

**MEFISTOFELE:
OPERA IN
FOUR ACTS**

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Mefistofele: Opera in Four Acts by Arrigo Boito

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ARRIGO BOITO

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MEFISTOFELE

OPERA
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ARGUMENT

The prologue takes place in the regions of space. Angels and cherubim sing the praises of the Creator. MEFIStOFELE, half-way between heaven and hell, addresses a mocking song to the Omnipotent. He is on his way to earth to tempt the philosopher FAUST, who is a man of great wisdom.

ACT I.

Square in Frankfort. It is a festal day and students and girls are singing. FAUST appears with his pupil WAGNER. They notice a friar who keeps near FAUST. The latter, noting his sinister appearance, declares that he must be the Devil. Seeking to escape him, they return to FAUST's study. FAUST sings of the beauty of nature. All at once the friar appears again. He drops his gray cloak and now stands revealed as the Evil One. MEFIStOFELE bargains with FAUST, the latter being careless as to the future. For FAUST's soul it is agreed that he is to be given youth and one hour of genuine happiness.

ACT II.

MARGARET's garden. Here FAUST walks with MARGARET while MEFIStOFELE entertains MARTHA, the girl's mother. FAUST wants to meet MARGARET alone, and in order to prevent discovery the mother is given a sleeping powder. FAUST ardently woos and wins the girl. MEFIStOFELE finally warns the lovers that it is time to depart. He now takes FAUST to the top of the Brocken where the philosopher sees all the revelry of Hades. The demons dance in wild acclaim while the fire bursts from the awful depths. All Hell proclaims MEFIStOFELE its master and he is given a crystal ball that represents the Earth. FAUST is terrified at seeing MARGARET down in the rocks bound by red-hot chains.

ACT III.

A prison. Here MARGARET lies on a bed of straw. She has been convicted of murdering her babe. Insane, she prays for pardon, and sings

a sad melody. FAUST arrives with MEFISTOFELE. The latter gives FAUST the key of the prison and tells FAUST that he can escape with the girl. But MARGARET does not recognize FAUST. MEFISTOFELE returns and his presence fills MARGARET with terror. She sinks into FAUST's arms and dies while an angel chorus sounds her final victory over death. FAUST and MEFISTOFELE depart as the headsman enters.

ACT IV.

The Banks of a River in Greece. Here MEFISTOFELE tempts FAUST still further by giving him the beautiful HELEN of Troy. HELEN sings an ode to the moon. FAUST loves her ardently, and MEFISTOFELE goes back to the Brocken leaving the fair HELEN in FAUST's arms.

The scene of the Epilogue is FAUST's study. Old again, he regrets the way he has lived. He is now reading his Bible, and when MEFISTOFELE comes he is not tempted. The Evil One, however, still hoping to gain his soul, surrounds FAUST with lovely sirens. Praying for strength, the philosopher dies. MEFISTOFELE, defeated, disappears into the ground. Roses cover the body of FAUST and the angels' chorus is heard. FAUST, too, has been triumphant in death.

C H A R A C T E R S .

MEFISTOFELE.	WAGNER.
FAUST.	ELENA.
MARGHERITA.	PANTALIS.
MARTHA.	NEREO.

Choruses of the Celestial Phalanxes, Mystic Choir, Cherubim, Penitents,
Hunters, Students, Burghers, Witches, Sirens, Warriors, etc.

Place—Frankfort and Greece.

MEFISTOFELE

PROLOGO IN CIELO.

(*Nebulosa. Lo squillo delle sette trombe.—I sette tuoni.—Le FALANGI CELESTI dietro la nebulosa, invisibili.—CHORUS MYSTICUS. I CHERUBINI. Le PENITENTI.—Poi MEFISTOFELE solo nell'ombra.*)

FALANGE.

Ave, Signor degli angeli e dei santi,
E dei volanti cherubini d'or,
Dall'eterna armonia dell'Universo
Nel glauco spazio immerso
Emana un verso di supremo amor;
E s'erge a Te per l'aure azure
E cave in suon soave.
Ave, Ave, Ave, Ave.

