

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:
Le Lac des fées

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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: *Le Lac des fées*,
Edited and Introduced by Robert Ignatius Letellier

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D.F.E. Auber (c. 1850). Contemporary engraving of an ink drawing

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INTRODUCTION

Le Lac des fées, an *opéra* in five acts, with libretto by Eugène Scribe and Mélesville (Anne-Honoré-Joseph Duveyrier), was premiered at the Académie nationale de musique (Salle de la rue Le Peletier) on 1 April 1839.

The story is derived from the tale “Der geraubte Schleier” from Johann Karl August Musäus’s *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782-86). Musäus’s collection of fairy tales was also the basis of Wenzel Reisinger’s scenario for Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Swan Lake* (*Lebedinoje ozero*, 1877).

The opera is set in the Harz Mountains and Cologne, in the fifteenth century. Albert, a young student, has fallen in love with a fairy, Zélia: she has been forced to live on earth because Albert has stolen her veil. Albert borrows 30 thalers from the Jew Issachar, and pawns his freedom in order to settle his debt to Marguerite, his betrothed, since he wants to live with Zélia from now on. The lord of the castle, Rodolphe, has also fallen in love with Zélia and therefore buys the bond from Issachar. On the date of its maturity, Albert cannot repay the debt, so that Rodolphe is able to draw Albert (and Zélia by implication) into his power. In order to save Albert’s life, Zélia promises to marry Rodolphe. At the last moment, however, she regains her veil from Marguerite, and disappears to her fairy sisters. To welcome her back, the Fairy Queen allows Zélia a wish: but she chooses to renounce immortality, and returns to Albert on the earth.

The closing transformation scene (Zélia’s return to earth) is described in detail in the scene directions, and demands great technical skill and resources: “...we see her passing through the clouds, which, tinted variously by the rays of the sun, continually change; finally...we see the earth appear, first the tops of the mountains, then the buildings, the towns, the rivers, the prairies, the house, then the room that Albert inhabited in the third act. Albert, alone in his room and weighed down with despair, is about to kill himself—He raises his eyes and sees Zélia who is coming down on a cloud towards him, holding out her arms. He runs to her, and the curtain falls.”

Despite its five acts, the opera is not overtly concerned with the great historical themes usually associated with *grand-opéra*, but exemplifies Scribe’s third type of opera libretto (after *opéra-comique* and *grand-opéra*), derived from exotic or legendary material. However, the literary source is remarkable for its depiction of the rebellion of the people and students against the feudal lord Rodolphe—themes that have a strong affinity with the historical and political concerns of Auber’s earlier *grands-opéras*, *La Muette de Portici* and *Gustave III*. This thematic affinity is also evident in the musical aspects of the work.

Scribe combined the sentimental expectations of contemporary taste and the venerable Baroque operatic tradition of *le merveilleux* with consummate theatrical acumen. Much time in *Le Lac des fées* is taken in elaborating the central depiction of popular festivity. Indeed, the requirements of *grand-opéra* are realized with an original twist in the big act 3 depiction of the medieval Epiphany celebrations, with its attempt at recreating the variety of genre and mood. There is a detailed description of the procession through the streets of Cologne, organized by the medieval guilds, each preceded by its own standard, with choruses. It unfolds in several movements:—the chorus of students “Vive la jeunesse”, the *Fête des Rois* with its *Chant de Noël*, the

whole culminating in a big ballet sequence of four dances: 1) Valse des Étudiants, 2) Pas de Bacchus et Erigone, 3) Styrienne, and 4) Bacchanale.

The composer handled this legendary and supernatural subject with a certain poetic grace and dramatic inspiration. The G-major overture captures the essence of the work. Its incisive opening focuses on Albert and his words to Zélia during the act 3 *Fête des rois*, extolling her beauty above royal pretension (“C’est le sort qui seul to donne sceptre d’or...par la beauté tu regnerais encor”). It leads into the strutting dotted rhythms that refer to Rodolphe and his search for power, taken from the act 4 quartet.

