

## Cherubini - Les Deux Journees (Beecham) [1992]

Written by bluesever

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CD1 1. Acte 1 – Overture 2. Acte 1 - Un Pauvre petit Savoyard 3. Acte 1 - Guide me pas, o Providence 4. Acte 1 - O mon Libérateur 5. Acte 1 - Me separer de mon epoux 6. Acte 1 - Antonio o ciel, en croirai-je mes yeux CD2 7. Acte 2 - Point de pite! Point de clemence! 8. Acte 2 - Constance, deuxieme commandant 9. Acte 2 - Allons sabs tarder d'avantage 10. Acte 3 – Bergerettes 11. Acte 3 - Il fait une chaleur dans le creux de cet arbre 12. Acte 3 - Prenons bien garde e n'etre 13. Acte 3 - Nous tous a le gaiete

Le Comte Armand - Pierre Gianotti Constance - Janine Micheau Mikeli - Charles Paul Antonio - Eugene Regnier Daniel - Donald Munro Marcellina - Marion Davies Sémos - Donald Munro Angelina - Winifred Lawson Le Commandant - Fabian Smith Le Lieutenant - Ernest Frank Le Sergeant - Donald Campbell Le Corporal - David Perrin BBC Theatre Chorus - Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Sir Thomas Beecham - conductor Opera in three acts - Libretto by Jean Nicholas Bouilly BBC broadcast, 19 December 1947

Les Deux Journees is a landmark in the history of modern French opera. In the history of Cherubini's own style, it also signifies a change in direction. Cherubini had been composing only serious operas, but after the composition of Medee in 1797, he changed course. The subjects he chose were lighter, and the musical style adapted many elements from the French opéra comique. In Les Deux Journees, which was his greatest popular success, he combined non-operatic vocal forms with spoken dialogue, to treat a story of timely popular appeal. The songs in the opera are strophic chansons and vocal ensembles rather than arias. The orchestral accompaniment is filled with sophisticated and learned harmonies. The orchestration is extremely rich and varied, and provides the dramatic ambiance to the story. The story reflects the ideas and ideals of the early French Revolution, and came at a time when the French people were tired of the injustices of the Reign of Terror. Only a few years previously Cherubini had to flee the capital to escape the horrors of Madame La Guillotine. After a few years in hiding, he returned to a Paris that wanted to end the strife that tore apart the country and become reconciled in some way. The story of the libretto was taken from a true event that occurred during the Reign of Terror, in which a water-carrier aided a well-to-do relative of the librettist, Jean-Nicolas Bouilly, helping him to escape death at the hands of the revolutionary government. This courage on the part of poor man in the aide of an aristocrat is dramatized in

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the opera as reflecting the democratic ideals of the early revolutionaries of France. Mikel rejects injustice and asserts all people's rights to liberty. The water carrier is the cleverest and most intelligent of all of the characters in the cast. Although Constance, as the wife of Comte Armand, displays heroic virtues, Mikel the water-carrier is clearly the hero of the story.

The title *Les Deux Journees* refers to the two days in which Cardinal Mazarin imprisoned the President of the French Parliament for vetoing his tax laws. Mazarin not only imprisoned many members of the Parliament, but actually barricaded the city with his own Italian soldiers in 1749, in an effort to try to force the parliament to pass his tax codes. The president of the Parliament was Pierre Broussel. The French people revolted and forced the Queen to release the members of parliament. This, rather than the Reign of Terror, is the historical setting in which Bouilly places the story of the water-carrier. He turns his libretto into an imaginative rescue-opera, in which a humble water-carrier rescues the Comte Armand, President of the French parliament, from the Italian forces of Cardinal Mazarin.

This opera was enthusiastically received by the French public at its premiere. A group of water-carriers offered the librettist a free supply of water for a year. Its popular appeal is both through its story and its music, which is appealingly melodic and tuneful. It was also extremely popular in Germany and with German Romantics, and there it was performed well into the twentieth century. Beethoven, Schumann, Spohr, Weber, and Hiller are just a few of the German composers who fell in love with the Cherubini's romantic treatment of his story. They loved his complex harmonies and imaginative orchestrations, and the complete melding of music with drama which he achieves in this work. Cherubini not only changed the course of French opera, but greatly influenced the development of German Romantic opera as well. ---  
Rita Laurance, Rovi

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