

Overture to *Light Cavalry*

Franz Suppé

Born in Spalato, Dalmatia [now Split, Croatia] April 18, 1819; died in Vienna, May 31, 1895

Franz Suppé studied law to please his father, but his musical side could not be denied. He spent most of his career composing and conducting for the theater in Vienna—first without pay at the Theater in der Josefstadt, followed by seventeen years at the Theater an der Wien and later positions at the Kaitheater and Carltheater. His farce *Gervinus* and operettas *Flotte Bursche* (Jolly Students) and *Fatinitza* were among his longest-running productions—over one hundred performances each—capped by his operetta *Boccaccio*, the work he considered his greatest success.

After retiring from the Carltheater in 1882, Suppé continued to compose and conduct, receiving invitations to visit music centers across Europe. Though highly renowned in his own time, Suppé is remembered today chiefly for a handful of overtures—*Dichter und Bauer* (Poet and Peasant); *Ein Morgen, Mittag, und Abend in Wien* (Morning, Noon, and Night in Vienna); and *Leichte Cavallerie* (Light Cavalry).

Popular in its day, *Light Cavalry*, a two-act operetta with a libretto by Carl Costa, was first performed at the Carltheater in Vienna on March 21, 1866. The story involves the love between Vilma, a beautiful young woman raised as an orphan by Hungarian villagers, and Hermann, nephew of the mayor. Mayor Bums is only one of the influential townspeople hoping to marry Vilma, and it takes the clever intrigue of some Hussars (Hungarian light cavalry) stationed in the village to win consent for the two young lovers to marry. (Suppé's music was reworked in 1934 for an operetta of the same name, libretto by Hans Bodenstedt set around 1750, which has an entirely different plot.)

The Overture immediately suggests a military setting with its majestic opening fanfares. One definitely senses Rossini's influence in the instrumentation and in the additive construction by repetition of phrases with expanded instrumentation and range. When the fast main section begins, Suppé gives the scurrying first theme to the violins before introducing the famous theme that has been used to represent "galloping" to the rescue in so many cartoons, television shows, and movies. He contrasts this with a lyrical snippet, a menacing striding theme, and a brief clarinet cadenza that introduces his broad, soulful "Hungarian" theme, replete with characteristic short-long rhythms at its conclusion. The "galloping" theme returns for the Overture's conclusion, where Suppé combines it with his fanfare music from the opening for a rousing finish.

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