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Le Dernier Sorcier (Operetta; libretto by Ivan Turgenev) [Programme notes for performances at University of Calgary, January 2005.]

Viardot, Pauline; Zekulin, Nicholas G.; Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich; Žekulin, Nicholas G.

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Pauline Viardot, Le Dernier Sorcier (Operetta; libretto by Ivan Turgenev). Performing edition prepared from MSS sources. [Programme notes for performances at University of Calgary, January 2005.]

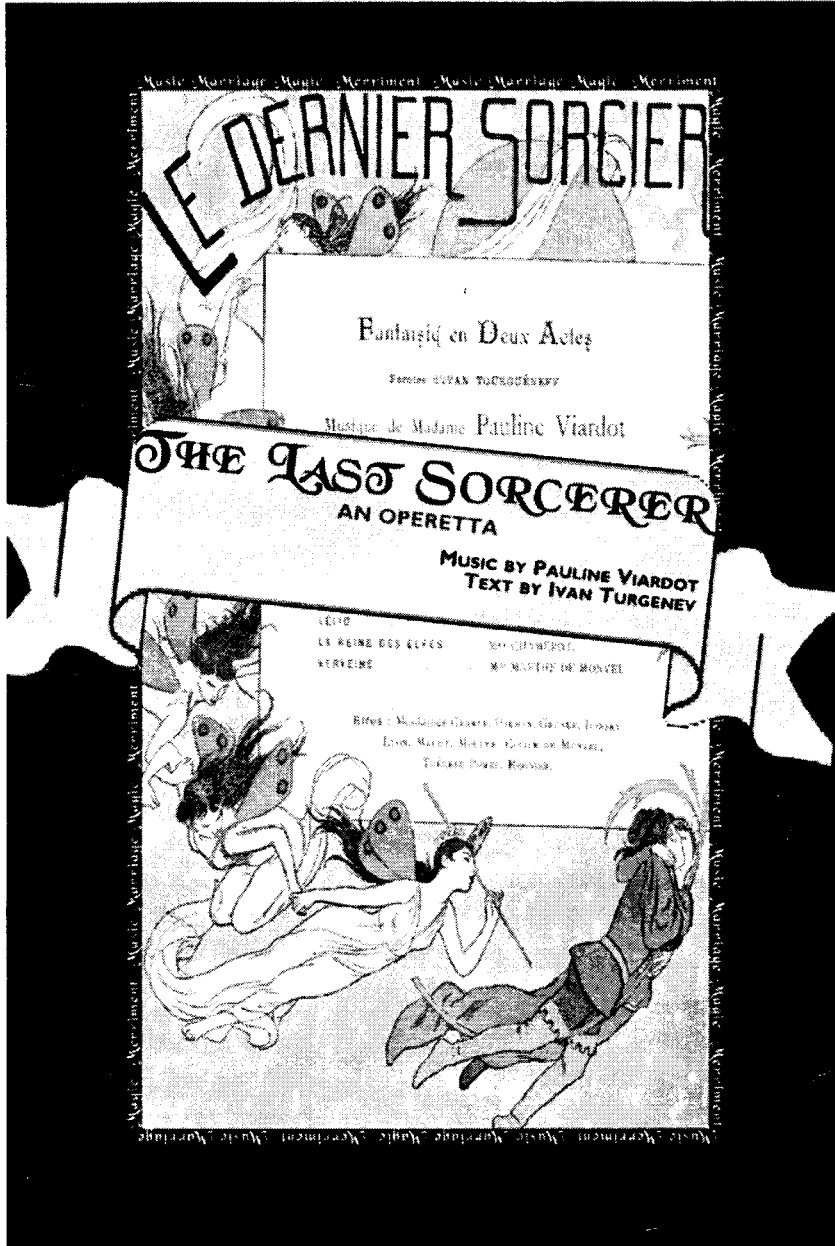
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The Departments of Drama, Music and Germanic, Slavic and East Asian Studies Present:



January 13, 14 & 15, 2005  
University Theatre  
7:30 pm



# The Last Sorcerer

## ~ Le Dernier Sorcier ~

Music by Pauline Viardot  
Text by Ivan Turgenev  
(Orchestration by Eduard Lassen)

Text transcribed and translated,  
Music transcribed, adapted and arranged  
from MSS in the Astor, Lenox & Tilden Foundation, NYPL  
and Houghton Library, Harvard University  
by Nicholas G. Žekulin

### PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director	Barry Yzereef
Music Director	Edette Wilks
Designer (Set & Costume)	Douglas McCullough
Designer (Lighting)	J. Jim Andrews
Scenic Artist	Douglas McCullough
Costumer	Carolyn Devins
Voice Coach	Patricia Hrynkiw
Stage Manager	Dawn Darsi

### CAST

Will Stinson	Krakamiche, an old sorcerer
Sarah Higgins	Stella, sorcerer's daughter
James Funfer	Perlimpinin, sorcerer's servant
Janelle Cooper	Prince Lelio
Meg Wilkie	The Queen of the Elves
Colleen Kenny	Verveine, an elf

# ORCHESTRA

Emily Westell	Violin I
Barb Olorenshaw	Violin II
Christine Mireault	Viola
Václav Albrecht	Violoncello*
Colleen Monaghan	Piano
Andrew Hawryluk	Piano
Miriam Clark	Harp
Brina Goyette	Percussion

\* Violoncello provided by: V.A. Hill Fine Strings Ltd. - Vickie Hill, President

# CHORUS

Colleen Kenny	Verveine
Katt Boulet	Cosette
Meagan De Jong	Petale de Rose
Deinera Exner	Marguerite
Leah Gingrich	Soleil Feu
Synthia Jahan	Fleureuse
Sarah Katz	Fleur Rivière
Lindsay Kurtze	Echo
Mercy Lamola	Papillon
Erin McKeage	Sureau
Amanda Massey	Rosée
Andrea O'Brien	Tilleul
Theresa Pamplin	Campanule
Lyndsey Paterson	Feuille
Shelby Reinitz	Couleur de feuille

# DANCERS

Janet Downie	Ne'nubhar
Laura Hildebrandt	Pamplemousse

## *Synopsis*

Somewhere, in a land far, far away, in a huge forest, there lives a sorcerer named Krakamiche. Once upon a time he had been powerful and dreadful; but his magic has spent itself, his power has diminished, and now he barely manages to get by, obtaining by means of his magic wand nothing but his daily bread, and that with the greatest of difficulty. The magnificent palace that he had erected has gradually shriveled into a miserable hut; his servant, a giant of great strength, capable of knocking over mountains as if they were nothing but sugar loaves, has turned into a puny and slow-witted dwarf. Krakamiche is particularly sensitive to this decline in his personal significance because he has a daughter called Stella, for whom he had planned a brilliant future... In that same forest there live female spirits—elves; they are governed by a queen. These elves are Krakamiche's sworn enemies; it had been very much not to their liking that he had taken it into his head to settle in their forest; but at the time they were unable to do anything to prevent it; now however, they annoy the old fellow in all kinds of ways, infuriate him, drive him to distraction. Not far from the forest there lives a king; he has a son, Prince Lelio, who often goes hunting in that forest. The Queen of the Elves has taken him under her protection and wants to marry him to Stella, whom she has come to love despite the fact that she is Krakamiche's daughter, and, naturally, she attains her goal. [...] First there is an introduction in the form of a small overture; two or three of the principal themes of the operetta interweave in a lovely way in this introduction and then resolve in a triumphant fortissimo. The curtain rises on a graceful chorus of elves teasing Krakamiche; he is having a lot of trouble with the fireplace in his hut while they pour water down the chimney onto his fire and laugh at his powerless anger. The Queen appears; one of the elves reports that she has succeeded in tricking Krakamiche into believing that a delegation of Cochinese spirits that are subject to him is due to arrive that very day with their customary, but long unpaid, tribute, namely a blade of the grass Moly, known already to the ancient Greeks and mentioned in the *Odyssey*; this magic grass has the power to restore a man to youth, beauty and strength. The elves themselves will dress up as Cochinese and, able in such a way to enter the abode of their enemy (they cannot do so without tricking him—Krakamiche still has that much power left), they will be able to have fun aplenty at his expense. The Queen approves the plan... but at that moment, a horn sounds; Prince Lelio approaches—the elves disappear. The prince enters and sings a romance in two verses; he "has wounded a hart with his arrow, but has himself been wounded in the heart." He has seen Stella, but does not know who she is. At that moment the Queen appears. (All her speeches are melodramas—that is accompanied with music.) She throws the prince a magic rose; the rose will make him invisible to everybody except Stella, but the magic is effective only after sunset. Then she exacts his word that he will obey her blindly and points out Stella, who appears at the window of her house. Lelio wants to rush to her, but the Queen orders him to withdraw: he obeys. Krakamiche enters; in a long, very characteristic aria he recounts his grief... Nonetheless, the news of the Cochinese delegation, which he has believed, raises his hopes and his spirits. Two or three drops of rain fall on his face... "What!" he exclaims, "has the magic net within which I have enclosed my dwelling also lost its power and is letting in water just like an old mackintosh?" He summons his idiot of a servant, Perlimpinpin, and sends him for an umbrella. There follows a comic scene, culminating in a furious Krakamiche's kicking and shoving him off stage and then himself following after him. Stella comes out of the house... She feels sorry for her father, speaks of her mysterious protectress, the Queen of the Elves, of the unknown, handsome young man with whom the Queen has brought her together and, noting the drops of rain, addresses them in a short but lovely aria, one of the highlights of the entire operetta, asking them to water her flowers. The queen appears again [...] and informs her of her imminent meeting with Lelio. Delighted, Stella exits and Perlimpinpin enters in her place. He sings an aria, the humour of which resides in the fact that, as a result of his dimwittedness, he is completely incapable of finishing any idea. The music corresponds perfectly to the words. [...] Suddenly, off-stage, a fantastic march is heard: it is the

