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1.
"Van Hunks & the Devil"
or
"The Tablecloth"

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"A Fantasy Folk Opera" as Albert Coates calls it, is based on a Legend about Table Mountain. The Legend is that a certain Dutchman named Van Hunks smoked a pipe with the Devil on the top of the mountain and the smoking of these two caused the cloud which gathers over the mountain making it take on the appearance of a vast table covered with a cloth. When this happens there is usually a terrific wind which often reaches gale-force and prevents ships from entering the Harbour besides causing much inconvenience to pedestrians, who are quite unable to walk in a dignified manner!

But how this all started and still continues is what interests us and in presenting the Composer's idea, we feel that here at least is a plausible reason for these strange happenings!

As the Opera begins
~~Before the curtain rises~~ we listen to an Overture portraying a battle at sea. Our story opens in the year 1752 and as the curtain ~~and~~ rises we are shown the Cabin of a great Privateer the "Isahendrik" so called because it carries the names of "Isabella" & "Hendrik", two of the characters around whom the story plays. The "Isahendrik" has come to the rescue of a King's Ship which has been engaged in battle with another Pirate vessel and in which the King's ship was very nearly captured and had it not been for the timely intervention of the "Isahendrik", "our tale would have had a different ending" as the gallant Captain Fitzroy puts it.

So the two Captains are sitting round the table with their officers smoking together when the Captain of the "Isahendrik" asks Captain Fitzroy about two passengers he was carrying on his Ship. "a lady & her son". Fitzroy at first hesitates but finally decides to trust his host and tells him it is the "Lady Isabella" but before presenting her he would like to tell something of her story.

In three scenes we are taken first of all to a garden at the Court of the Netherlands. The young Isabella meets her lover, a Nobleman, by the name of Hendrik Van Hunks and to whom she is secretly married. While embracing they are suddenly surprised by the Prince and one of the Courtiers. The Prince is deeply chagrined and in the next scene we see a duel taking place. We recognise Van Hunks but not his adversary who is masked, as well as the others accompanying him. Suddenly Van Hunks' adversary stumbles and is grievously wounded. As Van Hunks bends over him he removes the mask and finds he has wounded his Prince. Sounds of angry voices rouses the Prince who begs Van Hunks to "save himself". The Prince realising all too late that he has been at fault.

In the third scene we see Van Hunks and Isabella alone. He has come to tell her he has to leave the Court and they may never meet again. She bravely tells him that "Heaven will help us to find each other" and with these words ringing in his ears the Captain of the "Isahendrik" suddenly rises and cries out "but the Prince - the Prince?" and Captain Fitzroy replies - "the Prince ~~did not die~~ and searched the earth for his one-time friend to bring him back, but Van Hunks had completely disappeared. ~~&~~ and only now after twenty two years, the Prince having died the Lady Isabella felt herself free to continue the search for her husband."

Wine is ~~called~~ called for and "fill our pipes to the brim" and the Captain of the "Isahendrik" suddenly thoughtful rises and goes from the Cabin.

No sooner has he left than ~~then~~ Isabella enters, she is followed by her son dressed in the Uniform of the Dutch Royal Navy. Captain Fitzroy begs forgiveness for the unfortunate mishap which he has brought upon them and suddenly the Captain of the "Isahendrik" appears dressed as he was long ago at the Dutch Court. He is immediately recognised by Isabella who, with a cry of joy throws herself into his arms but to the astonishment of her son who suddenly realising that his father is a "Bucaneer" parts them violently and drawing his Mother away (she too overcome to protest) asks for time to consider this position.

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2. " Van Hunks & the Devil"
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A seaman appears with the message "wind freshening, sir" and Van Hunks asks Fitzroy to regain his Ship and take with him as many of his ^{U. H.'s} crew to help, leaving the wounded in the care of the Lady Isabella. The two Captains take leave of each other as firm friends.

Act 1. Scene two.

We are present at the Wheel and Van Hunks and his officer Brandt are keenly watching the King's Ship in the storm which is now raging.

We hear strange voices calling amid the storm and we realise that possibly we are in that strange haunted Zone referred to by Camoens, in his great epic poem "The Lusiads" when he accompanied Vasco da Gama on his voyage round the Cape.

Van Hunks is very troubled about the safety of the two ships and says to Brandt - "I would gladly wager a pipe with the Devil, himself, if by so doing I could bring both ships safely into Port."

No sooner has he spoken than a Voice answers - "would you indeed?" And a stranger emerges from the shadows.

After some conversation an agreement is reached whereby the Stranger will arrange for the safe arrival of both ships, the conditions to be discussed at a later date and to their mutual satisfaction.

To the cries of "Land" - land" Van Hunks seems to awake as if from a dream but soon Isabella and her son come towards him and in their ~~great~~ happy reunion he thinks only of the present moment and taking them towards the bows of the Ship he shows the great mountain on the horizon the promised land of all their dreams.

This Act is looked upon as a prologue to the Opera, as Mr Coates points out there is only dialogue in this act, except for the singing during the last few minutes of it when Van Hunk's Sea-chanty is sung by all the crew. The Van Hunks' Sea chanty constantly recurs during the Opera after this.

