

*A Kalmus Classic Edition*

Ambroise  
**THOMAS**

**MIGNON**  
AN OPERA IN THREE ACTS

VOCAL SCORE

With French and English Text

K 06810



# MIGNON

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## Characters of the Drama

<b>MIGNON, a young girl stolen by Gypsies . . . . .</b>	<b>Mezzo-soprano.</b>
<b>FILINA, an actress . . . . .</b>	<b>Soprano</b>
<b>FREDERICK, a young nobleman . . . . .</b>	<b>Contralto</b>
<b>WILHELM MEISTER, a student . . . . .</b>	<b>Tenor</b>
<b>LAERTES, an actor . . . . .</b>	<b>Tenor</b>
<b>LOTHARIO, an Italian nobleman . . . . .</b>	<b>Basso cantante</b>
<b>GIARNO, a Gypsy . . . . .</b>	<b>Bass</b>
<b>ANTONIO, a servant . . . . .</b>	<b>Bass</b>

**Townfolk, Peasants, Gypsies, Actors and Actresses**

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*The scene of Acts I and II is laid in Germany ; of Act III in Italy*

# MIGNON

OPÉRA-COMIQUE IN THREE ACTS AND FIVE TABLEAUX

Words by

MM. MICHEL CARRÉ AND JULES BARBIER

Music by

**AMBROISE THOMAS**

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First performed at the Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra-Comique, Paris,  
November 17, 1866, with the following cast :

MIGNON, . . . . .	Mezzo-Soprano, . . .	MMES. GALLI-MARIÉ
PHILINE, . . . . .	Soprano, . . . . .	MARIE CABEL
WILHELM, . . . . .	First Tenor, . . . .	MM. LÉON ACHARD
LOTHARIO, . . . . .	First Singing Bass or Barytone,	BATAILLE
LAËRTE, . . . . .	Second Tenor, . . .	COUDERC
JARNO, . . . . .	Second Bass, . . . .	BERNARD
FRÉDÉRIC, . . . . .	Buffo Tenor, . . . .	VOISY
ANTONIO, . . . . .	Speaking Part, . . . .	DAVOUST

The scene, in the first two acts, is laid in Germany ; in the third act, in Italy.

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## Mignon.

A narration of the story of this opera may profitably precede a discussion of its origin and some of the vicissitudes through which it has passed. *Mignon*, the heroine of the tale, is a strange creature who in her infancy had been stolen from her home in Italy by a band of wandering Gypsies. By them she is brought up and compelled to earn her living by dancing. We meet with her first in the courtyard of a German inn, among whose guests are a troupe of actors who are on their way to the castle of a nobleman where their performances are to enliven a festival. In this company are *Filina*, an accomplished flirt, *Laertes*, a light-hearted servant of the tragic muse, and *Frederick*, a young gentleman dangling after the skirts of mistress *Filina*, with whom he is over head and ears in love. Another occupant of the inn is an aged harper, *Lothario*, whose words and acts

indicate that a great sorrow has turned his mind awry. He is, indeed, an Italian nobleman who, crazed by the loss of his child and the death of her mother, is wandering about the earth as a minstrel seeking the daughter who, he is convinced, is still alive, though many years have passed since she was carried away by Gypsies. The actor-folk are making merry and have compelled *Lothario* to sit down to a cup of comfort with them, when a company of Romany mountebanks appear on the scene. Their dance is rewarded with applause and silver, whereupon the leader brings *Mignon* out of a cart, where she has been sleeping on the straw, and bids her perform the egg dance upon a carpet spread for her. The girl, angered by the laughter with which she is received, sullenly refuses, and the Gypsy leader is about to beat her when *Lothario* throws his arms about her in protection. The old man is thrust aside and the stick again raised over the head of *Mignon*, when *Wilhelm* enters the courtyard and rushes to defend her, threatening the life of her tormentor with a pistol. *Giarno* whines about his loss caused by the girl's disobedience, but *Filina* throws her purse to him and he takes himself off contented. *Wilhelm*, the newcomer, is a wealthy young gentleman, who, having finished his university studies, is seeing the world at his leisure. *Filina* has cast an auspicious and eager eye on him and now sends her friend *Laertes* to make his acquaintance, while she coyly retires within the inn, only to reappear when the men are in conversation and receive the homage of *Wilhelm*, already dazzled by her charms. The upshot of the matter is that *Wilhelm*, having nothing better to do, joins the theatrical company, accompanied by *Mignon*, whose release he had purchased from *Giarno*, and followed by the harper.