Cochinese delegation approaching. Perlimpinpin runs to warn his master—both are dreadfully agitated and they just about knock each other over ... Krakamiche is determined to receive his former subjects in all the majesty of his power; he demands an armchair to serve as a throne, his ceremonial wizard's hat... Perlimpinpin fusses about. Somehow or another, everything is sorted out and as the delegation enters, Krakamiche is seating himself in the armchair and inclines his head with dignity in response to the bows of the disguised elves. The final sounds of the march die down... Krakamiche delivers a kind of throne-speech [...], refers to the "prestige" of his name, to his dynasty, to his desire to preserve peace, etc. Finally he demands the grass *Moly* contained in a magnificent casket. But at that moment the treacherous trick is revealed: the elves throw off their costumes, the Queen appears in response to their call, and Krakamiche's hat, struck by the Queen, flies off his head... Grabbed by his merciless foes, he spins for a long time in a wild waltz ... Exhausted, half-dead, he finally escapes into his dwelling. The elves celebrate their victory with a dance until the Queen gives the order to go and rest until the following night. An extended, well-developed and extremely melodious chorus [...] concludes the first act.

The set does not change for the second act. It begins with a small romance for Lelio who cannot wait for the onset of night in order to approach the girl he loves with the aid of the magic flower... He hears a noise in the house and withdraws. Krakamiche and Stella enter... The old man finds it stifling in the cramped rooms. He brings with him a giant folio, the last work of the famous magus "Merlin"; this folio contains the cabbalistic incantation against which everything is powerless. But how to find this incantation? Krakamiche sits down and begins to search for it. His daughter sits down next to him with her spinning wheel. A conversation ensues. She asks him to take a rest, to forget the insult inflicted on him, but he is burning with a desire for revenge. She begins to assure him that she has no need whatsoever of wealth, that she needs "a simple cottage and a loving heart." The old man turns crimson with rage. A duet follows in which he expounds to her all the advantages of wealth; but she stands her ground. Seeing that he cannot convince her, he orders her not to disturb him in his search and get on with her spinning, and then buries himself once more in his book. She obeys and sings a song in two verses with a catchy melody... Off-stage, Lelio sings a third verse and, a moment later, enters, the magic rose in his hand. The ensuing love duet between him and Stella, by its modest and at the same time impetuous fervour, is perhaps the principal jewel of "le Dernier Sorcier." Krakamiche peers around in consternation, but, thanks to the flower, sees no one; besides, he thinks he has found the incantation... However, when at the end of the duet, Lelio falls to his knees before Stella and lets the rose fall, the magic ceases and everything stands revealed to the old man. He becomes indignant, furious. He is convinced that his old powers have returned to him, that he can now annihilate the bold intruder; he pays no heed to Lelio's pleas, to his claims to royal blood and when Lelio refuses to leave, he arms himself with the folio and pronounces the spell with which he summons forth the most terrible monster, which is supposed to tear apart his foe... A gong is struck—and, in place of the monster, a ram appears from the depths of the earth! [...] "The wrong incantation," cries Krakamiche in despair and falls senseless to the ground... Lelio and Stella both rush to him, try to comfort him... The Queen of the Elves appears, in order to help them. Krakamiche finally gives in, consents to his daughters marriage, promises to leave the forest and live with his son-in-law; after an unaccompanied quartet (a capella) (in which Perlimpinpin also participates), he leaves to the strains of a march which signals the arrival onto the stage of the elves. The Queen waves her wand in the air... The house of the last sorcerer crumbles—the final chorus of the elves is heard celebrating their victory and hailing their cherished forest, theirs entirely and alone, now and forever, and the curtain falls.

