Daniel-François-Esprit Auber

Les Diamants de la coronne

(I diamanti della corona/

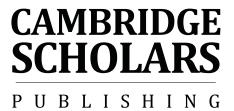
The Crown Diamonds)

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber
Les Diamants de la coronne
(I diamanti della corona/
The Crown Diamonds)

Opéra-Comique en trois actes
Paroles de
Eugène-Augustin Scribe
et
Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges
In Italian and English Translation

Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier



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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

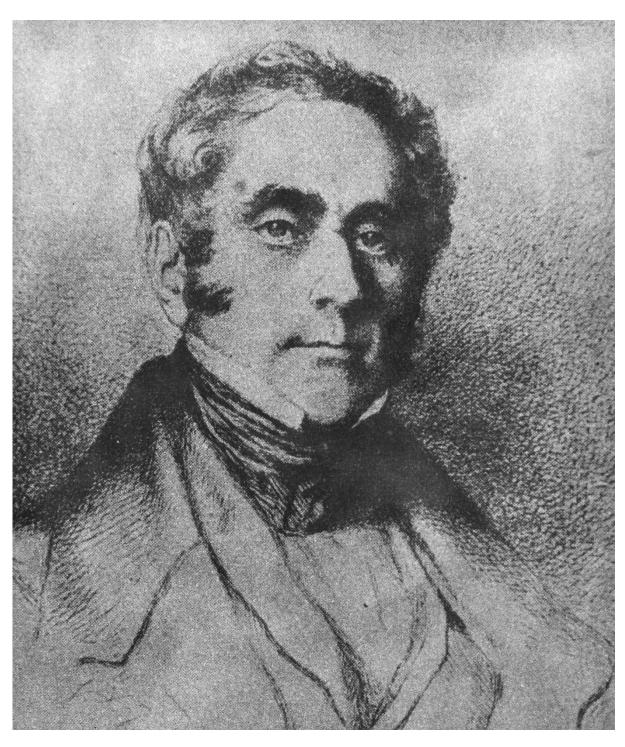
12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5443-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5443-6



D.F.E. Auber (1840). Steel engraving by Edmond Hédouin after Paul Delaroche, printed by Marchant (1858).

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INTRODUCTION

Les Diamants de la couronne, an opéra-comique in three acts, with libretto by Eugène Scribe and Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges, was first given at the Opéra-Comique (Deuxième Salle Favart) on 6 March 1841. It was very popular, and remained in the regular repertoire until 1887, attaining some 379 performances. It was last revived in Marseilles on 20 March 1896, and re-appeared in modern times in Compiègne, at the Théâtre Impérial in December 1991

In many respects *Les Diamants de la couronne* represents something of a distillation of the art of Scribe and Auber, a synthesis in some ways of the more earthy comedy of *Fra Diavolo* and the almost spiritual refinement of *Le Domino noir*. Both plot and music carry the natural instincts of both creators to their extreme attainment.

Portugal, 1777, shortly after the accession of Queen Maria I. Act 1: the workshop of the counterfeiters in Estremadura; act 2: the castle of Coimbra; act 3: the royal palace in Lisbon.

Act 1. Don Henrique de Sandoval, nephew of the Count of Campo Mayor, lost in the mountains, inadvertently stumbles on the workplace of a band of smugglers and counterfeiters, led by the beautiful Catarina. She protects him when her lieutenants, Rebolledo and Mugnoz, propose to do away with him, but he is sworn to secrecy. Although she and her ostensible uncle Rebolledo regard all court society as fools, Henrique falls in love with her and tries to persuade her to give up her outlaw life, but to no avail. When the band is surrounded by soldiers, the smugglers escape, disguised as monks, while Catarina leaves through a subterranean passage.

Act 2. Henrique is told of the smugglers' escape at the home of the Alcalde, to whose daughter Diana, his cousin, he is affianced. Henrique risks a scandal by not marrying the daughter of the Count of Campo Mayor, but Diana in any case loves Don Sébastien d'Aveyro, a young officer and Henrique's friend. A carriage breaks down outside and its occupant, the Countess of Villaflor, enters; Henrique immediately recognizes Catarina. He begs her again to give up her misspent life, and further pledges his love; she rebuffs him but gives him a ring as token of her affection. The Alcalde rushes in with the news that the crown jewels have been stolen and recognizes Henrique's new ring as one of them. Catarina overhears this and flees in the Alcalde's carriage.

