BALFE

MICHAEL WILLIAM BALFE was born at Dublin, Ireland, May 15, 1808. Of all the English opera composers, his career was the most versatile, as his success, for a time at least, was the most remarkable. At seven years of age he scored a polacca of his own for a band. In his eighth year he appeared as a violinist, and in his tenth was composing ballads. At sixteen he was playing in the Drury Lane orchestra, and about this time began taking lessons in composition. In 1825, aided by the generosity of a patron, he went to Italy, where for three years he studied singing and counterpoint. In his twentieth year he met Rossini, who offered him an engagement as first baritone at the Italian Opera in Paris. He made his debut with success in 1828, and at the close of his engagement returned to Italy, where he appeared again on the stage. About this time (1829–1830) he began writing Italian operas, and before he left Italy had produced three which met with considerable success. In 1835 he returned to England; and it was in this year that his first English opera, the "Siege of Rochelle," was produced. It was played continuously at Drury Lane for over three months. In 1836 the "Maid of Artois"; in 1837, "Catharine Grey" and "Joan of Arc"; and in 1838, "Falstaff" were produced. During these years he was still singing in concerts and opera, and in 1840 appeared as manager of the Lyceum. His finest works were produced after this date, — "The Bohemian Girl" in 1843; "The Enchantress" in 1844; "The Rose of Castile," "La Zingara," and "Satanella" in 1858, and "The Puritan's Daughter" in 1861. His last opera was "The Knight of the Leopard," known in Italian as "Il Talismano," which has also been produced in English as "The Talisman." He married Mlle. Rosen, a German singer, whom he met in Italy in 1835; and his daughter Victoire, who subsequently married Sir John Crampton, and afterwards the Duc de Frias, also appeared as a singer in 1856. Balfe died October 20, 1870, upon his own estate in Hertfordshire. The analyses of his two operas which are best known in this country — "The Bohemian Girl" and "The Rose of Castile" — will contain sufficient reference to his ability as a composer.

The Bohemian Girl

"The Bohemian Girl," grand opera in three acts, words by Bunn, adapted from St. George's ballet of "The Gypsy," which appeared at the Paris Grand Opera in 1839, — itself taken from a romance by Cervantes, — was first produced in London, November 27, 1843, at Drury Lane, with the following cast:

Arline	Miss Romer.
Thaddeus	Mr. Harrison.
Gypsy Queen	Miss Betts.
Devilshoof	Mr. Stretton.
Count Arnheim	Mr. Borrani.
Florestein	Mr. Durnset.

The fame of "The Bohemian Girl" was not confined to England. It was translated into various European languages, and was one of the few English operas which secured a favorable hearing even in critical Germany. In its Italian form it was produced at Drury Lane as "La Zingara," February 6, 1858, with Mlle. Piccolomini as Arline; and also had the honor of being selected for the state performance connected with the marriage of the Princess Royal. The French version, under the name of "La Bohémienne," for which Balfe added several numbers, besides enlarging it to five acts, was produced at the Théâtre Lyrique, Paris, in December, 1869, and gained for him the Cross of the Legion of Honor.

The scene of the opera is laid in Austria, and the first act introduces us to the chateau and grounds of Count Arnheim, Governor of Presburg, whose retainers are preparing for the chase. After a short chorus the Count enters with his little daughter Arline and his nephew Florestein. The Count sings a short solo ("A Soldier's Life"), and as the choral response by his retainers and hunters dies away and they leave the scene, Thaddeus, a Polish exile and fugitive, rushes in excitedly, seeking to escape the Austrian soldiers. His opening number ("'T is sad to leave your Fatherland") is a very pathetic song. At its end a troop of gypsies enter, headed by Devilshoof, singing a blithe chorus ("In the Gypsy's Life you may read"). He hears Thaddeus's story and induces him to join them. Before the animated strains fairly cease, Florestein and some of the hunters dash across the grounds in quest of Arline, who has been attacked by a stag. Thaddeus, seizing a rifle, joins them, and rescues the child by killing the animal. The Count overwhelms him with gratitude, and urges him to join in the coming festivities. He consents, and at the banquet produces a commotion by refusing to drink the health of the Emperor. The soldiers are about to rush upon him, when Devilshoof interferes. The gypsy is arrested for his temerity, and taken into the castle. Thaddeus departs and the festivities are resumed, but are speedily interrupted again by the escape of Devilshoof, who takes Arline with him. The finale of the act is very stirring, and contains one number, a prayer ("Thou who in Might supreme"), which is extremely effective.

