

SYNOPSIS

Aleko

A band of gypsies has pitched its tents for the night on the bank of a river. Beneath a pale moon, they light campfires, prepare a meal and sing of the freedom of their nomadic existence. An old gypsy tells a story. Long ago, he loved Mariula who deserted him for another man, leaving behind Zemfira, their daughter. Zemfira is now grown up, has her own child, and lives with Aleko, a Russian who has abandoned civilisation for the gypsy life. Hearing this story, Aleko is outraged that Zemfira's father accepted Mariula's leaving: his views are different and he would seek revenge for betrayal. But Zemfira disagrees. For her, as for her mother, love is free, and she herself has already tired of Aleko's possessiveness and now loves a younger gypsy, one of her own people. After dances for the women and the men, the gypsies settle down to sleep. Zemfira appears with her young lover, whom she kisses passionately before disappearing into her own tent to look after her child. Aleko enters and Zemfira taunts him, singing about her wild lover. Alone, Aleko broods on the catastrophe of his relationship with Zemfira and the failure of his attempt to flee the ordinary world. As dawn comes, he surprises Zemfira and her lover together. In a torment of jealousy he kills them both. All the gypsies gather, disturbed by the noise. Led by Zemfira's father, they spare Aleko's life but cast him out from them for ever: this peaceful people do not want a murderer in their midst. Alone again, Aleko finds no escape from fate.

SYNOPSIS

Pagliacci

Prologue

Tonio, in Taddeo's costume, introduces himself to the audience to present the show: what they are going to see on the stage is not just fiction, but a true story, where they will observe the real passions and real emotions of the characters.

Act I

A travelling company of actors arrives to a village in the south of Italy where, in the evening, they will perform a show. The members of the troupe are Canio, the first actor, Nedda, his wife and two more comedians: Peppe and the hunchbacked Tonio.

Tonio tries to flirt with Nedda but Canio, who is terribly jealous, sends him away. When Canio moves to the tavern with Peppe, Tonio resumes his harassment. Nedda kicks him out and Tonio leaves, vowing to take revenge on her. Silvio, Nedda's secret lover, makes an appearance to convince her to escape with him after the end of the evening show.

Tonio, who had overheard the couple, goes to find Canio but Silvio is able to escape before being recognized; Canio questions Nedda about the identity of her lover but she refuses to reveal his name.

Canio is close to killing her but Peppe comes to stop him: the performance is about to begin and the actors have to go on stage.

Canio is deeply upset at having to play a comic character while he feels so miserable.

Act II

The villagers arrive at the theater; Nedda goes around collecting the money for entrance. Also Silvio arrives, and the two lovers renew their promise to run away together.

The show begins and the events on stage mirror what just happened: Columbina is at home, waiting her beloved Harlequin. He sings a serenade but Columbina wants to be sure that Pagliaccio, her husband, is far away before allowing Harlequin in.

Taddeo, the servant, arrives and declares his love to Columbina; finally she opens the door for Harlequin, who comes in and kicks out Taddeo.

The couple sit at the dining table to have some food and wine, promising each other to leave together after drugging Pagliaccio.

Taddeo reappears, announcing that Pagliaccio is coming back home. Taddeo and Harlequin flee and a furious Pagliaccio arrives threatening Columbina.

Canio is now maddened with jealousy and, confusing stage fiction and reality, is ready to kill Nedda if she won't say the name of her lover.

While the mesmerized audience is watching the show, Silvio understands what is actually happening and attempts to climb on the stage.

Canio stabs Nedda, while dying she calls Silvio's name. Canio, discovering who his rival is, knifes him to death as well.

Some of the villagers come on the stage to stop Canio while Tonio, making a mockery, announces: «The comedy is over».