Arrived at the castle where the festivities are to take place, *Wilhelm* falls rapidly and deeply into the toils of *Filina*, to the unutterable grief of *Mignon*, who is now consumed with love for her deliverer. She notes the infatuation of *Wilhelm*, and in her jealous despair attempts to drown herself, but is restrained by the sound of *Lothario's* harp. To the minstrel she goes for help and comfort, but her imprecations against the castle inspire a wicked plan in the distraught mind of the old man. Actors and guests are in the midst of their rejoicings over the success of the theatrical entertainment when it is found that the castle is in flames;—the minstrel had fired it for *Mignon's* sake. The scene of confusion is increased by the discovery that *Mignon*, having been sent back for *Filina's* nose-gays, is in the burning building. *Wilhelm* rushes in and brings out her unconscious form in his arms.

These are the incidents of the first two acts. In the third act we are transported to Italy. *Lothario*, himself unconscious of the fact, has brought *Mignon* to his ancestral palace in the land which had haunted her memory from childhood, but for which she has no name. It was to her only the land of golden oranges and burning roses, of blue skies and light-winged birds, of palaces peopled by marble statues—the land in which she wished to live, in which to die. *Wilhelm*, enlightened at last as to her love, has followed her, and *Filina* has

and Barbier bears little more than an external resemblance to the *Mignon* of Goethe, and to kill her is wanton cruelty. The operatic change has altered her nature quite as much as *Gretchen's* was altered, but the two characters are not necessarily rendered less amiable by that fact. In the case of *Gretchen versus Marguerite*, a strict moralist might even plead that the French librettists lifted Goethe's maiden to a higher ethical plane than she occupies in the original drama. Goethe's *Gretchen*, despite her sweet innocency, is of coarser fibre than the *Marguerite* of the opera. The authors of the libretto made the character more gentle, even while emptying it of most of its poetic contents; and Gounod refined it still more by breathing ecstasy into all its music. Goethe's *Gretchen* eagerly returns *Faust's* kiss on her first meeting with him in the garden, and already at the second (presumably) offers to leave her window open and accepts the sleeping potion for her mother; it is the sudden, uncontrollable rush of passion to which Gounod's *Marguerite* succumbs. *Gretchen* remains in simple amaze that such a fine gentleman as *Faust* should find aught to admire in her, even after she has received and returned his first kiss, but *Marguerite* is exalted, transfigured by the new feelings surging within her.

“ *Il m'aime ! . . . quel trouble en mon . . . cœur !*  
*L'oiseau chante . . . le vent murmure ! . . .*  
*Toutes les voix de la nature*  
*Semblent me répéter en chœur :*  
*Il t'aime ! ”*

But this is getting to be something like critical discussion, which is not the business of this prefatory essay, and a sidewise excursion besides. It may have its value, however, in directing attention to some of the changes which the opera has undergone. It was brought forward at the Paris Opéra-Comique on November 17, 1866. Its success was instantaneous. Within six months it had one hundred performances, and before the year was over this number was increased to one hundred and fifty. Twenty years later the performances still averaged half a hundred a year in Paris. Its vogue, which was very considerable, in London and New York, was due to Madame Christine Nilsson, who sang it in London on July 5th, 1870, and in New York on November 22d, 1871. The latter performance took place at the Academy of Music, under the management of Maurice Strakosch, the language being Italian and the parts being distributed as follows :

Mignon, . . . . .	Mme. Christine Nilsson.
Filina, . . . . .	Mlle. Léon Duval.
Frederico, . . . . .	Mlle. Ronconi.
Guglielmo, . . . . .	M. Capoul.
Lotario, . . . . .	M. Jamet.
Laerte, . . . . .	M. Lyall.
Giarno, . . . . .	Sig. Coletti.
Zingarella, . . . . .	Mlle. Bellon.

followed him. He finds *Mignon*, and to *Lothario* confesses his purpose to purchase the palace for *Mignon*, who is now supremely happy in his love. *Filina's* coming almost gives her a death-blow, but *Lothario's* mental recovery, his recognition of the palace as his old home, deserted since he had set out on his wanderings in search of his child *Sperata*, and of *Mignon* as that child, bring all to a happy conclusion.