Act 3. Henrique and his friends are at Lisbon to attend the coronation of the new Queen of Portugal. Rebolledo enters, dressed as a count. Henrique, alarmed, goes to warn the Queen and finds Catarina, who, it transpires, is herself the queen in disguise. She then discloses herself as the new Queen, and explains that since the treasury was depleted of money, she arranged for the sale of the crown diamonds, covered it up by a supposed robbery, and secretly had the crown diamonds replaced with counterfeit gems. She brings the lovers Diana and Sébastien together, and herself chooses Henrique for her husband.

The story is one of the more unlikely among the libretti of the nineteenth century, but is arranged with dramaturgical skill (especially in the court festivities in act 2) and presents a rich selection of emotional and decorative scenes—among them the popular topoi of an Iberian setting and the Romantic robber. Scribe borrowed the *coup de théâtre* of flight in a carriage from Merimée's *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul*. A zarzuela, adapted from Scribe's libretto by F. Camprodon, was set by F. Asenjo Barbieri in 1854 under the title *Los Diamantes de la Corona*.

The unlikely story is saved by the brilliant skill of the librettist and the melodic fecundity of the composer. Despite its improbability, this work was very successful, owing no doubt to the music. Auber's music, even within the confines of his own created conventions, is highly inventive, elegant, sophisticated, and full of delicately imagined local colour. And indeed the opera proffers the most piquant musical fantasies. The overture presents several themes from opera, with the first *pianissimo* section exercising a charming effect. Act 1 contains Catarina's aria "Oui c'est moi", the chorus "Amis dans ce manoir" with appended ballad "Le beau Pédrillo", and the so-called 'Chocolate Duet' for Catarina and Don Henrique. The chorus of brigands disguised as monks closes act 1 in the jolliest of ways. Auber's treatment of this religious element in the *opéra-comique* in several of his works shows infinite grace. Act 2 contains a pretty bolero for two female voices ("Dans les défilés des montagnes"), the soprano aria—the *grand air avec variations* "Ah! je veux briser ma chaîne". Act 3 offers the cavatina "A toi, j'ai recours", and an excellent quintet ("Oh ciel! Ah vous connaissez donc"). The finales of the first two acts are particularly remarkable. The music of this opera became especially popular in the dance halls of the day.

The narrative with its story of royal counterfeiting, romance fulfilment and social restitution combines several recurrent motifs that preoccupied Scribe, with the exotic Iberian setting opening up the Mediterranean sphere so stimulating to the artistic imagination of both creators. The governing topos of disguise and impersonation is carried to new heights of invention in the young queen's protean assumptions of different controlling roles while hiding her real, powerful persona and implementing her vision of change (like Fra Diavolo) and yet finding time, despite disparities of status, to bring about the ideal union of love with socially transforming implications (like Angèle in her black domino). In the process the major female character assumes a centrality that reduces the traditional male dominance to something peripheral. The tendency is most strongly delineated in Péki in *Le Cheval de bronze* who becomes

redemptrix over, and for, the four strongly sketched male characters. Lorenzo (*Fra Diavolo*), Prince Yang (*Le Cheval de bronze*), Horace (*Le Domino noir*) and Don Henrique (*Les Diamants de la couronne*) are all noble and idealistic, but not the social movers and engineers of change. This role is assumed with varying degrees of self-conscious involvement by Zerline, Péki, Angèle and Catarina. All bring about the overturning of expectation and a social transformation—which with the latter assumes a national significance.

Thus the focus of the opera is the personality, the resourcefulness and composure, of the young queen who tackles the various challenges of the realm and her personal emotions with imagination and flair. Her big act 3 soliloquy provides an unusually sustained opportunity for self-disclosure, the words fusing her sense of majesty with her uncompromising femininity and dynamic sense of self.

Je suis femme, je suis reine;
Il n'est rien que je n'obtienne;
Et je dois, sans peine,
Imposer ma loi souveraine.
Il faudra
Que l'on me craigne et qu'on m'adore;
Car je suis femme, et mieux encore,
Je suis la Catarina!