(*Compare MEFISTOFELE.*)

MEFISTOFELE

(*Coi piè fermi sul lembo del suo mantello.*)

Ave Signor. Perdona se il mio gergo
Si lascia un po' da tergo le superne
Teodie del paradiso;
Perdona se il mio viso non porta il
raggio
Che inghirlanda i crini degli alti cherubini;
Perdona se dicendo io corro rischio
Di buscar qualche fischio.
Il Dio piccin... della piccina terra
Ognor traligna ed erra,
E, al par di grillo saltellante,
A caso spinge fra gli astri il naso,
Poi con tenace fatuità superba
Fa il suo trillo nell'erba.
Boriosa polve! tracotato atomo!
Fantasima dell'uomo!
E tale il fa quell'ebbra
Illusione ch'egli chiama:
Ragion, ragion. Ah!
Sì, Maestro divino, in bujo fondo
Crolla il padron del mondo,
E non mi dà più il cuor,
Tant'è fiaccato, di tentarlo al mal.
x

CHORUS MYSTICUS (*interno*).

T'è noto Faust?

MEFISTOFELE.

Il più bizzarro pazzo
Ch'io mi conosca, in curiosa forma
Ei ti serve da senno.
Inasospita bramosia di saper
Il fa rapino ed anelante;
Egli vorrebbe quasi trasumanar
E nulla scienza al cupo
Suo delirio è confine.
Io mi sobbarco ad adescarlo
Per modo ch'ei si trovi
Nelle mie reti, vuoi tu farne scom-
messa?

CHORUS MYSTICUS.

E sia.

MEFISTOFELE.

Sia! vecchio Padre, a un rude gioco
T'avventurasti. Ei morderà nel dol-
ce
Pomo de' vizi e sovra il Re del ciel...
Avrò vittoria!

FALANGI CELESTI.

Sanctus! Sanctus! Sanctus!

MEFISTOFELE.

(Di tratto in tratto m'è piacevol cosa
Vedere il Vecchio e dal guastarmi
seco
Molto mi guardo; è bello udir l'E-
terno
Col Diavolo parlar sì umanamente.)

I CHERUBINI

(*Dietro la nebulosa.*)

Siam nimbi volanti dai limbi,
Nei santi splendori vaganti,
Siam cori di bimbi, d'amori.

MEFISTOFELE.

E' lo sciame legger degli angioletti;
Come dell'api n'ho ribrezzo e noia.

(*Scompare.*)

MEFISTOFELE

PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN.

(*Clouds. The sound of seven trumpets. Seven thunderbolts. The celestial phalanxes invisible behind clouds.* MYSTIC CHOIR. CHERUBIM. PENITENTS. Then MEFISTOFELE alone, in the shadow.)

PHALANX.

Ave, Lord of the angels and saints,
And of the winged cherubim of gold.
From the eternal harmony of the
Universe,
Floating in the emerald space,
Rises a verse of supreme love:
And comes to Thee through the azure
air.

In sounds suave.
Ave, Ave, Ave.

MEFISTOFELE

(*With feet at the edge of the mantle*).
Ave, O Lord. Forgive me, if my lan-
guage
Gives little heed
To the sublime songs of paradise;
Forgive me, if my countenance bears
not the beams
Which circle the tresses
Of the high cherubim.
Forgive me if, speaking, I perchance
Should hiss.
The small God of the small earth,
Like unto a grasshopper,
Now lifts his head 'mongst the stars
And then, with fatuous and enduring
pride,
Sounds his trill in the grass.
Vain dust! proud atom!
Fancy of mankind!
Thus is he made by that mad illusion
Which he calls Reason.
Yes, divine Master, in gloomy depths,
Trembles the lord of the world;
So feeble he I scarce have heart
To tempt him into sin.

MYSTIC CHOIR (*within*).

Is Faust known unto thee?

MEFISTOFELE.

The strangest madman
I ever knew, in curious fashion
He serves there.
A thirst unquenchable for knowledge
Makes him anxious and wretched;
He would go beyond the reach of
man;
No science a boundary to his delirium.
I undertake to lure him on,
Until within my net he falls;
Wilt thou lay a wager on it?

MYSTIC CHOIR.

So be it.

MEFISTOFELE.

So be it! Father, thou hast willed
To play a dangerous game. He will
bite
In the apple of vice, and o'er the King
of Heaven,
I shall victorious be.

CELESTIAL PHALANXES.

Sanctus! Sanctus! Sanctus!

MEFISTOFELE (*Aside*).

Ever and anon I like it much
To see the Heavenly Father; and right
careful am I
Not to offend; 'tis fine to hear the
Eternal One
Speak thus humanly with the devil.

CHERUBIM (*behind the clouds*).

We are showers fleeting from cloud-
land,
Wandering in heavenly splendors.
We are choirs of infants, of loves.

MEFISTOFELE.

'Tis the light band of cherubs;
They tire and fret me, like bees.
(*Vanishes.*)

I CHERUBINI

(Coro interno di ragazzi).

