Rediscovering, restoring, recording and performing the forgotten operatic heritage of the 19th century

Offenbach
FANTASIO

ORC351

This recording is dedicated to the memory of
Michael John Heathcote
31 July 1937– 5 March 2014
Jacques Offenbach

**FANTASIO**

Opéra-comique in three acts and four tableaux
Libretto by Paul de Musset and Charles Nuitter
First performance: 18 January 1872, Opéra-Comique, Paris

Fantasio
La princesse, Elsbeth
Le Roi de Bavière
Le prince de Mantoue
Marinoni, the prince’s aide-de-camp
Sparck
Flamel, a page
Facio
Hartmann
Un Pénitent
Max Robert
Le Tailleur& Passer-by
Le Suisse & Rutten

Sarah Connolly
Brenda Rae
Brindley Sherratt
Russell Braun
Robert Murray
Neal Davies
Victoria Simmonds
Aled Hall
Gavan Ring
Michael Burke
Anthony Gardiner
Sir Mark Elder
Nicholas Jenkins

Pages, Students, Officers, Courtiers, Townspeople – Opera Rara Chorus

*Renato Balsadonna* chorus director

**Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment**
Matthew Truscott, *leader*

**Sir Mark Elder**, conductor

Recorded at Henry Wood Hall, London, December 2013
Dialogue recorded at St Jude’s Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London, December 2013
Producer
Michael Haas

Opera Rara production Management
Kim Panter

Assistant conductor
Nicholas Jenkins

Répétiteur
Nicholas Bosworth

French coach
Nicole Tibbels

Dialogue director
Agathe Mélinand

Studio production assistant
Jim Barne

Dialogue editing
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Recording engineer
Jonathan Stokes

Editing
Michael Haas, Sir Mark Elder and Jonathan Stokes

Article, note and synopsis
Jean-Christophe Keck

The synopsis translated into French, German and Italian can be found at www.opera-rara.com/fantasio

The complete libretto in French and English is available at www.opera-rara.com/fantasio

Session photographs
Russell Duncan

19th century singer images
Opera Rara Archive

Jacques Offenbach, Fantasio revised edition by Jean-Christophe Keck © Boosey & Hawkes/Bote & Bock, Berlin
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Graham C Ives  Adam Swann  
Richard Jacques  Robert Taylor  
Ralph Land  Gerry Wakelin
CÉLESTINE GALLI-MARIÉ
(1840–1905)

The first Fantasio

MARGUERITE PRIOLA
(1849–1876)

The first Elsbeth
Dialogue tracks indicated by blue text

ACT I

[1] Overture
[2] ‘Vive le roi!’ – Chorus
[3] Fanfare
[4] ‘Mes amis, je vous...’
[5] ‘Vive le roi! Vive le roi!’ – Chorus
[6] ‘Où diable est donc Fantasio?’
[7] Ballade – Fantasio
  ‘Voyez dans la nuit brune’
[8] ‘Eh bien, que ferons-nous...’
[9] Récit et Romance – Elsbeth
  ‘Voilà toute la ville en fête’
[10] Duo – Fantasio et Elsbeth
  ‘Quel murmure charmant’
[12] ‘Vois comme ce clair de lune’
[13] Choeur de pénitents
  ‘Ô Saint-Jean! ta joyeuse face’
[14] ‘Que je prenne la place de Saint-Jean’
  ‘Je médite un projet d’importance!’
[16] ‘Une seule chose me paraît s’opposer’
Finale Act I – Chorus, Hartmann, Facio, Sparck, Fantasio

[17] ‘Tout bruit cesse’  

10’33

ACT II

[18] Entr’acte

2’55

Choeur et air – Chorus, Flamel, Elsbeth

[19] ‘Quand l’ombre des arbres’  

9’02

[20] ‘Je me sens, malgré tout...’  

0’51

Quintette – Flamel, Marinoni, Le Prince, Elsbeth, Le Roi

[21] ‘Oui, c’est bien lui, chère princesse!’  

2’51

[22] ‘Permettez-moi de baiser cette main’  

2’07

Strophes – Le Prince

[23] ‘Je ne serai donc jamais, non jamais’  

3’38


0’52

CD2   65’35

[1] ‘Quel métier délicieux quel celui...’  

Couplets – Fantasio et Elsbeth

[2] ‘C’est le nouveau bouffon de roi’  

2’49

[3] ‘Tu me fais l’effet de regarder...’  