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" Van Hunks & the Devil"

Act 2. scene one.

A Dutch home at the Cape. Three years have passed and today is the Wedding day of their son Hendrik. Isabella sings of the beauty of the sky and the happiness of the children in this pleasant and sunny land as she breaks up the garland to be strewn in the path of the Bride and Bridegroom. Van Hunks call to her and the Duminy enters with the young couple and the Bride's parents and all of them sing a Septette. We are then shown the little church and hear the Organ play and soon the wedding festivities are in full swing.

Fitzroy enters with gifts for the family which he has brought back from his voyage to the Indies. These he presents while singing about the land he brought them from.

The Bridegroom sings his thanks and then Johanna sings a song taught to her by the Duminy who accompanies her on the Flute.

A French Minuet is danced, as was the custom in those days, followed by joyous singing and dancing of Folk-songs.

The Sailor's Hornpipe is danced by a young boy and then the Duminy asks all to join in a song of Thanksgiving and the scene ends with the young couple alone and singing of their love.

Act 2. scene two.

It is now evening and we see Van Hunks & Isabella come out onto the stoep. She is holding a light while he carries a model of his ship the "Isahendrik" on which he is working. In the music we find the fulfillment of all their quiet joy and happiness. Here we have ~~again~~ a song to his Ship, and the many years they have spent together. As the song ends we see ~~the~~ grim shadow and the Stranger appears and now the price must be paid and the price is - a smoking Contest in which the one who loses must remain the guest of the winner! The Stranger emphasises the fact that he must win and the Contest must go on until he does! In any case the first round is to take place that very night and the chosen spot will be the top of Table Mountain, it will start at mid-night and end with the early dawn. The Stranger sings of "the place where from I come we strive, oh, how we strive for victory!" and with a gleeful "tonight" - he vanishes leaving Van Hunks to the realisation that he may never return to his home again.

Tempo Before Act III begins we hear the Overture. The music portrays the slow ascent of the mountain and the heavy spirit of Van Hunks. As the ~~music~~ quickens we find that he is gradually accepting the situation and will meet the unknown Contest in the same way in which he has met his storms and battles on the Oceans. The Overture gradually develops into the original and first Sea-chanty and with this still being sung by him we find him on the top of the mountain.

Act III.

The Top of Table Mountain. A weird and desolate place all very mysterious in the Moonlight. As Van Hunks song reaches its end we hear an answering echo and the Stranger is before us.

And antique table and two chairs are brought in by imps. The Stranger waves Van Hunks to a chair and the Contest begins and soon smoke is beginning to whirl around.

After a time the Stranger finds some discomfort from his tobacco, which has, as he says "an acrid and sulphurous flavour" and decides to employ other ways of trying to overcome Van Hunks who is quietly smoking. so he gets the rocks to move and soon we find strange happenings, Trolls and rocks slowly rotating. Still Van Hunks quietly smokes. So beings in the form of lovely women appear and dance and among them we seem to see the young Isabella of long ago and as she appeared in the garden.

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4. (continued)

"Van Hunks & The Devil".

Van Hunks taken by surprise lays down his pipe for a moment and takes up his telescope. The Stranger, overjoyed at the success of his scheme cannot resist looking through the other end of the telescope..suddenly Van Hunks realises that in a moment he would have lost the Contest,so quickly taking up his pipe once more he goes on smoking and does not falter again...meanwhile the mountain top is almost covered with the smoke from their pipes. Now the Stranger loses his head and a furious Baccanalia takes place. The Beautiful women suddenly become terrible old hags and the devils and frightful creatures with their horrible claws all gradually converge on Van Hunks as if ~~ready~~ to tear him to pieces.

Suddenly Van Hunks jumps up and fires his pistol into the mad hoarde of demons. The Stranger throws himself into the middle and immediately everything disappears - only the Stranger remains, but in what a pitiable state. He calls on - who - it does not matter for all that remains is a group of imps who laugh and dance around him before carrying him off to the Devil's Peak where he will have to remain until the next Contest.

Meanwhile Van Hunks has begun to look for his adversary until a Voice from the direction of the Lion's Head tells him that "the Stranger" deserves his fate for he tried to stop Van Hunks from his just victory".

The Light of the early dawn is now beginning to show and we hear voices calling Van Hunks and soon Isabella appears and Fitzroy and the Duminy and his family and all speaking at once and telling him they thought he must have been lost and wounded and unable to find his way home. ~~and~~ All Van Hunks can say is "Home - home - what a beautiful word" and so they begin their way down and the last to leave is Van Hunks and suddenly a voice from the Devil's Peak sings "When the Crescent Moon shines in the evening sky our next Contest will begin" and then a Voice from the Lion's Head - "Fear Nothing, I will be here to see fair play" and Van Hunks with a deep bow of gratitude towards the Lion's Head and a gay wave of his hat towards the Devil's Peak takes his way down the mountain and we hear his voice ringing while he sings his old Sea-shanty...the sound echoing all around.

Now we see Table Mountain in full sunlight and as the music swells we gradually see it sparkling with its myriad of lights around its feet and along its shores just as we know it today, watching and welcoming us all.

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