



Franz Lehár (30 April 1870 – 24 October 1948) was an Austrian composer. He is mainly known for his operettas of which the most successful and best known is *The Merry Widow* (*Die lustige Witwe*). Lehár was born in the northern part of Komárom, Kingdom of Hungary, Austria-Hungary, the eldest son of an Austrian bandmaster in the Infantry Regiment No. 50 of the Austro-Hungarian Army and a Hungarian woman of German descent. His mother was not able to speak German to him and so he was raised mainly with the Hungarian language in his childhood. Franz studied violin and composition at the Prague Conservatory, where his violin teacher was Antonín Bennewitz, but was advised by Antonín Dvořák to focus on composing music. After graduation in 1899 he joined his father's band in Vienna, as assistant bandmaster. In 1902 he became conductor at the historic Vienna *Theater an der Wien*, where his first opera *Wiener Frauen* was performed in November of that year. He also wrote sonatas, symphonic poems, marches, and a number of waltzes, some of which were drawn from his famous operettas. Individual songs from some of the operettas have become standards, notably *Vilja* from *The Merry Widow* and *You*

Are My Heart's Delight (*Dein ist mein ganzes Herz*) from *The Land of Smiles* (*Das Land des Lächelns*). Lehár was also associated with the operatic tenor Richard Tauber, who sang in many of his operettas, beginning with *Frasquita* (1922), in which Lehár once again found a suitable post-war style. Between 1925 and 1934 he wrote six operettas specifically for Tauber's voice. By 1935 he decided to form his own publishing house, Glocken-Verlag ("Publishing House of the Bells"), to maximize his personal control over performance rights to his works.

Lehár's relationship with the Nazi regime was an uneasy one. He had always used Jewish librettists for his operas and had been part of the cultural milieu in Vienna which included a significant Jewish contingent. Further, although Lehár was Roman Catholic, his wife, Sophie (née Paschkis) had been Jewish before her conversion to Catholicism upon marriage, and this was sufficient to generate hostility towards them personally and towards his work. In 1938 Mrs. Lehár was given the status of "Ehrenarierin" ('honorary Aryan by marriage'). Nonetheless, attempts were made at least once to have her deported. The Nazi regime was aware of the uses of Lehár's music for propaganda purposes: concerts of his music were given in occupied Paris in 1941.

Giuditta is an operatic *musikalische Komödie* (in German - musical comedy) in five scenes, with music by Franz Lehár and a German libretto, by Paul Knepler and Fritz Löhner. Scored for a large orchestra, it was Lehár's last and most ambitious work, written on a larger scale than his previous operettas. Of all his works it is the one which most approaches true opera, the resemblances between the story and that of Bizet's *Carmen* and its unhappy ending heightening the resonances. Perhaps the best known song in the work is the soprano aria *Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiß*, sung by Giuditta in the fourth scene. The aria encompasses all of the traditional characteristics of a twentieth-century Viennese waltz, with a few added surprises. The waltz characteristics include a triple meter, a quick-paced tempo, and long sweeping notes, with an alternation between a verse and the chorus. However, the verses are set in E minor, whereas the choruses are in the key of E major, signifying Giuditta's changes in mood. Without a doubt, the musical highlight is the dramatic, resonant ending, featuring long, sustained high B's. The operetta is based around the alluring Giuditta, who abandons her husband Manuele and runs off with Octavio, an army officer, to North Africa. Military obligations intervene, and Octavio leaves Giuditta behind. She becomes a night club dancer, only to be discovered by Octavio, after he eventually deserts his unit. Giuditta is a success in her new profession, but Octavio's self-esteem is destroyed, and he becomes a club pianist. The work received its first performance at the Vienna State Opera on 20 January 1934, with Jarmila Novotná and Richard Tauber in the leading roles.

German

Ich weiß es selber nicht,
warum man gleich von Liebe spricht,
wenn man in meiner Nähe ist,
in meine Augen schaut und meine Hände küsst.

Ich weiß es selber nicht
warum man von dem Zauber spricht,
dem keiner widersteht, wenn er mich sieht
wenn er an mir vorüber geht.

Doch wenn das rote Licht erglüht
Zur mitternächt'gen Stund
Und alle lauschen meinem Lied,
dann wird mir klar der Grund:

Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiß
Meine Glieder sind schmiegsam und weiß(weich),
In den Sternen da steht es geschrieben:
Du sollst küssen, du sollst lieben!

Meine Füße sie schweben dahin,
meine Augen sie locken und glüh'n
und ich tanz' wie im Rausch den ich weiß,
meine Lippen sie küssen so heiß!

In meinen Adern drin,
da rollt das Blut der Tänzerin
Denn meine schöne Mutter war
Des Tanzes Knigin im gold'nen Alcazar.

Sie war so wunderschön,
ich hab' sie oft im Traum geseh'n.
Schlug sie das Tamburin, zu wildem Tanz,
dann sah man alle Augen glüh'n!

Sie ist in mir aufs neu erwacht,
ich hab' das gleiche Los.
Ich tanz' wie sie um Mitternacht
Und fühl das eine blos:

Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiß!

Translation in English

I don't understand myself,
why they keep talking of love,
if they come near me,
if they look into my eyes and kiss my hand.

I don't understand myself,
Why they talk of magic,
you fight in vain, if you see me
If you pass me by.

But if the red light is on
In the middle of the night
And everybody listens to my song,
Then it is plain to see:

My lips, they give so fiery a kiss,
My limbs, they are supple and white,
It is written for me in the stars:
Thou shalt kiss! Thou shalt love!

My feet, they glide and float,
My eyes, they lure and glow,
And I dance as if entranced, 'cause I know!
My lips give so fiery a kiss!

In my veins
runs a dancer's blood,
Because my beautiful mother
Was the Queen of dance in the gilded Alcazar.

She was so very beautiful,
I often saw her in my dreams,
If she beat the tamburine, to her beguiling dance
All eyes were glowing admiringly!

She reawakened in me,
mine is the same lot.
I dance like her at midnight
And from deep within I feel:

My lips, they give so fiery a kiss!