The final chorus, the melody of which encapsulates the whole opera, confirms the young monarch's success—the inextricability of her personal charm with the effective exercise of her regal office.

Vive, vive notre reine! Notre jeune souveraine, Qui d'avance nous enchaîne Par sa grâce et sa beauté.

The powerful male figure is glimpsed in the Count of Campo-Formio, but finds heroic investment in Roger (*Le Maçon*), in Masaniello (*La Muette de Portici*), in Gustave (*Gustave III*), in Lorédan (*Haydée*) (where the potential for heroic action and real tragedy is touched on or actually confronted). Otherwise the young hero is more passive, more played upon, usually misunderstood, or confused/bewildered, and either excluded from society or predictable expectation, even to the point of deception or pain, before his miraculous reintegration by social transformation through powerful female agency. This went on throughout the Scribe/Auber collaboration, the Prodigal Son himself (*L'Enfant prodigue*) eventually epitomizing the trend with Biblical symbolism, and was a type sought out by Auber even after Scribe's death in his last two young heroes, Gaston (*Le Premier Jour de bonheur*) and Marcel (*Rêve d'amour*), who suffer in their patient search for the first day of happiness.

The score of the *Diamants* reflects the slightly Mannerist elongation of the thematic situations and prototypes. Auber's response mirrors Scribe's exaggerations in his most refined and stimulating, almost rarified, musical reflection of the plot. The famous overture tells it all.

The opening *cantabile*—an aria for the first violins supported by wind chords and plucked strings—is among the most serene and beautiful things the composer ever wrote. Here is the fulfilment of the pastoral dream, a suggestion of an inner core of beauty and peace. It is ended by a more rhythmic figure in the strings that leads to the main subject of the overture. This begins quietly in the brass, soon joined by the woodwind, but unusually with no string support—the brassy military fanfares of public life and heroic calling. This in turn transmutes into possibly Auber's most extreme galop. Here crisp elegance and relentless acceleration reach the limits of control and good taste in a full-throttled apprehension of life lived to the full, fusing as it does the notions of dance and march most beguilingly. These elements are underlined by the propulsive rhythms and the highly unusual scoring, that lend a unique colour to the orchestral sound, hinting at Janissary music and the traditions both of the dance ensemble and military band. The theme is from the finale of the opera, where it appears as a chorus of praise for the young queen. This orchestral melody that plays a dominant part in act 3 thus recurs as one of the principal themes of the overture (as also in *Emma*).

Suddenly the strings re-enter *forte*, and the music is alternately stormy and delicate. The huge storm-like surges interrupting the flow reflect the tempests in the story, both literal and metaphorical, that disturb its dizzy trajectory, and must be resolved in graciousness before the goal is achieved. This resolution is suggested in the second subject, full of stylish elegance, from the rondo trio for the queen, Diana and Campo Mayor that directly precedes the rondo finale. Brass fanfares herald the return of the main galop theme, now reinforced by the strings, and initiate the peroration, an ecstatic resumption of the paean of praise and its triumphant conclusion. This overture, *par excellence*, provides a fine example of one of Auber's salient stylistic traits— the use of similar rhythmic patterns within a phrase: the first two-measure group of a phrase is virtually duplicated in the second two-measure group. Short motives are often repeated, the whole generating a lilting and gaily effective mood.

The presence of Anna Thillon encouraged Auber to create his most extreme coloratura heroine, a fusion of Angèle and Henriette, whose apprehension of the whole vocal traditions of *bel canto* finds its ultimate fulfilment in the legendary vocal theme and variations. Here the aria exists for itself, and does not grow out of the dramatic circumstances of say, Angèle in *Le Domino noir*, thrown into crisis by her outrageous liberties, or the Princess Stella in *Le Cheval de bronze*, held captive to magical forces and awaiting release. In both cases the coloratura becomes an

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objective correlative of the context, and an expression of a sought liberty. In *Les Diamants de la couronne*, these are also exactly the Queen's sentiments ("Ah! Je veux briser ma chaîne"), but the circumstances of the delivery, while thematically relevant to her existential dilemma, are more external in application. Indeed, every utterance of the Queen carries this pyrotechnical potential that becomes a more formal cypher for her separate status, extraordinary calling, and high aspirations. The more lyrical and stately aria of the last act is moving and dignified; a play with tonality, relative and tonic minor keys (F major-G minor-F minor-F major), chromatic inflection, uncomfortably low intervals in the vocal line (especially on the word "thrône") and a striking use of the lower strings and bassoons emphasizing the heavy burden of royal office that the young queen reflects on. This does not, however, stop the rise of her natural spirits and optimism expressed in her special vocal brilliance in the bolero cabaletta (especially on the words "souveraine" and "Catarina").