Un giorno nel fango mortale,
 Perdemmo il tripudio dell'ale,
 L'aureola di luce e di fiori;
 Ma sciolti dal lugubre bando,
 Pregando, cantando, danzando,
 Noi torniamo fra gli angeli ancor.
 La danza in angelica spira gira,
 Si gira, si gira, si gira.
 Fratelli, teniamci per mano,
 Fin l'ultimo cielo lontano
 Noi sempre dobbiamo danzar;
 Fratelli, le morbide penne
 Non cessino il volo perenne
 Che intorno al Santissimo Altar.

I CHERUBINI.

Siam nimbi volanti dai limbi,
 Nei santi splendori vaganti,
 Siam cori di bimbi, d'amori.

LE PENITENTI *(dalla terra).*

Salve Regina!
 S'innalzi un'eco
 Dal mondo cieco
 Alla divina reggia del ciel,
 Col nostro canto,
 Col nostro pianto
 Domiam l'intenso
 Foco del senso,
 Col nostro canto
 Mite e fedel.
 Odi la pia
 Prece serena.

I CHERUBINI.

Sugli astri, sui venti, sui mondi,
 Sui limpidi azzurri profondi,
 Sui raggi del sol...
 La danza in angelica spira
 Si gira, si gira, si gira.

FALANGI.

Oriam, oriam per quei morienti oriam.

PENITENTI.

Odi la pia prece serena.
 Ave Maria gratia piena.
 Il pentimento lagrime spande.
 Di queste blande turbe il lamento.
 Accolga il cielo.

FALANGI.

Oriam per quelle di morienti ignave
 Anime schiave, si per quell'anime
 schiave preghiam.

I CHERUBINI.

Siam nimbi volanti dai limbi,
 Nei santi splendori i vaganti.

TUTTI.

Odi la pia, la pia prece serena.
 Ave, Ave, Ave! Ah!
 Signor degli angeli e dei santi
 E delle sfere erranti,
 E dei volanti cherubini d'or.

PENITENTI E FALANGI.

Dall'eterna armonia dell'Universo
 Nel glauco spazio immerso
 Emanò un verso di supremo amor;
 E s'erge a Te per l'aure azzurre
 E cave in suon soave.
 Ave, Ave!

CHERUBINI.

Ave, Ave, Signor degli Angeli
 E dei santi, Ave Signor.
 S'erge a Te per l'aure azzurre
 E cave in suon soave.

CHERUBIM

(*Chorus of boys in the background*).

One day, 'mid human corruption,
We lost our winged glory.
Our halos of flowers and light.
But released from that gloomiest
exile,
Praying, singing, dancing,
We return midst the angels once
more.
The dance, in an angelic spiral,
Goes on, goes on, goes on.
Brethren, clasp we each other's hand.
Until the most distant heaven nears,
We must ever dance.
Celestial pinions
Must not stop in perennial flight,
Save at the Holiest Altar.

CHERUBIM

We are showers fleeting from cloud-
land,
Wandering in heavenly splendors.
We are choirs of infants, of loves.

PENITENTS (*From earth*).

Salve Regina!
An echo rises
From the blind world
To the divine kingdom of heaven.
With our song,
With our tears,
We dominate the intense
Fire of the sense,
With our song
Mild and faithful.
Hear the serene
And pious prayer.

CHERUBIM.

O'er stars, o'er winds, o'er worlds,
O'er limpid azure depths,
O'er the warm sunbeams.
The dance, in an angelical spiral,
Goes on, goes on, goes on.

PHALANXES.

Pray we for the enslaved souls.

PENITENTS.

Hear the serene and pious prayer.
Ave Maria, gratia plena.
Thou canst save from this earth,
From the flesh that weeps and strays;
Cruel dust!

PHALANXES.

Pray we for the enslaved souls.
Yes, for those enslaved souls we pray.

CHERUBIM.

We are showers fleeting from cloud-
land,
Wandering in heavenly splendors.

ALL PHALANXES.

Hear the serene and pious prayer.
Ave, Lord of the Angels and saints,
Of the wandering spheres,
And of the winged cherubim of gold.

PENITENTS AND PHALANXES.

From the eternal harmony of the Uni-
verse,
Floating in the emerald space,
Rises a verse of supreme love;
And comes to Thee through the azure
air
In sounds suave.
Ave, Ave!

CHERUBIM.

Ave, Ave, Lord of the angels
And saints, Ave Lord
Comes to Thee through the azure air
In sounds suave.