*Ivan Turgenev*

(Translated from the Russian by Nicholas G. Žekulin)

## *Le Dernier Sorcier*

In 1863 the famous *diva* Pauline Viardot-Garcia (1821—1910) retired from a triumphant career on the opera stages of Europe. Together with her husband, Louis, a translator, art critic and political writer, and their three younger children, she took up residence in the popular Black Forest spa town of Baden-Baden. There she quickly established herself as a singing teacher who attracted a significant number of advanced pupils looking for final training before taking up professional careers.

To those who knew him well it must have come as no great surprise that not long after the Viardots settled in Baden-Baden, the Russian author Ivan Turgenev (1818—1883) should also have moved there, eventually buying the property adjacent to theirs and building on it an elegant mansion that stands to this day. Turgenev had become infatuated with Pauline ever since her first appearance on the stage of the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg in 1843. Over time, the infatuation of the “young Russian landowner, a good shot, pleasant conversationalist and bad poet” — as he was introduced to the Viardots — turned into an intimate friendship, not only with Pauline, but with the entire family.

Viardot had begun composing as a young woman. Most of her compositions are songs (*Lieder*), which she would occasionally incorporate into her concerts. Her instrumental compositions are primarily pieces that she composed to play with her violinist son, Paul (she had been a student of Franz Liszt and had originally been destined for a career as a concert pianist). She also made numerous arrangements to use as vocal exercises with her pupils. In Baden-Baden, in addition to presenting her pupils in recitals before distinguished audiences composed of prominent musicians and members of the aristocracy, including King Wilhelm and Queen Augusta of Prussia, she decided to provide her pupils with stage experience. Since she had only female pupils, there was no standard repertoire and thus the Turgenev-Viardot operettas were born.

*Le Dernier Sorcier* was the first of these; in fact, a more farcical version of it in the spirit of the operettas of Jacques Offenbach had been created as early as 1859 and was now revised for Baden-Baden. In addition to Viardot's pupils, all the children participated in the secondary rôles. The first performance took place in September 1867 in Turgenev's completed, but still empty, house. A star-studded audience soon spread word of the operettas around Europe. A second operetta season took place in 1868 and in 1869 Viardot was invited to present *Le Dernier Sorcier* in Weimar. For these public performances the work was translated into German by the well-known music critic Richard Pohl and orchestrated by Liszt's successor as Musical Director in Weimar, Eduard Lassen. Although the Weimar performances achieved a modest success, there was a consensus that a rather ponderous translation and a full symphony orchestra rather overwhelmed the chamber operetta.

Turgenev's original French language text (although fluent in several languages, he always wrote his “literary” works in Russian) combines three levels. On the one hand, some of the slapstick humour that dominated early Offenbach operettas remained (particularly in the interplay between the sorcerer and his servant) even after the gentler tones of an *operetta féerique* took pride of place. There is also a biographical element: Turgenev's gentle mocking of himself in the person of Krakamiche, but especially of the Viardot children, of the teenage girls and their newly developed attention to boys and to their own *toilette* and of the cheekiness and perpetual hunger of the nine-year-old Paul, who played Perlimpinpin. Finally, we can find an underlying serious element in which Turgenev engages with Mozart's *Magic Flute*. The noble enlightenment rationalism of Sarastro that triumphs in the opera, has degenerated into the waning magic powers of Krakamiche, while the dangerous forces of an untamed nature represented by the Queen of the Night metamorphose into the desire of the Queen of the Fairies for a return to unsullied Nature in her forest.

As for Pauline Viardot's music, it reflects not only her own conviction that her strength lay in "character music," but also the avowed purpose of these operettas as a pedagogical tool, perhaps nowhere as much as in the choruses. The intervals, melodic lines, harmonic shifts and tricky rhythms present challenges in both ensemble and pitch for even the most accomplished singers, who, furthermore, are required to participate in the action and not merely "stand and sing."

