Mefistofele

Rihm. Most recently Faust has been portrayed as the architect of longer. Contemporary composers who have been attracted to the power and rich ambiguity of the Faust legend continues to grow bringing about the salvation of Faust.

Unlike Gounod’s Marguerite, Boito’s village maiden is not intended to play in two parts, like Goethe’s work, on two nights. Instead, Mefistofele, dressed as a friar, stalks Faust. Carre, were interested in Goethe’s philosophy, but they did fiend Mephistopheles serves as the agent who brings both to operas, is the love story of Marguerite and Faust in which the redemption by his love of knowledge and truth.

Among the Romantic era composers who drew from it were Gounod, Liszt, Schumann, Berlioz, and Boito.

Gounod’s Faust (1859), one of the most popular of all French operas, is the love story of Marguerite and Faust in which the protagonist of the title character. The opera, now regarded as Gounod’s finest achievement, was first performed in Paris in 1859. In the same year Boito resumed his work as a librettist, creating the text for Ponchielli’s La Gioconda. Boito’s finest achievements as a librettist, however, came in his works: with the great composer Giuseppe Verdi to create two highly successful operas based on Shakespeare plays: Othello (1887) and Falstaff (1893). Boito’s verse began a King Lear libretto, but the aged Verdi was unable to take up the project.

After Verdi’s death in 1901, Boito returned to intermit tent work on a second opera of his own composition he had begun decades earlier. But now, the story of the emperor Neros, remaining unfinished at Boito’s death in 1918. In the next few years: the famed conductor Toscanini and others completed the opera, which premiered in 1946, some 63 years after Boito conceived it. Like Mefistofele, Neros presents the struggle between paganism and Christianity, destruction and redemption. According to some critics, the Neros libretto: is Boito’s greatest achievement.

The success of William Ashbrook, “The mark [Faust] left on Italian opera is greater than the sum of his own accomplishments.”

“Mefistofele is the work of an extraordinary man whose place as a poet, revolutionary, composer and—perhaps above all—librettist to Verdi, is secure in both Italian and operatic history.”

—Tom Rosenheld

Jerome Hines (1917-2005), baritone, was one of the twentieth-century’s most celebrated singers. He appeared in more than 800 performances at New York’s Metropolitan Opera. The obituary for Mr. Hines published by The New York Times on February 5, 2005, included the following quote: “In the mid-1950s Mr. Hines became a turn-off character: Christian, and made his debut at the center of his life and work, noting in interviews: at the Met in those years, he was ‘like a square peg in a round hole’ because of [his] level of artistry.” Mr. Hines composed an opera of his own: “I am the way...about the life of Jesus, in which he sang the title role. The work was performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1955, and Mr. Hines sang 93 times around the world, including a performance at the Bolshoi in Moscow.” Jerome Hines appeared twice at Bob Jones University as a librettist/composer serving as stage director. The opera, now regarded as Boito’s finest achievement, won a special prize in the international repertoire. In the same year Boito resumed his work as a librettist, creating the text for Ponchielli’s La Gioconda. Boito’s finest achievements as a librettist, however, came in his works: with the great composer Giuseppe Verdi to create two highly successful operas based on Shakespeare plays: Othello (1887) and Falstaff (1893). Boito also began a King Lear libretto, but the aged Verdi was unable to take up the project. After Verdi’s death in 1901, Boito returned to intermittent work on a second opera of his own composition he had begun decades earlier. But now, the story of the emperor Neros, remaining unfinished at Boito’s death in 1918. In the next few years: the famed conductor Toscanini and others completed the opera, which premiered in 1946, some 63 years after Boito conceived it. Like Mefistofele, Neros presents the struggle between paganism and Christianity, destruction and redemption. According to some critics, the Neros libretto: is Boito’s greatest achievement.

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The story of a man who sold his soul to the devil has fascinated poets and musicians for centuries. No subject has inspired more works of music than Faust, a German sorcerer who yearned for knowledge and power.

The historical Faust was a well-known traveling sorcerer who lived in Germany from 1488 to 1544. He was a philosopher who also dabbled in alchemy, a medical pseudo-science that aimed to convert baser metals into gold and to develop an elixir that would extend the human lifespan.

Johannes Faust had a reputation for being an evil man who claimed the devil as his ally. Whereas Martin Luther and other German theologians who were Faust’s contemporaries refer to Faust as having diabolical powers, some writers suggest that he was merely a petty, fraudulent charlatan.

During the sixteenth century, Faust became the subject of broadsides and puppet shows. Such versions of the story remained popular for over 200 years. In the 1970s the first “biography,” of Faust, Faustbuch, appeared. This collection of tales included graphic descriptions of hell and emphasized the fearful state of Faust’s soul as he carried out his merci less deeds. The anonymous author also created the ruthless fiend Mephistopheles.

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Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), Poet, Composer, Music Theorist continued from front page

stage on October 4, 1879, in Bolzano. Boito made further modifications before its next performance in Venice on May 13, 1879. By 1881 Boito was fully vindicated when the shorter, more accessible Mefistofele made a triumphant return to La Scala, this time with the libretto/composer serving as stage director. The opera, now regarded as Boito’s finest achievement, won a special prize in the international repertoire. In the same year Boito resumed his work as a librettist, creating the text for Ponchielli’s La Gioconda.