A transition for solo flute leads into the undulating and mystical C major music of Zélia’s supernatural nature, smooth and lyrical as compared with the brusque and jerky human music just heard—the melody arching over the arpeggios and floating on a pedal point of C for 18 bars. This becomes a Leitmotif of the Fairies, and recurs whenever the crisis over Zélia’s nature is in question, especially in act 5. It flows immediately into the E-flat major music of the fairy apotheosis at the end of the opera—a serene melody moving in small intervals soaring in octaves over upward rippling harp figures, extended for some 20 bars. The melody will recur in huge chords in the finale, and in the closing moments of the opera. It is also germane to the central conflict of the overture which erupts in a fraught G minor episode, a sequence of demisemiquaver turns resting on long notes over a restless bassline. This motif opens the act 2 finale, where it accompanies Marguerite’s anguished outburst, and becomes a cypher for human pain, something that becomes clearer when it recurs in act 5 where Zélia is confronted with the choice of detached immortality or the vibrant but painful human condition.

The choice is dramatized in the proem by the second subject, a D-major rhythmically transformed variant of the fairy apotheosis, with fleeting references to Albert’s skipping praise of Zélia’s beauty. This development is unfolded at length, as Zélia’s existential dilemma. It is resolved in the return to the home key of G in the *Allegro* conclusion: the *alle breve* sprung music of Zélia’s decision to give up her fairy nature for the sake of love (“Que Dieu daigne m’entendre qu’il t’élève à moi, ou me laisse descendre mon bien aimé vers toi”).

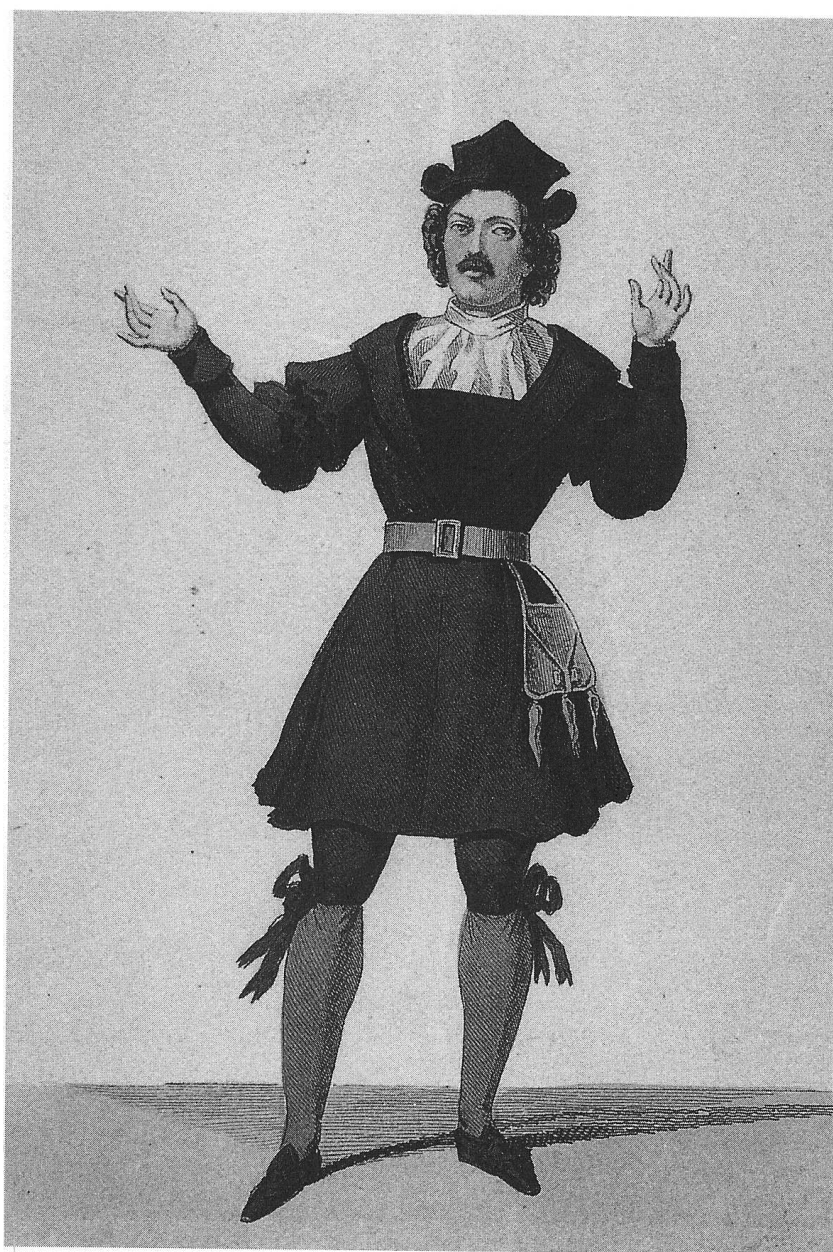
The dramatic highpoints of the score provide impressive examples of Auber’s art. Remarkable pieces include: the overture, the cavatina for Albert “Gentille fée”; Rodolphe’s *grand air* “Avec adresse” with its striking use of syncopation (reminiscent of Hérold); the Scene of the Fairies, Zélia’s scene of despair in act 1 (“Mes soeurs, attendez-moi!...Je tremble, je frissonne”) and her *complaint* “C’est est donc fait”; the extensive duet for Zélia and Albert in act 3 (“Asile modeste et tranquille”), and Albert’s mad scene in act 4 (“C’est moi, c’est moi, qui l’ai frappée...Quand viendra la déesse”). Of special note are the graceful and effective fairy choruses (partially offstage, and accompanied by the mélophone, a type of harmonium, invented in 1831, and resembling a guitar, with knobs on the haft functioning as a keyboard). There is also a very Romantic sense of tonal painting, with the moonlit serenity of the fairy lake conveyed in mellifluous orchestral detail.

