Etienne-Nicolas Mehul – Uthal (2015)

1. Uthal Karine Deshayes, mezzo-soprano (Malvina) Reinoud Van Mechelen, haute-contre (Premier Barde) Yann Beuron, tenor (Uthal) Sébastien Droy, tenor (Ullin) Artavazd Sargsyan, tenor (Deuxième Barde) Jean-Sébastien Bou, baritone (Larmor) Philippe-Nicolas Martin, baritone (Le Chef des Bardes, Troisième Barde) Jacques-Greg Belobo, bass (Quatrième Barde) Choeur de Chambre de Namur Les Talens Lyriques Christophe Rousset – conductor May 30, 2015, Opéra Royal, Versailles

Opera in one act. Libretto by Jacques Maximilien Benjamin Bins de Saint-Victor, loosely based on the poem Berrathon, the final poem in the first volume of James Macpherson's Ossian poems. First performed at the Opéra Comique in Paris on 17 May 1806.

The story of the opera is set at night in a forest somewhere on the west coast of Scotland; it tells of King Uthal, who has seized the throne by deposing his father-in-law Larmor, Chief of Dunthalmor. Uthal's wife, Malvina, comforts her father, but is horrified to hear that Larmor has summoned help from Fingal, king of neighbouring Morvern; she still loves Uthal, and fears for his safety. Larmor's loyal bard Ullin, who had been sent to tell Fingal of the situation, returns to announce that Fingal's men are close and ready to fight to restore Larmor to the throne. Ullin advises a night of rest before the battle, and he and his bards sing the soldiers to sleep. Malvina, however, is too disturbed by her conflicting loyalties to sleep – she runs out into the forest in her distress.

Uthal wanders off and, alone in the forest, muses on his situation. He recalls his past happiness with Malvina and when she comes upon him, she does not recognise him, armed and in the darkness, and she pleads with him to help her. They eventually recognise one another and declare their love, and Malvina begs him to make peace with Larmor – he asks her to come away with him, but she refuses to abandon her father, she loves them both. Larmor

and Ullin are both wandering in the forest as well, and they have heard Uthal and Malvina's conversation and come to join them and, face to face, Larmor and Uthal exchange accusations. Uthal is nor prepared to give up the throne so he tells Malvina that she must choose between them and she reluctantly decides that it is her greater moral duty to stand by her father. Battle is inevitable, and the bards launch into an anthem of war. Once the warriors have left, Malvina asks the bards to comfort her and they sing the story of Hidallon, a son who rises against his father but is eventually forgiven.

A battle ensues: eventually Larmor returns from the battle and announces that he has won and that Uthal has been taken prisoner. Uthal is brought in and Malvina pleads for his life but he scorns her and demands to be executed rather than live as a defeated captive. Larmor announces that Uthal is to be spared, but must go into exile, and when Malvina says that she will join him, Uthal is moved by her love, but rejects her offer. She says that she cannot live without her husband, and Uthal admits that her nobility of spirit has subdued his pride and he humbly asks Larmor's forgiveness for his rebellion. Larmor too is moved, and says that he will match his daughter's generosity – he pardons Uthal, and they all live happily ever after. --- operastory.co.uk

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