1’13

Duo – Elsbeth et Fantasio

[4] ‘Je n’ai donc rien de plus’  

5’01

[5] ‘Je vous laisse, princesse...’  

0’25

Finale Act II – Chorus, Flamel, Facio, Max, Sparck, Fantasio, Le Prince, Marinoni, Le Roi, Elsbeth

[6] ‘C’est aujourd’hui fête à la cour’  

12’32
### ACT III

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LÉON MELCHISSÉDEC (1843–1925)
The first Sparck

JEAN-VITAL JAMMES
Stage name ISMAËL (1825–1893)
The first prince de Mantoue
OFFENBACH AND FANTASIO

Offenbach and England, a secret love affair

Ask any music lover which city Offenbach’s music calls to mind and the obvious answer will be Paris. The ‘City of Light’ that took the composer to its heart as a very young man seems inseparable from the spirit that inspired the creator of La Vie Parisienne. However, there is another imperial city with close links to the career of this itinerant musician: Vienna. As the man himself once said: ‘I write my music for Paris, but it is in Vienna that I hear it played.’ Maybe this says a lot about the respective virtues of Parisian and Austrian artists of the 1860s.

But what about London, another beacon of European culture and also an imperial capital? Its name seems somewhat out of place among the composer’s favourites; neither has it caught the attention of any of his biographers. Nevertheless, England has always been a special place, as it was in Offenbach’s day. It was here that he began his career, built his reputation and became the object of admiration bordering on adoration. He even progressed so far as to attract imitators.

It all began in 1844. Then aged 25, the young Offenbach was about to marry the beautiful Herminie de Alcain. His fiancée’s mother was remarried to an Englishman, Michael George Mitchell. The future in-laws trod warily. They set the composer and virtuoso cellist a kind of entrance exam to prove his talent and, surreptitiously, to see whether he was capable of earning enough to support a family. A cousin, the impresario John Mitchell, organised a tour of England for the young man. It was a resounding success. Audiences – including a number of crowned heads – were captivated, and the press waxed lyrical. Jacques could now look forward to married bliss and, soon afterwards, to bringing up five children.

Twelve years later, Offenbach was to return to the British capital to conduct performances of his operettas Ba-Ta-Clan and Les Deux Aveugles – staged in English as Beggar Thy Neighbour and A Mere Blind – which in Paris had recently heralded the real beginning of his theatrical career. From then on, his name was seldom absent from the façades of London’s theatres, such as the St James’s Theatre, the Alhambra, the Gaiety, the Lyceum, and the city’s concert venues. His works were staged in splendid translations, including some by the illustrious William S. Gilbert – which may well have inspired some of his own comic operas. It’s worth remembering that Londoners were
Sarah Connolly
(Fantasio)
alone in having the privilege of attending a revival of *Orpheus in the Underworld*, with the great Hortense Schneider as Eurydice – a pleasure denied even to Parisians at the first performance in 1858 (when the role was sung by Lisa Tautin).

In the 1870s Offenbach was commissioned by the Alhambra Theatre and Cramer, the music publisher, to create an opéra bouffe from the fairy tale *Dick Whittington and His Cat*, with an English libretto by Henry Brougham Farnie based on the French version by Nuitter and Tréfeu. The premiere on 26 December 1874 was followed by a successful run of more than 110 consecutive performances.

Offenbach would still have loved to embellish *The Tales of Hoffmann* with sung recitatives for the London and Viennese stage. But time ran out and his final illness overtook him, even before he could attend the opening night of his masterpiece.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the BBC was the radio broadcaster that paid the greatest tribute in 1980, the centenary of Offenbach’s death, by transmitting a large number of rare works, specially recorded for the occasion. And in 1980 Opera Rara set itself the task of revealing to music lovers the true – in other words the frequently unexpected – face of a composer who often became the victim of his own success.

Nevertheless, one of Offenbach’s masterpieces was missing from British playbills. The score of *Fantasio* had never found its way across the Channel. But all that changed on a wonderful evening in December 2013 when the opera’s most glorious melodies resounded from the stage of the Royal Festival Hall on London’s Southbank. So what is this little-known but almost legendary masterpiece all about?