Richard Wagner arrived in Paris 1839, and perhaps saw one of the last of the stagings. The influence of the final transformation scene must have affected him deeply—both as stagecraft and music. The many transformation scenes in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Parsifal* are based on this dramaturgy: the Entry of the Gods into Valhalla in *Das Rheingold*, and the music of the Rainbow Bridge owe much to the final scene of *Le Lac des fées*. Further, the Feast of the Magi in act 3 provided the model for the great procession of the guilds and townspeople to the Meadow of Song in the last scene of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. This too culminates in a ballet

sequence: the Dance of the Apprentices (cf. Auber's *Valse des Étudiants*).

The original cast were: Gilbert Duprez (Albert); Mlle Maria-Dolorès-Bénédicta-Joséphine Nau (Zélia); Nicholas-Prosper Levasseur (Rodolphe); Louis-Émile Wartel (Issachar); Ferdinand Prévôt and Alexis Dupont (Fritz and Conrad, students); Molinier (Pikler, a vagrant); Rosine Stoltz (Marguerite, an innkeeper); and Mlle Elia Barthélémy (Edda and a young herdsman).

Despite the cast of exceptional quality, *Le Lac* was not a success in Paris, where it was performed 30 times, with no reprise. On the other hand, the German version of the work enjoyed great popularity; there is a discernible resemblance in this work, both of subject and form, to German Romantic opera (for example Hoffmann's *Undine* 1816, Marschner's *Hans Heiling* 1833, Wagner's *Die Feen* 1833/1888). The work was also translated into English and Polish, and produced in a number of European countries and in New York between 1839 and 1847, with revivals in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart in 1865 and 1871.



Gilbert-Louis Duprez as Albrecht. Engraving by Hautecourt-Martinet

LE
LAC
DES
FÉES.

Opéra en cinq actes,

Paroles de M^r

E. Scribe,

Musique de

D. F. E. AUBER,

DE L'INSTITUT.

PARTITION PIANO ET CHANT

A-V

PARIS,

G. BRANDUS, DUFOUR et C^{ie}, éditeurs,

103, Rue Richelieu.

LE LAC DES FÉES.

PERSONNAGES.

DESSUS.	TÉNORS	BASSES.
ZÉILA.	ALBERT.	RODOLPHE.
MARGUERITE.	ISSACHAR.	FRITZ
EDDA.	CONRAD.	PICKLER.

CATALOGUE DES MORCEAUX.

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LE LAC DES FÉES,
MUSIQUE DE D. F. E. AUBER.

OUVERTURE.

Allegro, ♩ = 100

PIANO.

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked *Allegro, ♩ = 100*. The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system features triplets in both hands and a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The fourth system continues with triplets in the treble. The fifth system concludes the page with a final melodic flourish in the treble and sustained chords in the bass.