The incidents of this plot were drawn chiefly from episodes in Goethe's famous novel entitled "Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre," which has been done into admirable English by Carlyle. In this work the story of *Mignon* is only of subordinate interest, serving effectively to supply a romantic atmosphere to portions of the story and bringing pure and ennobling influences into scenes singularly deficient in them, but touching none of the real springs of the romance. This, in effect, is an exhaustive commentary on social and political life in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. In constructing a romantic play out of the *Mignon* incidents, the librettists proceeded very much as they had done in the case of "Faust," which they had turned into an opera-book for Gounod a few years before;—they took out the incidents which were adaptable to the operatic manner, utilized the poet's pictures and sentiments, but poured all the borrowed material into the conventional operatic mould, thus making it serviceable to the conventional operatic manner. For this both "Faust" and "Mignon" have been severely faulted by German critics, who, indeed, would not have been true in allegiance to the masterpieces of their greatest poet had they not resented their despoliation by librettists bent only on providing an agreeable entertainment for the habitués of the lyric theatre. But the philosophy of "Faust" and the critical comment of "Wilhelm Meister" are not fit operatic material, whereas some of the incidents and people of the two works are cut out for opera. This fact is strikingly illustrated in the present case. No more perfect prototype for an operatic character of the *leggiera* class than *Filina* could be imagined; and each of her companions supplies an individual element of contrast. *Mignon* is the embodiment of pathos, the exemplar of the cantabile style; *Wilhelm* stands for youthful sentiment—fluctuating and variable because youthful; *Laertes* for that careless disposition which has excellent expression in the conventional idioms of the *buffo*; *Lothario* is lyricism incarnate. The *Mignon* of Goethe is a tragic type, and her death, inevitable under the circumstances, is one of the most moving incidents in Goethe's romance. Mr. Thomas's opera, having been written for the Opéra-Comique of Paris, had to have a happy ending (tragic operas being at the time reserved for the Grand Opéra), and the circumstance that in it *Mignon* marries *Wilhelm* instead of dying of a broken heart gave great offence to the Germans, whom the composer attempted to appease with a new *dénouement*, a "Version allemande" in which *Mignon* falls dead in the arms of her lover when she hears the voice of *Filina* repeating some of the flourishes from her polacca in the second act. The device proved futile, as it deserved. The *Mignon* of Carré

The circumstance that the part of *Frédéric*, quite inconsequential originally, and played by a man, is in this cast assigned to a contralto, is an evidence of the changes that had taken place between the first Parisian and the New York productions. In London the part had been given to Madame Trebelli, for whom the rondo-gavotte, "In veder l'amata stanza" ("Me voici dans son boudoir"), was arranged from the *entr'acte* music preceding the second act, and since then has always been sung by a contralto. For Madame Volpini, who sang the part of *Filina*, also in London, a florid air, "Alerta, Filina!" ("Alerte, alerte!") was introduced, but these changes were trifling compared with the transformations which the finale underwent. The form in which it is presented in this edition is the first rearrangement of the original finale, and that followed universally now, so far as I have been able to learn. *Lothario*, reclothed in his right mind, sees his daughter Sperata in *Mignon*, because of the latter's recognition of the girdle which she wore as a child, her mother's portrait, and her recollection of the childish prayer which she used nightly to utter. The scene then comes to a conclusion with an ensemble, *Mignon*, *Wilhelm* and *Lothario*, rejoicing in the mutual understanding finally established, the musical foundation of which is the melody of the romance of the first act based on a paraphrase of Goethe's "Kennst du das Land" ("Connais-tu le pays" in the first act). Originally this scene was much more extended. *Mignon* and *Wilhelm* are happy in each other's arms when the voice of *Filina* floats in at the window. *Mignon* pleads with *Wilhelm* to drive the siren away, and the two withdraw from the threatened presence. The scene changes. We are in the midst of a group of peasants who are making merry. *Filina* is on hand, accompanied by the faithful swain, *Frederick*. She orders breakfast, and while it is preparing sings a song in the measure of a *forlana*—an Italian dance in sextuple time, particularly beloved of the Venetian gondoliers, beginning

*Paysanne ou signora,  
 Choisissez qui vous plaira!  
 Tant qu'au ciel le jour luira,  
 En ce monde on aimera!*

The sentiment is that of the song which Shakespeare admitted to his comedy "Much Ado About Nothing":

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
 Men were deceivers ever,  
 One foot in sea, and one on shore,  
 To one thing constant never.  
 Then sigh not so,  
 But let them go,  
 And be you blithe and bonny,  
 Converting all your sounds of woe  
 Into hey, nonny, nonny!"

The melody of this *forlana*, changed in rhythm, is yet to be heard in the

coda of the overture. *Mignon* is shocked by the heartlessness of *Filina*, but the latter advances to her and offers her hand in friendship and congratulation and graciously bestows herself upon *Frederick*. Enter a chorus of peasants, who acclaim *Lothario* as their old master, the Marquis of Cypriani; and then general rejoicing. The nature of the finale constructed to humor the *Pietät* of the Germans, has already been suggested. It is abrupt enough to please the most voracious devourer of penny dreadfuls. It proceeds like the original ending up to the moment when the voice of *Filina* is heard in a phrase of the polacca, "Je suis Titania." *Mignon* pleads that she be driven away lest she herself die of grief. *Wilhelm* exclaims: "Mignon! Filina"; *Lothario* echoes with, "My daughter! Filina!" but *Mignon*, staring fixedly at the actress, falls into her lover's arms and expires.



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