This extreme vocalism spills over into the quite startling treatment of the expectations of both form and tonality throughout the opera. The most original handling of opening couplets for Henrique alert one to this immediately: the character of the young hero is deftly established as the busy opening motif gives way to a calm but buoyant second subject. But the normally self-contained flow of the couplets is interrupted by both the turbulence of the storm and then the extraneous noises of the counterfeiters, both metaphors of the extraordinary circumstances that are interrupting the young man's life and the peace of the realm. Catarina's entrance aria is also treated most unusually, as a kind of ongoing speech punctuated by her flights of coloratura and by the ecstatic commentary of the chorus, without the usual structural formality of the heroine's appearance. The singularity of the musical metier of both hero and heroine is captured in their love duet which again is contrary to expectation, and evinces its unusual formal treatment in its precipitate launch into a rapturous unison, usually retained until the culmination of the duet ritual, and here suggesting the overwhelming attraction that has already taken place between the lovers.

The chorus are far from being a colourful local prop or harmonic resource. Their presence is vibrant throughout the act, dominating the musical landscape and assuming a corporate identity usually more associated with grand opera. As they comment on the Queen's words, their onomatopoeic refrain is almost disfigured by strong chromaticism, suggesting the awkwardness of the situation and the dangerous nature of their mission with the young monarch. Their special role becomes apparent in the finale which is shaped by their notorious escape disguised as monks. The melody of their procession is most unusual, a remote, hushed, almost eerie minor keyed variant on a chant, exquisitely darkhued for bassoons and lower strings, recurring thrice, shaping and dominating the finale, exquisitely varied in accompaniment and tonal colour on each of its incrementally augmented recurrences. It is as though the music is expressing something beyond the confines and scope of the story, a disparity of form and content that is quite unsettling.

The score is also remarkable for its extended sequences of conversational exchange, *parlando* passages over a continuous smooth musical commentary, interspersed with more vigorous ensemble work, usually in lyrical unison rondo passages (as in the extended act 3 quintet, one of Auber's *chefs d'oeuvres*), or in the more monolithic stretta (as in the act 2 finale).

The roles, all written in the venerable vocal traditions of the Opéra-Comique, were created by the famous soprano Anna Thillon (Catarina, *première chanteuse légère*); Célestine Darcier (Diana, *seconde Dugazon*); Joseph-Antoine-Charles Couderc (Don Henrique de Sandoval, *prémier ténor léger*); Ricquier (Le comte de Campo Mayor, *Laruette*); Henri (Rebolledo, (*basse chantante*); Ernest Mocker Don Sébastien d'Aveyro, *second ténor léger*); Louis Palianti (Barbarigo, *seconde basse chantante*); and Charles-Louis Sainte-Foy (Mugnoz, *Trial*).

The musical colour, especially the fiery pieces like the Bolero in act 2, won great popularity for the opera. In Paris, it became one of Auber's most popular works (379 performances by 1887, with 186 between 1841 and 1849). It was produced in Munich and Hamburg (1842), Berlin (1843), and Vienna (1849), but did not retain an enduring popularity on German-speaking stages, possibly because of the unusually inept translation by Vaclav Alois Svoboda.

The opera enjoyed particular popularity in London, appearing at the Princess's Theatre 2 May 1844 (in English, translated by T. H. Reynoldson); Covent Garden June 1845 (in French); Drury Lane 16 April 1846 (new English version by E. Fitzball, additional music by H. B. Richards and J. H. Tully); Covent Garden 3 July 1873 (in Italian, translated by G. Zaffira, recitatives by A. Vianesi).