**The missing link**

A romantic, middle-class dreamer disguised as a jester: this description of Fantasio somehow epitomises the entire Offenbach spirit. The artistic collaboration between Alfred de Musset (1810–1857) and Jacques Offenbach began in the early 1850s, when Offenbach was musical director at the Comédie Française and Musset a writer at the height of his powers. Although their first work together did not lead to immediate success – the voice of the actor Louis Arsène Delaunay (1826–1903) did not produce the delicate tones required for the ‘Chanson de Fortunio’, composed for a 1850 revival of *Le Chandelier* with libretto by Musset – the paths of poet and musician constantly crossed.
Offenbach even drew on Musset’s works in his last bequest to the world of music, *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1881). Although he did not live to see the success of his final composition, Offenbach did not wait until his twilight years to treat his audience to works far more romantic than the farces staged at the Bouffes Parisiens or the Variétés. *Fantasio* (1872) is unquestionably the missing link in the chain between *Die Rheinnixen* (*Les fées du Rhin; The Rhine Nixes*), the great romantic opera composed for performance in Vienna in 1864, and *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

Throughout his life, Offenbach found his role as public entertainer at times burdensome, at others a source of pride. Since his youth when, as a rank-and-file orchestral cellist, he discovered with amazement the repertoire of the Opéra Comique, he had a single dream: to return in triumph to the same theatre with compositions of his own. Sadly, his efforts would only be rejected (*Blanche* in the 1840s), fail abjectly (*Barkouf*, 1861), remain unperformed (*La Baguette*, 1862) or achieve only limited success (*Robinson Crusoe*, 1867; *Vert-Vert*, 1869). *Fantasio* was written immediately after the Franco-Prussian war – during one of the darkest periods in Offenbach’s life – and while it was not exactly a flop, neither was it warmly received.

With the passage of time, it has become ever clearer that *Fantasio* deserves to be called a masterpiece, although the score does not quite match the metaphysical wizardry of *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Even so, unlike the latter, it is an accomplished work, brimming with lyricism and ingenuity, a genuine opéra comique as Offenbach would have understood the term. Moments of tender emotion combine with comedy supplied by Marinoni and the Prince of Mantua to truly dramatic effect. This same brand of humour would bring a breath of fresh air to the darkly labyrinthine *Tales of Hoffmann*, most notably in Franz’s couplets.

**Different versions of Fantasio**

The success in 1869 of Victor Capoul (1839–1924) as Valentin, hero of the comic opera *Vert-Vert*, persuaded Offenbach to cast him in the title role in *Fantasio*. Capoul, a leggiero tenor, was a particular favourite with female opera-lovers. The composer was half-way through writing the first draft when Capoul’s departure for the USA forced him to rethink the entire project.

He probably spent some time considering another tenor, but finally he gave in to repeated suggestions by the theatre director Camille
du Locle (1832–1903) that he turn Fantasio into a trouser role and cast a mezzo-soprano, Célestine Galli-Marié (1840–1905), who would soon become famous throughout the world wearing the gypsy garb of the bewitching Carmen in Georges Bizet’s comic opera.

To suit the voice of his new interpreter, Offenbach had no hesitation in revising the entire score, including the orchestration. During rehearsals he cut or added numerous pages, as was his wont. He would rearrange whole scenes to create a perfect balance and a correct rhythm between music and dialogue – a secret shared by all skilled dramatists.

However, at rehearsals there was outright hostility towards this once-idolised composer, who was now seen as guilty of achieving success and being born Prussian – this despite the fact that Fantasio had been commissioned by Camille du Locle and co-director Adolphe de Leuven (1800–1884), who were friends of the Offenbach family. Du Locle had even collaborated on the libretto with Paul de Musset (1804–1880) – Alfred’s brother – Charles Nuitter (1828–1899) and, according to rumour, Alexandre Dumas the Younger (1824–1895).

Written in 1834, Musset’s play was reworked, somewhat unsuccessfully, by his brother Paul in 1866, so that it could be performed at the Comédie Française. A few seasons later, with the French army humiliated by Prussian guns at the Battle of Sedan, a vicious press campaign preceded the opening night of the operatic version on 18 January 1872 and it ran for only ten performances.