Twelve years elapse between the first and second acts,

and during this time Count Arnheim has received no tidings of Arline, and has given her up as lost forever. The act opens in the gypsy camp in the suburbs of Presburg. Arline is seen asleep in the tent of the Queen, with Thaddeus watching her. After a quaint little chorus ("Silence, Silence, the Lady Moon") sung by the gypsies, they depart in quest of plunder, headed by Devilshoof, and soon find their victim in the person of the foppish and half-drunken Florestein, who is returning from a revel. He is speedily relieved of his jewelry, among which is a medallion, which is carried off by Devilshoof. As the gypsies disappear, Arline wakes and relates her dream to Thaddeus in a joyous song ("I dreamed I dwelt in Marble Halls"), which is a favorite with every one. At the close of the ballad Thaddeus tells her the meaning of the scar upon her arm, and reveals himself as her rescuer, but does not disclose to her the mystery of her birth. The musical dialogue, with its ensemble, "The Secret of her Birth," will never lose its charm. Thaddeus declares his love for her just as the Queen, who is also in love with Thaddeus, enters. Arline also confesses her love for Thaddeus, and, according to the custom of the tribe, the Queen unites them, at the same time vowing vengeance against the pair.

The scene now changes to a street in the city. A great fair is in progress, and the gypsies, as usual, resort to it. Arline enters at their head, joyously singing, to the accompaniment of the rattling castanets, "Come with the Gypsy Bride"; her companions, blithely tripping along, responding with the chorus, "In the Gypsy's Life you may read." They disappear down the street and reappear in the public plaza. Arline, the Queen, Devilshoof, and Thaddeus sing an unaccompanied quartet ("From the Valleys and Hills"), a number which for grace and flowing harmony deserves a place in any opera. As they mingle among the people an altercation occurs between Arline and Florestein, who has attempted to insult her. The Queen recognizes Florestein as the owner of the medallion, and for her courage in resenting the insult maliciously presents Arline with it. Shortly afterwards he observes the medallion on Arline's neck, and has her arrested for theft. The next scene opens in the hall of justice. Count Arnheim enters with a sad countenance, and as he observes Arline's portrait, gives vent to his sorrow in that well-known melancholy reverie, "The Heart bowed down," which has become famous the world over. Arline is brought before him for trial. As it progresses he observes the scar upon her arm and asks its cause. She tells the story which Thaddeus had told her, and this solves the mystery. The Count recognizes his daughter, and the act closes with a beautiful ensemble ("Praised be the Will of Heaven").

The last act opens in the salon of Count Arnheim. Arline is restored to her old position, but her love for Thaddeus remains. He finds an opportunity to have a meeting with her, through the cunning of Devilshoof, who accompanies him. He once more tells his love in that tender and impassioned song, "When other Lips and other Hearts," and she promises to be faithful to him. As the sound of approaching steps is heard, Thaddeus and his companion conceal themselves. A large company enter, and Arline is presented to them. During the ceremony a closely veiled woman appears, and when questioned acknowledges she is the Gypsy Queen. She reveals the hiding-place of her companions, and Thaddeus is dragged forth and ordered to leave the house. Arline declares her love for him, and her intention to go with him. She implores her father to relent. Thaddeus avows his noble descent, and boasts his ancestry and deeds in battle in that stirring martial song, "When the fair Land of Poland." The Count finally yields and gives his daughter to Thaddeus. The Queen, filled with rage and despair, induces one of the tribe to fire at him as he is embracing Arline; but by a timely movement of Devilshoof the bullet intended for Thaddeus pierces the breast of the Queen. As the curtain falls, the old song of the gypsies is heard again as they disappear in the distance with Devilshoof at their head.

