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# ROSSINI

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GUILLAUME TELL  
Overture to the Opera



Eulenburg

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GIOACCHINO ROSSINI

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GUILLAUME TELL

Overture to the Opera

Edited by/Herausgegeben von  
Lionel Salter



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# PREFACE

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*Guillaume Tell* was Rossini's thirty-eighth opera: it was also his last, for after its production in August 1829 he suddenly and unaccountably gave up composition almost completely, spending the remaining half of his life in masterly inactivity. Several reasons have been advanced – that his health was bad; that he was aware that his days of operatic supremacy in Europe were coming to an end and that Meyerbeer's star was rising; that with the 1830 Revolution and the fall of Charles X his contract to provide five new works for the Paris Opéra (of which *Tell* was the first and an opera on Faust was to have been the second) became null, and he lost all further interest; and that he was profoundly embittered by the public's indifference to what he considered, and other composers everywhere acclaimed as, his supreme achievement in the theatre.

It was probably the success of Auber's *Masaniello* the previous year – a story of a popular revolt which itself later provoked an insurrection in Brussels – together with a new French dramatic version of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, that confirmed Rossini in his choice of this story of Switzerland's fourteenth-century struggle for liberation. He had been studying the scores of Beethoven – who had earlier advised him to stick to *opera buffa* as being best suited to his style and temperament; and to introduce this large-scale historical opera, on which he had spent nine months (as against a fortnight on *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), he departed from his customary procedures and neither borrowed an overture from a previous work nor constructed one from themes from the opera itself. Instead, he composed a descriptive tone-poem, which falls into four sections.

A lyrical introduction, scored in highly original fashion for five solo cellos, supported only by the ripieni cellos and the basses, suggests the love of young Arnold for Matilda, the sister of the Austrian tyrant: it is twice inter-

rupted by ominous growls of thunder from the timpani, but at its close a storm bursts which is more than the familiar phenomenon of nature in the mountains in that it also symbolises the fury of the Swiss under the yoke of their oppressors: the storm subsides and the *Ranz des vaches* is played on a cor anglais, echoed by the flute, which later adds birdlike warblings to the traditional Alphorn call; but this idyll is shattered by a trumpet signal which heralds an electrifying gallop (twice reaching a climax) that represents the surge of the Swiss towards liberty.

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## Editorial Notes

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In preparing this edition the following early sources were examined:

- A Rossini's autograph score of the opera (Paris, Bibl.Nat.MS 1331 R 17611)
- B The original orchestral parts of the opera, used in the Paris Opéra 1829 (Paris, Archives de l'Opéra 4077)
- C The earliest printed full score of the opera (Troupenas, Paris 1829-30)
- D A lithograph full score of the opera (Ratti, Rome c. 1830)
- E The printed miniature score of the opera (Ricordi, Milan n.d.)

Additionally, an early miniature score of the overture (Donajowski, London n.d.), the current scores and parts of the overture published by Schott and by Breitkopf & Härtel, and the previous Eulenburg edition of the overture were also consulted.

The cor anglais part, written in A in the old French tradition (i.e. in the bass clef an octave below concert pitch), is here printed in the now customary manner (i.e. in the treble clef a fifth above concert pitch), which in fact was already adopted in B. The somewhat misleading indi-

cation *Solo* often shown in the horn parts, and signifying merely that the passage was not to be played *a2*, has been replaced by a specification of which horn should play: likewise the marking *Solo* as applied to the triangle (i.e. not together with the bass drum and cymbals) has been avoided by showing the part on a separate line. For ease of reading, the cello clefs in the opening section of the overture have been restricted to treble and bass. The metronome marks are taken from *C*.

Despite the great popularity of this overture – indeed, perhaps because of it – the score as usually performed differs in numerous details from that actually written by Rossini. Many of these discrepancies are small, though by no means unimportant (length of phrasing slurs, presence of ties, precise placing of *crescendo* and *decrescendo* signs, etc); but some are major divergences, of which one of the most startling is encountered no later than b8, where, despite the unanimous evidence of the early sources, modern scores and parts have changed the first chord from a last inversion dominant seventh to a second inversion. This point at least admits of no ambiguity, but elsewhere the establishment of an authentic text bristles with problems. Rossini's score (*A*), obviously written at speed, is riddled with omissions, inconsistencies and even downright contradictions, quite apart from leaving continuations or repetitions of *sforzandi*, articulation marks (and it is impossible to be sure of the distinction, if any, between staccato dots and dashes) etc to be taken for granted; the orchestral parts (*B*) contain a number of obvious copyists' errors; and the first printed score (*C*) significantly differs in numerous details from both.

Doubts previously entertained about whether, since three trombones are demanded at only one point, the composer originally called for only two and momentarily forgot when he wrote the triad in b240, or whether he expected two of his three to play in unison almost throughout, are resolved by reference to *B*, where the latter is seen to be the case. The disposition of the cellos and basses is a lot less clear. In the auto-

graph the two staves below the five solo cellos are bracketed together and marked *Violoncelli ripieni*; but in *C* and *D* these have become *Basses ripiennes* and *Primo e Secondo Basso* respectively. It is highly improbable that with five cellos already fully committed a sufficient number of cellos would have remained to allow them to be divided for a *ripieno*, and this is borne out in *B*, where the upper staff is allotted to the *ripieno* cellos and the lower to the basses – the disposition adopted for the present edition. The Opéra clearly had difficulty in meeting Rossini's requirements, for in *B* the solo lines have been re-allocated (rather clumsily) to three cellos and two violas dovetailed between them.

As was customary at the period, the string parts in *A* are, in general, given phrasing slurs rather than bowing marks – hence the apparently impracticable articulation for the cellos in the opening section; but when bowing does seem to be indicated it is often chaotically self-contradictory. Analogous passages are differently marked: in the Storm section the 'rumbling' semiquavers (e.g. bb58–62) are variously shown with two bows to a bar, one bow to a bar, or one bow to two bars, and moreover even when two string parts are in unison there is often no consistency between them – nor do the bowing indications in *B* tally with those in *A*. For the present edition it was decided, since no reason whatever could be adduced for such discrepancies, to adopt the most common pattern of one bow to a bar.

In other cases, inconsistencies have mostly been allowed to remain: on the face of it, the 1st cello's bowing in bb28 and 30 looks as if it should be identical with that in bb17 and 19, but the phrase extension from b27 upsets the pattern; we cannot know which phrasing Rossini really intended for the 1st cello in bb20 and 31, since each is quite unambiguous; he may or may not have meant the violins' *g#*<sup>'''</sup> in bb309, 345 and 353 to be sustained (although repeated in semiquavers in b301) or the upper winds' phrasing in bb117–118 to be mirrored in the bassoons, trombones and basses in bb118–119.

But extrapolation from these patterns, like any attempt to complete the erratically intermittent phrasing of the solo cor anglais part, immediately lands an editor in the realm of speculation and, in no time at all, leads to the kind of misleading distortions from which the score has already suffered. It is with the aim of showing, so far as possible, what Rossini actually wrote rather than what it is thought he meant to write, that this edition has been prepared: conductors and students may reach their own conclusions about

the many debatable details of the score, but at least it will be on the basis of something approaching an 'Urtext'.

Grateful acknowledgements are made to the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archive de l'Opéra of Paris, and special thanks are due to the BBC Music Librarian and her staff for their assistance.

Lionel Salter