Nevertheless, the press recognised the unmistakable virtues of Offenbach’s music. In his review for Le Figaro on 21 January 1872, the music critic Bénédict wrote: ‘Monsieur Jacques Offenbach’s score attests to work carried out, painstakingly and con amore, by a composer whose wit and abundant talent are given free rein in his musical parodies. Of Fantasio’s three acts, Monsieur Jacques Offenbach has written one, the first, which is a complete success, from the introduction to the students’ chorus as it rings through the streets of Munich. There are none of those frivolous, witty, cheerful, rhythmic little pieces that audiences merrily hum in unison as they spill out of the Variétés or the Bouffes-Parisiens. The musette aspires to be a muse. In this first act, Monsieur Offenbach, the prolific improviser of popular operettas, stays in the realm of opera – this is genuine singing, not music-hall caterwauling. In the overture, he introduces and discreetly develops the different motifs, such as Fantasio’s charmingly melodic duet with
his princess “Ah, for a little love”. The singing of the chorus of students and citizens of Munich is full of life and without affectation. The “chimes” couplets, with choral refrain, are delightful melodies, dynamically performed by Melchissédec in his fine voice. The audience demanded an encore. In completely different mood, I would mention the comic duet sung as a rondo by the Prince of Mantua and his aide-de-camp. “Ballad to the Moon” with its elegant and picturesque accompaniment, has grace and colour. Madame Galli-Marié’s voice sounded somewhat uncertain on this opening night. The princess’s verses have a twilit clarity when sung in perfect tune by Mademoiselle Priola’s crystalline voice. But let us look at the best page of the score, Fantasio and Elsbeth’s inspired, highly poetic and highly melodious duet, its tune already heard flowing, like a first frisson of love, through the pot-pourri of the overture. The first act could hardly end more happily than with the students’ chorus and a reprise of the “Song of the Fools”, whose nuances from piano to forte add charm and sparkle to the warm and dulcet tones of Melchissédec’s bass. […] Even if Monsieur Jacques Offenbach, a composer as busy as he is talented, continues to write much more, he will never write anything so accomplished.

The rather uncertain and confused interpretation of the still-imperfect final two acts can be put to rights at forthcoming performances. I hope and trust that it will. Whether or not it does, the musician can take comfort in the knowledge that the success of the first act will ensure success for the composer of Fantasio.

But audiences were unimpressed by Fantasio. Despite his friendship with Offenbach, Camille du Locle did nothing to rescue the work. The failure had a lasting effect on the composer, even though the Viennese premiere at the Theater an der Wien, with his favorite soprano Marie Geistinger in the trouser role of the clown, achieved a measure of success. Once more, Offenbach made the necessary changes to this third and final version, dusting off certain pages of his draft tenor arrangement, which were easier to adapt to a higher register.

The title role was not the only one to be modified. The part of the Prince of Mantua was originally written for tenor and then adapted for the great baritone, Ismaël (1825–1893) before finally the tenor Joseph Wilhelm Swoboda (1806–1882) took on the role for the Viennese production.
Back to the sources
The sources for Fantasio are scattered around the world and have long caused confusion. All we have of the Paris version is the original stage play and an arrangement for voice and piano published in 1872. It seems that the libretto of this comic opera was never published; neither was the orchestral score. The instrumental parts may have been lost in the terrible fire that swept through the Opéra Comique on 25 May 1887.

An orchestral score and a libretto of the Viennese version kept at the Theater an der Wien enabled the music publishers Bote & Bock to produce a revised and re-orchestrated version which was broadcast by Radio Hamburg in the late 1950s. Since then, the popular perception has been that this was the only playable version. However, a hand-written libretto lodged at the bureau of censorship in Paris resurfaced in the 1980s. Several ambitious attempts were made in Germany and France to reconstruct the work, but the results were incomplete as many manuscript sources were inaccessible.

That is, until very recently, when I was able to bring together all the autograph scores. Some were dispersed around the world by less than scrupulous heirs but finally acquired by major museums in London, Cologne and Paris.

Others, lovingly preserved by a branch of the Offenbach family, were recently placed at my disposal. With all these trails converging, I have finally been able to piece the jigsaw together. Still yet to be found are the first page of the overture – which fortunately is included in the Vienna score – and the first leaf of an unpublished chorus. Aided by the manuscript of an arrangement of the chorus in question for voice and piano, my only personal contribution is to orchestrate these few bars.

In this introduction I have discussed three different versions of Fantasio – the original and the Paris and Vienna versions. On this recording, we have the Paris version, as the audience at the Opéra Comique heard it at the first performance on 18 January 1872. The only addition is Fantasio’s ballad ‘Pleure, le ciel te voit’, which the composer removed during the final rehearsals, doubtless for dramatic effect, but which is still interesting from a musical point of view.

A finely polished score
Clearly, compared to many scores written at breakneck speed as only he knew how, Offenbach took exceptional care with Fantasio, putting heart and soul into this ‘different’ work. Much as Offenbach admired the classical
composers (he was nicknamed the ‘Mozart of the Champs-Elysées’), he demonstrates in Fantasio – and in most of his opera seria works – an unexpected modernism that foreshadows Bizet and even Massenet. His orchestration is as scholarly as it is polished, completely true to the spirit of the great French school.