This page of musical notation for piano consists of six systems of staves. The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system includes piano (*p*) and piano (*p*) markings. The third system has a piano (*p*) marking. The fourth system includes a piano (*p*) marking and a forte (*f*) marking. The fifth system is marked *dolce.* (sweet). The sixth system includes a pianissimo (*pp*) marking. The notation is written in a style typical of 19th-century musical manuscripts, with clear staff lines and distinct note heads.

The musical score is written for piano and violin. The piano part is in the lower register, featuring a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The violin part is in the upper register, featuring a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The score is divided into six systems, each with a piano and violin staff. The tempo is marked 'moderato' and the time signature is 3/4. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ornaments, and dynamic markings. The first system includes the instruction 'en ralentissant un peu.' and the tempo marking 'moderato' with a quarter note equal to 92 beats per minute. The second system includes the instruction 'p' (piano). The third system includes the instruction 'p' (piano). The fourth system includes the instruction 'p' (piano). The fifth system includes the instruction 'p' (piano). The sixth system includes the instruction 'fz' (forzando) and 'p' (piano).

en ralentissant un peu .

moderato ♩ = 92

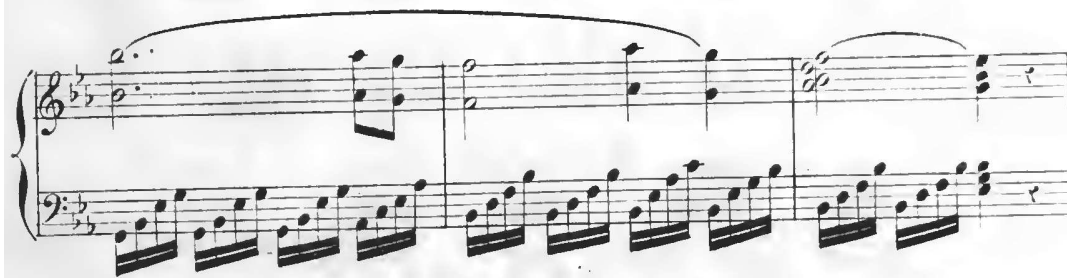
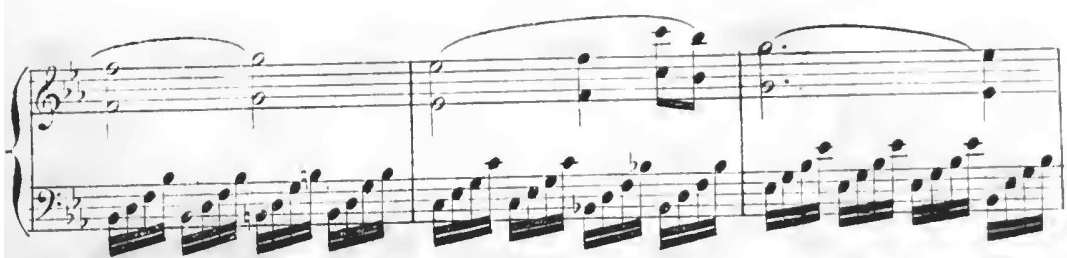
p

p

p

fz *p*

This page of musical notation, likely from a piano concerto or sonata by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, consists of five systems of staves. Each system contains a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The music is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with long, flowing phrases, often marked with a '2.' (second ending) and a fermata. The left hand (bass clef) provides a complex, rhythmic accompaniment, characterized by rapid sixteenth-note patterns and frequent beaming. The first system begins with a piano (p) dynamic marking. The notation is clear and professional, typical of 19th-century musical publications.



This page of musical notation for piano consists of seven systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The music is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a series of chords in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. The second system continues with similar textures, including a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The third system introduces a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble. The fourth system features a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble. The fifth system continues with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble. The sixth system features a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble. The seventh system concludes with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble. The notation is dense and complex, with many notes and rests, and includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and trills.

This page of musical notation for "Le Lac des fées" (page 9) consists of seven systems of piano accompaniment. Each system is written for a grand piano, with a treble staff and a bass staff. The music is in 3/4 time and features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The first system begins with a treble staff containing a series of eighth notes and a bass staff with a similar rhythmic pattern. The second system continues the melodic line in the treble and provides harmonic support in the bass. The third system introduces a new melodic phrase in the treble, while the bass continues with a steady accompaniment. The fourth system features a more complex melodic line in the treble with some chromaticism, and the bass provides a consistent harmonic foundation. The fifth system shows a continuation of the melodic development in the treble, with the bass maintaining its accompaniment. The sixth system includes a dynamic marking of *sf* (sforzando) in the bass, followed by a *p* (piano) marking, indicating a change in volume. The seventh system concludes the page with a final melodic phrase in the treble and a corresponding accompaniment in the bass.