Other productions outside France included:

Brussels: 25 November 1841 (in French)

Prague: 13 August 1842 (in German) and 4 December 1865 (in Czech, translated by B. Peška)

Riga: 1843 (in German) Amsterdam: 1843 (in French)

Berlin: Hofoper 11 February 1843 (in German) and Victoria-Theater 30 May 1862 (in French)

Copenhagen: 17 February 1843 (in Danish, translated by T. Overskou)

New York: 14 July 1843 (in French)

Stockholm: 17 September 1845 (in Swedish, translated by N. E. W. af Wetterstedt)

Rio de Janeiro: September 1846 (in French)

Lemberg: 1848 (in German)

Vienna: 25 January 1849 (in German; revived 18 December 1884)

Buenos Aires: 11 April 1852 (in French) Boston: 1854 (in English, Fitzball's version) San Francisco: 1854 (in English, Fitzball's version) Turin: 3 April 1858 (in French)

Sydney: August 1863 (in English, the Drury Lane version)

Barcelona: 20 October 1866 (in French)

St Petersburg: 15 January 1876 (in Italian). Also in Lvov

Lisbon: 26 April 1878 (in French)

Naples: Teatro Bellini 30 April 1879 (in Italian, translated by M. M. Marcello, recitatives by E. Gelli)

Mexico: 8 May 1879 (in French)

Budapest: 1880 (in Hungarian, translated by K. Abrányi)

Malta: 1890 (in Italian)

Barcelona: 22 August 1891 (*zarzuela buffa* in 2 acts, *El Collar de Perlas*, text by José María Nogués and Ricardo Revenga, music adapted by Tomás Fernández Grájal).

The first revival in the twentieth century was at Compiègne: Théâtre Impérial December 1991 (with Ghyslaine Raphanel, Mylène Mornet, Christophe Einhorn, Armand Arapian, Dominique Ploteau, Paul Médioni, Nicolas Gambotti, Sébastien Lemoine, cond. Edmon Colomer). The performance was recorded on both CD and DVD.



Anna Thillon as Catarina



Joseph-Antoine-Charles Couderc as Don Henrique

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Act 3: Wood engraving by Paquet from Scribe's Works, 1854

LES DIAMANTS DE LA COURONNE.



IN THREE ACTS,

 $\mathbf{B}\mathbf{Y}$

AUBER

WITH ITALIAN AND ENGLISH WORDS.

EDITED BY ARTHUR SULLIVAN AND J. PITTMAN.

BOOSEY AND CO., LONDON AND NEW YORK.