A student of Halévy, creator of La Juive, Offenbach once again demonstrates his extraordinary understanding of the means available to the orchestrator. The overture alone attests to this talent. Throughout the opera, the composer pulls out all the stops to amaze those who know nothing of his chamber music or his operas and are only familiar with Orpheus in the Underworld, his opéra bouffon, satirising the court of Napoleon III, and its breathtaking gallops. Without departing from its unique brand of craziness – exemplified by Marinoni’s duet with the Prince, the quintet and finale of Act II – Fantasio explores darker domains, secret, moonlit and intangible, as in Elsbeth’s aria ‘Ballade à la lune’ (Ballad to the Moon) and her duet with Fantasio in Act I).

The opera also has disturbing moments of unease, in which the composer reveals a psychological perceptiveness that would do credit to Massenet, such as in Marinoni’s declaration and the penitents’ chorus. In each finale, we witness Offenbach’s mastery of large ensembles, which first became apparent in Les Brigands, composed in 1869. Nor does he neglect the characteristic Salle Favart style, here and there dropping in the odd neatly packaged couplet or line.

The difficulties of setting Musset’s play to music – not least because it is a work better read than seen on stage – may well have forced the composer to break new ground. Every Offenbach enthusiast knows he is brilliant at springing surprises. After a century and a half, we now have the chance to see just how brilliant. He truly deserves our gratitude.

© Jean-Christophe Keck, 2014
Sir Mark Elder (conductor) with Nicholas Jenkins (assistant conductor)
The Keck Offenbach Edition

The publication today of a critical edition of the works of Offenbach is a delicate task, for various reasons. Through poor management of the Offenbach legacy, the autograph manuscripts have been scattered to the four corners of the earth. As for the archives of the French editors, numerous original orchestral manuscripts have been damaged or lost.

It should also be noted that in the case of Offenbach, an autograph manuscript can never represent a unique source of reference. The original orchestral parts, the copyist’s scores, as well as all the materials printed in the last century (voice and piano, librettos, individual arias, etc) are indispensable to a coherent edition as much from the point of view of the drama as the music.

To this experienced man of the theatre, a work was a living thing which constantly had to evolve according to the changing demands of the stage. Certain works underwent important transformations between their first performance in Paris and their revival in Vienna (re-orchestration for larger forces, various structural modifications). Other works were subject to notable revisions for their various performances in France during the composer’s lifetime. The Keck Offenbach Edition’s policy is to publish all these different versions in their complete form, to give the public the most comprehensive choice.

I should like to pay tribute to the musicographer Robert Pourvoyeur (1924–2007), who dedicated his life to resurrecting Fantasio and aroused my own interest in this outstanding work, guiding my initial research.

Jean-Christophe Keck, 2014
Synopsis

Act 1
The action takes place on a square in Munich. On one side of the stage are the gates and terrace of the royal palace; on the other, a tavern and a tailor’s shop. Dusk is falling. The town is in festive mood. The crowd has gathered to celebrate peace, soon to be sealed by the forthcoming marriage of the Prince of Mantua to the Princess of Bavaria. Three students, Sparck, Hartmann and Facio, enjoy the party and poke fun at the bourgeoisie (chorus and couplets, ‘Long live the King’). The king, with his attendants, appears from the palace to announce the arrival of the Prince of Mantua and the marriage of his daughter Elsbeth. Rotten, the king’s secretary, tells the sovereign that his daughter Elsbeth is mourning the death of Saint-Jean, the court jester whom she adored. Enter an odd-looking figure, Marinoni, the Prince of Mantua’s aide. He has come to keep a discreet eye on the preparations for the festivities and find out what the locals are thinking. He moves away when Fantasio appears, lost in thought. In a melancholy mood with no wish at all to join the celebrations, he improvises up a ballad to the moon (ballad, ‘See in the dark night’). Flamel the page arrives to ask the students to keep their voices down so as not to disturb the Princess, who wanders on to the terrace, also deep in thought. Elsbeth sings of her confusion at feelings she is experiencing for the first time and which are gradually taking her over (recitative and ballad, ‘Look, the whole town is celebrating’). Fantasio, spellbound by her angelic voice, responds to her melancholy song with a ballad of his own, so that the two young people sing a duet without having seen one another (duet, ‘What sudden delightful murmuring’). A maidservant comes to fetch the Princess. Meanwhile, the student Sparck tries to drag Fantasio to join in the dance. But suddenly the court jester Saint-Jean’s sombre funeral procession moves across the square. It then occurs to Fantasio to disguise himself as the late jester so that he can approach the Princess (penitents’ chorus, ‘Oh, St Jean’). He goes with Sparck to the nearby tailor’s shop to get the costume, which will also help him escape his creditors and avoid a prison sentence. The Prince of Mantua enters, accompanied by Marinoni. To try to discover his future bride’s true feelings, the Prince decides to exchange clothes with his aide (‘I’m working out an important plan!’). The students return and Sparck sings a final homage to Saint-Jean and to fools in general. They are all
waiting for Fantasio but are dumbstruck when he appears, believing the king’s jester has risen from the dead. The merry group leave and Fantasio stands alone, knocking at the palace door (finale, ‘All noises cease’).