Although the Turgenev-Viardot collaboration was well documented, none of the materials, neither texts nor music, were known. Pohl's German translation of the text appeared in Russia in 1916 and in the 1960s the orchestral materials that had been used in Weimar were discovered in the theatre archives there. In the early 1980s I was fortunate to find a copy of the full orchestral score in the New York Public Library. This manuscript included, for the first time, the original French text of the sung numbers. Not long afterwards, I was given permission to examine Turgenev's autograph manuscript of the complete libretto that was in a private archive in Paris. On the basis of this, I was able to publish in 1989 Turgenev's original text and a history of the operetta performances during Pauline Viardot's lifetime. And there matters would have stood, had it not been for the enthusiasm, initiative and vision of my colleagues in the Department of Drama, Douglas McCullough and Barry Yzereef, who insisted that a stage work does not come to life as a text on the page and who audaciously proposed that the operetta be produced at the University of Calgary, once again as an instrument for students to learn stage craft.

In one of life's coincidences, as we were planning our production, I learned that, following the death of Pauline Viardot's great-great-granddaughter, part of her archive had been acquired by the Houghton Library at Harvard University and that included among the materials was a copy of the original piano score of *Le Dernier Sorcier*. For the first time, we now had access to Pauline Viardot's original music, because, as it turned out, Lassen had not merely orchestrated the work, but had made a not insignificant number of alterations, often minor, but overall ones that tended to eliminate some of the more individualistic elements in Viardot's music. After extensive consultations that now included Edette Wilks as the conductor of the proposed performances, it was decided that while the operetta would be sung in French, the spoken dialogue would be translated for a Calgary audience into English, and a compromise between the full orchestral version and the original version just with piano was needed. Fortunately, there was a happy historical precedent for just such a compromise.

In 1869 the Viardots had built a small theatre adjacent to their existing art gallery-cum-concert hall. It was decided to inaugurate this theatre on 13 August with a gala performance of *Le Dernier Sorcier*. Since the theatre had a small orchestra pit, the operetta was presented with a chamber orchestra consisting of a piano, a string quartet, harp and percussion. By coincidence, a number of the performers who had taken part in the performances in Weimar were on hand and participated, including Lassen at the piano and Feodor Milde, the Krakamiche in Weimar, who sang his rôle. Because he did not know the French text and because Turgenev, to his eternal chagrin, was not blessed with a singing voice, Turgenev played Krakamiche on stage, lip-synching to Milde's singing off-stage. Pauline herself sang Lelio and Paul Viardot reprised Perlimpinpin. Among the audience was Johannes Brahms, who returned ten days later to direct another performance of the operetta from the piano.

It was to the gala performance that we turned our Calgary presentation, which recreates the orchestration and returns closer to Viardot's original music, is intended to celebrate the circumstances and atmosphere of what had been both a triumph and a most joyous occasion for the creators of *Le Dernier Sorcier*.

Nicholas G. Žekulin



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Make-up Artists	Alison Barr Heather Korol <del>Sarah Malyk</del> Meg Finkelman Alex Woods

Dressers and Running Crew from the Department of Drama

Dan McIntyre

## SPECIAL THANKS

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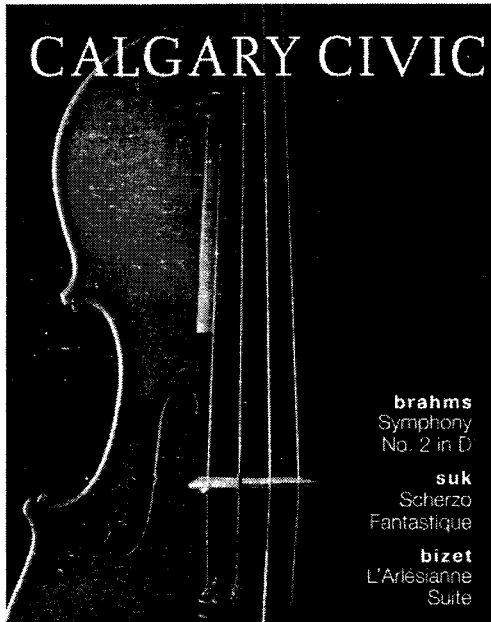
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