Many of the operas of Balfe, like other ballad operas, have become unfashionable; but it is doubtful whether "The Bohemian Girl" will ever lose its attraction for those who delight in song-melody, charming orchestration, and sparkling, animated choruses. It leaped into popularity at a bound, and its pretty melodies are still as fresh as when they were first sung.

The Rose of Castile

"The Rose of Castile," comic opera in three acts, the text by Harris and Falconer, was first produced at the Lyceum Theatre, London, October 29, 1857. The scene is laid in Spain; time, last century. At the opening of the opera, Elvira, Queen of Leon, has just ascended the throne, and her hand has been demanded by the King of Castile for his brother, Don Sebastian, the Infant. The latter, with the design of satisfying his curiosity about her, is on the eve of entering the city disguised as a muleteer. Elvira hears of this, and adopts the same expedient, by starting with Carmen, one of her attendants, disguised as peasants, to intercept him. In the opening of the first act the two appear at an inn where the peasants are dancing. The innkeeper is rude to them, but Don Sebastian, disguised as Manuel, the muleteer, protects them, and offers his services as escort, which the Queen willingly accepts, for she has recognized him and he has fulfilled the motive of the story by falling in love with her. At this point Don Pedro, who has designs upon the throne, enters

with his fellow-conspirators, Don Sallust and Don Florio. Observing Elvira's likeness to the Queen, they persuade her to personate Her Majesty, which, after feigned reluctance, she consents to do. She also accepts their services as escorts, and all the more unhesitatingly because she knows Manuel will follow her.

The second act opens in the throne-room of the palace. Don Pedro enters, somewhat dejected by the uncertainty of his schemes. The Queen, who has eluded the surveillance of the conspirators, also appears and grants an audience to Manuel, in which he informs her of the meeting with the peasant girl and boy and declares his belief that they are the Queen and Carmen. He also informs her of the conspirators' plot to imprison her, which she thwarts by inducing a silly old Duchess to personate the Queen for one day and ride, closely veiled, to the palace in the royal carriage. Her scheme succeeds admirably. The Duchess is seized and conveyed to a convent. In the next scene, while Don Pedro and Don Florio are mourning over the loss of their peasant girl, she appears. Their mourning turns to desperate perplexity when the Queen reveals herself and announces her intention of marrying the muleteer.

In the last act Carmen and Don Florio agree to marry. The Queen and her ladies now enter, and a message is delivered her from Don Sebastian announcing his marriage. Enraged at the discovery that the muleteer is not Don Sebastian, the Queen upbraids him and yet declares she will be true to him. This pleases Don Pedro, as he believes he can force her to abdicate if she marries a muleteer; but in the last scene Manuel mounts the throne, and announces he is King of Castile. Elvira expresses her delight, and all ends happily.

The story of the opera is exceedingly involved, but the music is well sustained and ranks with the best that Balfe has written. The principal numbers of the first act are the lively chorus, "List to the gay Castanet"; the vocal scherzo by Elvira, "Yes, I'll obey you"; Manuel's rollicking song, "I am a simple Muleteer"; the buffo trio, which ends in a spirited bacchanale, "Wine, Wine, the Magician thou art"; and Elvira's pleasing rondo, "Oh! were I the Queen of Spain." The second act contains the expressive conspirators' chorus, "The Queen in the Palace"; the beautiful ballad, "Though Fortune darkly o'er me frowns," sung by Don Pedro; the ballad, "The Convent Cell," sung by Elvira, which is one of Balfe's happiest inspirations; the buffo trio, "I'm not the Queen, ha, ha"; and Elvira's characteristic scena, "I'm but a simple Peasant Maid." The leading numbers of the last act are the bravura air, "Oh! joyous, happy Day," which was intended by the composer to show the vocal ability of Eliza Pyne, who first appeared in the role of Elvira; Manuel's fine ballad, "'Twas Rank and Fame that tempted thee"; Don Pedro's martial song, "Hark, hark, methinks I hear"; the stirring song by Manuel, when he mounts the throne, which recalls "The fair Land of Poland" in "The Bohemian Girl"; and Elvira's second bravura air, "Oh! no, by Fortune blessed."