**Act 2**
The curtain rises on Elsbeth, her page Flamel and several ladies of the court strolling in the palace gardens. The Princess prefers to remember her beloved jester than to think about her future marriage (chorus and aria, ‘When the tree’s shade’). The arrival of the Prince of Mantua is announced (quintet, ‘It’s really him’). The king enters with the Prince and Marinoni, disguised as each other. The Prince’s first encounter with Elsbeth is not a success. Marinoni does not know how someone of his new-found status should behave, and the Prince’s attempted hoax makes matters worse. Left alone, the Prince is riddled with self-doubt (ballad, ‘I shall never be loved for myself’). But he is not about to give up and prepares to launch a fresh campaign. Returning to the palace gardens, Fantasio finally comes across Elsbeth. At first, the Princess takes offence at this ‘scholar in fool’s clothing’ who dares to disguise himself as poor Saint-Jean. But Fantasio intrigues her and makes her laugh at the silly things he says (couplets, ‘It is the King’s new jester’). He even manages to touch the young lady’s heart and to listen as she tells him her troubles (‘So that’s all I have to comfort my heart’). Before he leaves, Fantasio promises the Princess that this marriage of convenience will not take place. Flamel enters and tells Elsbeth that ‘the Prince is not the Prince’. But the entire court has already appeared onstage. While Marinoni (disguised as the Prince) enters, accompanied by the Prince (disguised as his aide), and pays his respects to Elsbeth, to the cheers of the crowd, Fantasio climbs up a tree and, with a stick, suddenly sends the false Prince’s wig flying through the air, making him look a complete fool. After such an insult the marriage cannot possibly take place and Fantasio is marched off to gaol (finale, ‘Today the court is in a festive mood’).

**Act 3**
Fantasio is delighted to have ruined the Prince’s wedding plans, but is nevertheless languishing in gaol. While he pretends to be asleep, Elsbeth comes to visit him (romance, ‘Poor careless Psyche’). She tells her new jester that his bravery was in vain as she is to marry the Prince of Mantua to ensure peace between the two kingdoms. Fantasio suddenly removes
his disguise and reprises the ballad he sang in Act 1. Deeply moved, Elsbeth believes him to be the real Prince of Mantua and is ready to offer herself to him. But Fantasio reveals his true identity: Fantasio, an ordinary middle-class man from Munich who has fallen in love (duet, ‘There is only one song to sing’). Elsbeth gives him her key to her garden and helps him escape. Since it was a hunchbacked jester and not a charming young man that the Swiss Guards believed they were keeping under lock and key, he is free to walk away accompanied by the Princess.

The second scene takes place in the same setting as Act 1. Still blind with rage, the Prince prepares to enter the royal palace to confess his trickery to the King of Bavaria and order Marinoni to return his princely clothes (couplets, ‘Take back this coat, my Prince’). Fantasio, dressed as a student once again, tries to calm his angry friends who were preparing to free him from prison (ensemble, ‘They have gone into the palace’). Meanwhile, the King of Bavaria and the Prince of Mantua are about to declare war. Fantasio, crowned ‘king of fools’ by the students, pleads for peace and challenges the Prince to a duel to settle the quarrel there and then. But the Prince withdraws, decides not to marry Elsbeth and returns to Mantua. The King pardons Fantasio, whom he names Prince for preventing war. Fantasio offers to hand back to Elsbeth the key to the gardens which she gave him in prison, but she asks him to keep it (finale, ‘Everyone is rallying to your banner’).
Sarah Connolly (Fantasio), Sir Mark Elder (conductor), and Brenda Rae (Elsbeth) with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Curtain call from Opera Rara’s concert performance at the Royal Festival Hall, London, on 15 December 2013.