This image displays a handwritten musical score for piano, organized into six systems. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The notation is in French, featuring various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system includes a '3' marking above a triplet. The second system features a 'f' (forte) dynamic. The third system has 'tr' (trill) markings above certain notes. The fourth system includes a 'f' (forte) dynamic. The fifth system begins with a '2.' marking, indicating a second ending, and includes a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The sixth system continues the musical composition with various note values and rests. The handwriting is elegant and characteristic of the 19th-century musical manuscript style.

This page contains six systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff, connected by a brace on the left. The music is written in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The notation includes various musical elements such as chords, arpeggios, and melodic lines. Some measures contain dynamic markings like 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano). The overall style is characteristic of late 19th or early 20th-century musical notation.

This page contains six systems of musical notation for piano, arranged in two columns of three systems each. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

- System 1:** Features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. A dashed line with the marking 8^a is above the treble staff.
- System 2:** Continues the melodic line in the treble staff, which includes a p (piano) dynamic marking. The bass staff continues the accompaniment.
- System 3:** The treble staff has a melodic line with a 8^a marking above it. The bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- System 4:** The treble staff has a melodic line with a 8^a marking above it. The bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- System 5:** The treble staff has a melodic line with a p dynamic marking. The bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- System 6:** The treble staff has a melodic line with a $cresc.$ (crescendo) marking. The bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment.

The musical score on page 13 of 'Le Lac des fées' consists of six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system is written for a grand piano, with a treble staff and a bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The notation includes various musical elements such as eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass. The second system introduces a forte ('f') dynamic in the bass. The third system features a trill ('tr') in the treble. The fourth system has a forte ('f') dynamic in the bass. The fifth system continues the melodic and rhythmic patterns. The sixth system concludes with a forte ('f') dynamic in the bass and a final cadence. The page number '13' is located in the top right corner.

42 *Allergro* ♩ = 144

This musical score is for a piano piece, measures 42 through 47. It is written in 2/4 time and marked *Allergro* with a tempo of 144 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is arranged in grand staff notation (treble and bass clefs). Measures 42-43 feature a melody in the right hand with eighth-note patterns and a bass line with chords. Measure 44 includes an 8-measure rest in the right hand. Measures 45-47 show a more active right hand with sixteenth-note runs and a bass line with chords. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking appears in measure 46. The piece concludes in measure 47 with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained bass note.

Plus animé.

8.

N^o 1.
INTRODUCTION.

LE PATRE.

ALBERT.

FRITZ.

All^o assai. ♩ = 400

PIANO.

p

cresc.

The musical score is for a piece titled 'Introduction' (N^o 1). It features three vocal parts: 'LE PATRE.', 'ALBERT.', and 'FRITZ.', and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major), and the time signature is 6/8. The tempo is marked 'All^o assai' with a quarter note equal to 400 (♩ = 400). The piano part begins with a forte (p) dynamic. The score is divided into five systems. In the first system, the vocal parts are silent. In the second system, Albert's part begins. The piano accompaniment consists of a melody in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The piano part includes a crescendo marking ('cresc.') in the fifth system.

The musical score is written for piano and voice. The piano part consists of two staves, with the right hand playing a complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, and the left hand providing a steady bass line. The vocal parts are arranged in three staves: 1st Ténors, 2^{ds} Ténors, and Basses. The lyrics are in French and are repeated across the vocal staves.

1st TÉNORS.
 A tra - vers ces ro - chers ter - ri - bles ces mon - ta - gnes in - ac - ces -

2^{ds} TÉNORS.
 A tra - vers ces ro - chers ter - ri - bles ces mon - ta - gnes in - ac - ces -

BASSES.
 A tra - vers ces ro - chers ter - ri - bles ces mon - ta - gnes in - ac - ces -

si - bles à tra - vers ces ro - chers ter - ribles ces mon - tagnes in - ac - ces -