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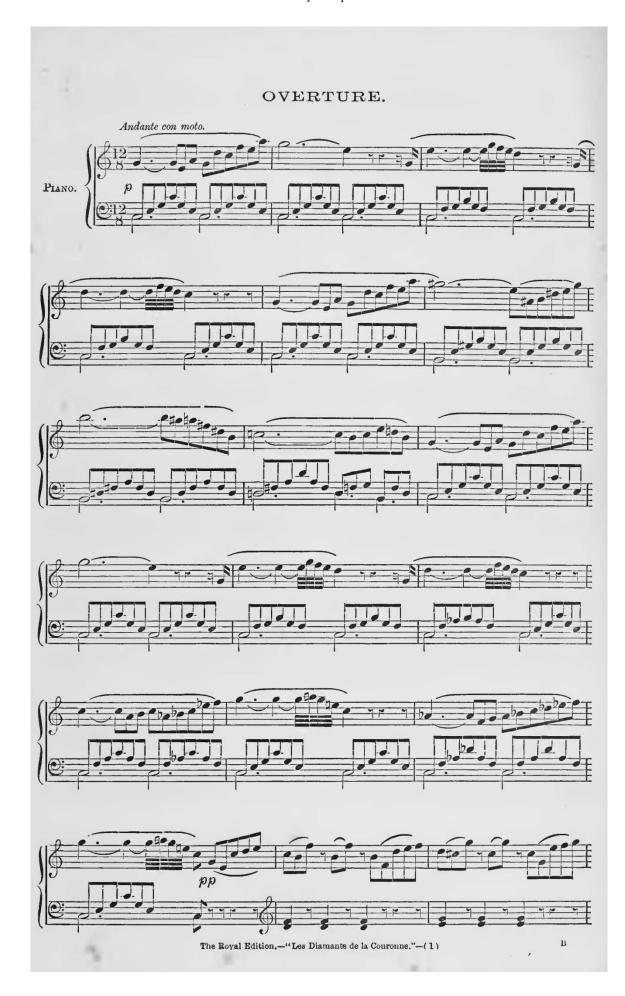
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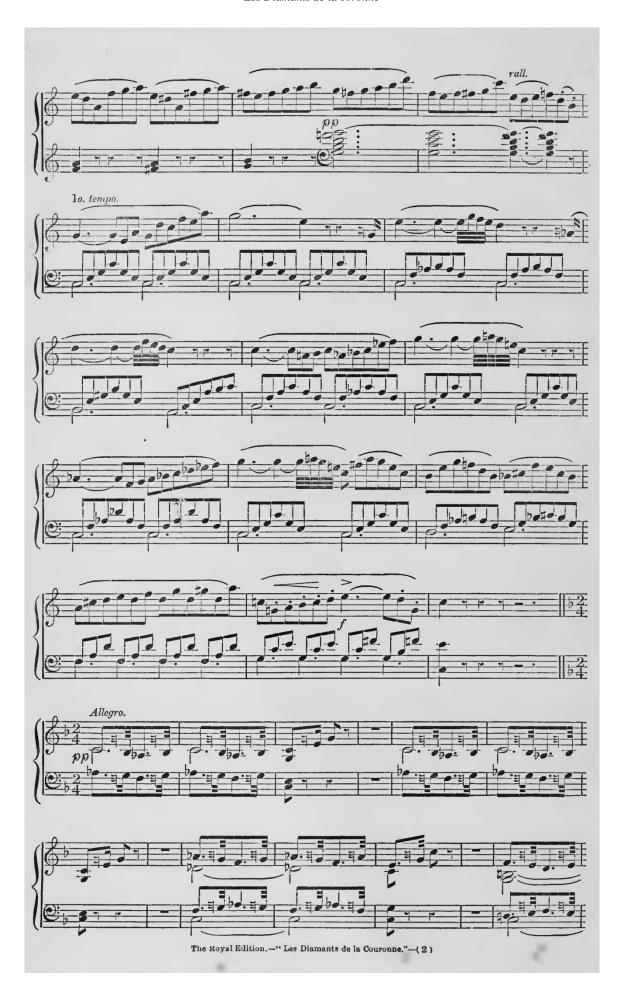
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

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	•••		•••	•••		•••	•••	•••	Soprano.
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The young Princess Maria Francesca, on her accession to the throne of Portugal, finding the treasury almost exhausted, orders the jewels of the Crown to be sold, in order to defray the expenses of her coronation, intending to replace them by counterfeits. For this purpose she goes disguised to the retreat of a band of coiners, and pretending she is lady in waiting to the Queen, and bearing the royal instructions, engages them to manufacture a set of false diamonds, which may be worn in state without detection. Don Enrico de Sandoval, a young nobleman of rank, returning home from his travels, is lost among the mountains and seized by the coiners. Catarina—the name the Queen assumes—rescues him. Struck with her beauty and manners, Enrico falls in love with her, although he is pledged to his cousin DIANA, and was on his way to be married when he was stopped so unceremoniously. Catarina is not insensible to the admiration of the young cavalier, with whose entire history, to his surprise, she is acquainted. The jewels completed, Catarina is desirous to convey them to Lisbon, and secure the escape of the coiners. The latter is not easy to accomplish, as the mountains are surrounded by soldiers, despatched by the Minister of Police, uncle to Enrico. Ultimately, the forgers, arrayed as monks, elude the vigilance of the guards, and effect their escape. Enrico reaches his uncle's house, and preparations are being made for his marriage with his cousin. The contract is about to be signed—equally to the regret of Diana as Enrico, since she and Don Sebastian, a young officer, had long been pledged to each other—when Catarina is ushered in, the carriage, conveying her to Lisbon, having broken down in front of the Minister's door. She is received most graciously by all except Enrico, who, recognising her, is terrified lest she should be discovered. Fortunately the Minister has not seen her, being summoned away, by information that the Crown Diamonds have been stolen, or he must have detected the royal personage. Enrico, to ensure Catarina's safe retreat, discloses the secret of the incognita to Diana, and the cousins, now come to an understanding about their mutual love affairs, contrive Catarina's escape. The lady, however, does not depart without leaving behind her the intelligence that she is the famous Queen of the Bandits. The time of Her Majesty's coronation draws nigh. According to the wish of the late King, a Council of Regency had been appointed to choose a husband for the young Queen; but, as the members cannot agree, Her Majesty resolves to make choice for herself; and so she selects him who loved her for herself alone, and whose virtues, she knows, will cast a lustre on her throne, brighter than jewels, or gold, or kingly rank. Don Enrico's feelings can only be imagined, when he recognises in the Queen of Portugal, Catarina, the chief of the coiners, and hears the royal voice pronounce the word that gives him new life, and realises his highest earthly dreams and aspirations.