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Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), Poet, Composer, Music Theorist continued from page 3

By this time Boito had already begun work on the libretto and score of his own opera based on Goethe’s Faust. He unique gifts allowed him to be one of those rare composers who write their own librettis. From the legendary German work, Boito derived a number of anthological themes that are inherent in the world’s greatest literature: the irreconcilable conflicts between God and Satan, youth and age, love and betrayal, life and death.

Boito’s Mefistofele premiered on March 8, 1886, at Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Italy’s leading theater, with Boito himself conducting. The audience response was so vociferous and so mixed that Boito lost his confidence as a composer and pursued instead his literary interests by writing music criticism and translating foreign literature for publication in Italy.

After undergoing extensive cutting and revision, Mefistofele returned to the New York Times

Mefistofele by Arrigo Boito

Libretto by the composer after Goethe’s Faust

March 2006

These study materials are produced for use with the Bob Jones University Opera Association production.

Five Hundred Years of the Faust Story

ARRIGO BOITO, a man of rare artistic accomplishments, was born in Padua, the son of a painter of miniatures and an impoverished Polish aristocrat. He enrolled at the Milan Conservatory in 1853 to study composition and aesthetics. He eventually became part of a circle of progressive musicians who sought to bring German and French influence into Italian music. Boito was a post-student in European literature as well as a composer. He created librettis for Verdi’s comparison of the Neave of Nature in 1861 and Franz Casetti’s Hamlet in 1865.
Act I, Scene I
in the Town Square on Easter Sunday

The aged scholar Faust with his student Wagner strolls through the town’s lively Easter festivities and contemplates the pleasures of spring. As the two begin to make their way home at dusk, a mysterious friar who has passed among the townspeople that day follows them. Faust tells Wagner that he suspects that the friar is actually the devil, who appears to be spinning a web around them.

Act I, Scene II
in Faust’s study, later that evening

The friar follows Faust into his study and lurks there while the old man muses on eternal peace. Faust then opens a Bible, preparing to meditate on the Gospel. At that moment the friar howls and emerges from an alcove, throwing off his cloak to reveal the appearance of a gentleman. Faust recognizes him as a supernatural apparition and fends him off with a symbol of God’s name. But Mefistofele eventually persuades the scholar to sign a pact by which he will serve Faust absolutely on earth if Faust agrees to reverse roles with him in the afterlife. Faust becomes exhilarated at the prospect of capturing ideal beauty. Thus the eternal pact is sealed, and the two fly away together on Mefistofele’s coat.

Act II, Scene I
in Marta’s garden

Now youthful in his appearance, Faust glories in the rejuvenation and change of scene Mefistofele has afforded him. While the devil flirts with Marta, Faust woos her beautiful young charge, Margherita. He at last persuades the village maiden to give her mother a sleeping potion he will provide so the couple can be alone together for the night.

Act II, Scene II
on a desolate mountaintop, months later

Faust and Mefistofele ascend a mountain, led by mysterious, malevolent lights, known as will-o’-wisps, that lure travelers from well-worn paths to treacherous ground. At the top of a mountain the two join a group of witches and warlocks who are celebrating their black rituals. The evil spirits hail Mefistofele as the King of Darkness and give him a crystal globe that symbolizes the world he despises. With derisive laughter, he throws it down and shatters it. While the spirits dance themselves into an infernal frenzy, Faust has a disturbing vision of Margherita with an eerie red line around her neck. The evil creatures continue their revelry.

Act III
in a prison cell

Convicted of poisoning her mother with a sleeping potion and drowning the illegitimate baby she has borne by Faust, Margherita in a state of madness awaits execution. Faust is brought into the cell by Mefistofele, who with-draws. Faust pleads with the woman he has seduced and then abandoned to escape with him to happiness and freedom. As the time of Margherita’s execution draws near, Mefistofele returns. After Margherita recognizes him as an agent of Satan, she calls upon heavenly powers for forgiveness and protection. In her dying moments she rejects Faust. As she sinks in death, she heavenly hosts joyfully proclaim her salvation.

Epilogue
in Faust’s study and the heavens

Faust, again an old man, is dejected by the emptiness of his life. Yet momentarily he imagines that he can make the world a better place by going, of himself for the good of others. Mefistofele, who realizes the nature of Faust’s contemplation, becomes desperate to claim the old man’s soul, especially when the celestial choir once again begins to sing. Clutching a Bible and resisting Mefistofele’s invitation to join him for new adventures, Faust at last prays for protection and salvation. At Faust’s death the heavenly hosts welcome his triumphant soul into heaven while the defiant Mefistofele sinks in defeat.
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In 1993 Christopher Marlowe, influenced by an English prose translation of the Faustbuch, created a powerful drama called Doctor Faustus that took the London stage by storm. His play is a work of spiritual sincerity and intensity that dramatizes Protestant theology and the universal struggle between good and evil.

All these versions of the story end with Faust’s suffering the consequences of his bargain. In an unfinished play of 1760, however, German writer Gotthold Lessing depicted Faust as a noble man who turned to magic to satisfy his longing for knowledge. Ultimately this Faust is reconciled with God and attains salvation.

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