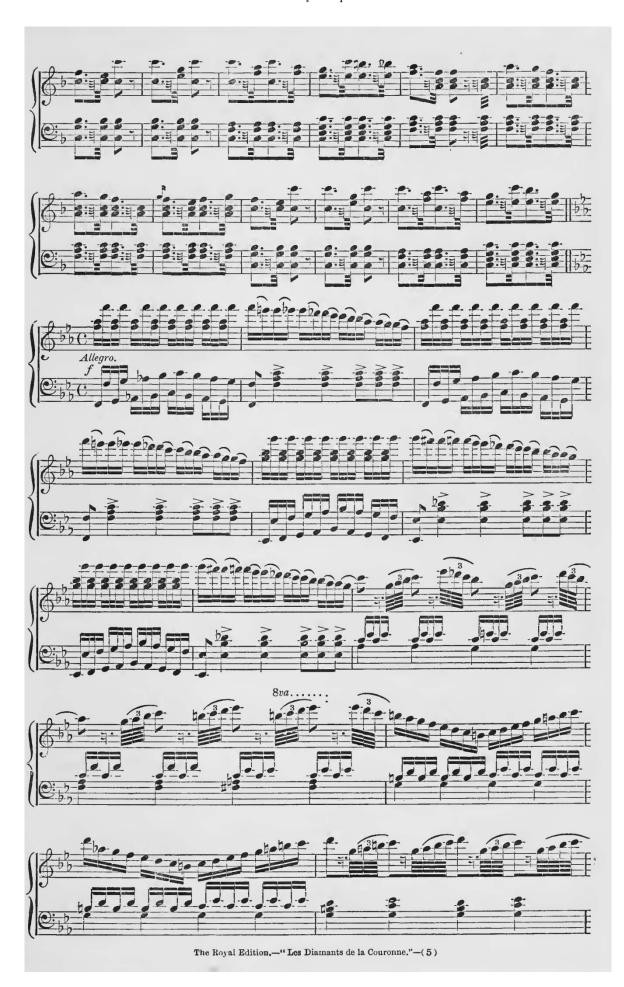
The scene is laid in Portugal. The first Act in the Mountains of Estremadura, the second in the Château de Coimbra, and the third in the Royal Palace at Lisbon.























RECITATIVO.

Enerco.—(scendendo con precauzione una scala diroccata)—Alfine vi son giunto, alimen qui non ci piove. Lasciai (Enrico descending the steps in the rock with precaution)—At length I am safe, at least the storm cannot reach me here. I left on sulla strada maestra la mia carrozza ed il mio servo Pietro, per salire sino all' eremo di Sant' Uberto qui presso, the high road my coach, and Pedro, my servant, to visit the hermitage of St. Uberto close by, e continuando poscia il mio viaggio, ritornare alfine a Coimbra, dove sono atteso, per isposare la mia gentile intending to return at last to Coimbra, where they await me to play the part of bridegroom to my pretty cousin Diana! Sorpreso dall' acquazzone, a mezza via, cercai ricovero in questo cavo, seesi un gradino, due, cinquanta, Diana. Surprised by the storm I found a shelter in the entrance to this cavern. I descended step by step until I find myself here ed eccomi—(guardando intorno)—Dove? (tuono.) at the bottom.—(looking around)—Where am I?



