

The NAXOS logo is located in the top left corner, featuring the word "NAXOS" in white capital letters on a blue rectangular background. Above the text is a stylized graphic of a classical building facade with columns.

NAXOS

BUSONI

Doktor Faust

Henschel

Brenna

Schwinghammer

Dahdah

Bezsmertna

Orchestra e Coro del
Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

Cornelius Meister

TEATRO



MAGGIO
MUSICALE
FIORENTINO

Ferruccio
BUSONI

(1866–1924)

Doktor Faust

Poem for Music in two preludes, an intermezzo
and three principal scenes, BV 303 (1916–23)

Completed by Philipp Jarnach (1925) 25 28–30

| | |
|--|---|
| Doktor Faust | Dietrich Henschel, Baritone |
| Mephistopheles (Night Watchman) | Daniel Brenna, Tenor |
| Wagner / The Master of Ceremonies | Wilhelm Schwinghammer, Bass |
| The Duke of Parma / A Soldier | Joseph Dahdah, Tenor |
| The Duchess of Parma | Olga Bezsmertna, Soprano |
| Lieutenant / Student from Wittenberg 4 | Florian Stern, Tenor |
| Student from Kraków 1 / Student from Wittenberg 1 | Martin Piskorski, Tenor |
| Student from Kraków 2 / Student from Wittenberg 3 | Marian Pop, Baritone |
| Student from Kraków 3 | Łukasz Konieczny, Bass |
| Jurist / Levis | Marcell Bakonyi, Bass-baritone |
| Theologian / Gravis | Dominic Barberi, Bass |
| Naturalist / Asmodus | Zachary Wilson, Baritone |
| Beelzebub / Student from Wittenberg 2 | Franz Gürtelschmied, Tenor |
| Megäros / Student from Wittenberg 5 | Ewandro Stenzowski, Tenor |
| Women's Voices | Maria Kokareva, Soprano; |
| | Olha Smokolina, Aleksandra Metelewa, Mezzo-soprano |

Andrea Severi, Organ 11–13

Coro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

(Lorenzo Fratini, Chorus master)

Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino • Cornelius Meister

Symphonia

Oster-Vesper und Frühlings-Keimen
(*'Easter Vespers and spring buds'*)

1 Pax... (Chorus)

Der Dichter an die Zuschauer (*'The Poet to the Spectators'*)

2 Von Kind auf hat ein Stück mich hingerissen
(*Distant Voices*)

Prelude I

Wittenberg. Vormittags. Studierzimmer
(*'Wittenberg. Morning in the Study'*)

3 Euerer Magnifizenz Verzeihung (*Wagner, Faust*)

4 Wer seid ihr?

(*Faust, Students from Kraków, Wagner*)

Prelude II

Der nämliche Raum, um die Mitternacht
(*The same room, midnight*)

5 Die Sanduhr zeigt die Mitternacht (*Faust, Chorus*)

6 Wie konnt' es alsobald gelingen? (*Faust, Chorus, Gravis, Levis, Asmodus, Beelzebub, Megäros*)

7 Ein einzelner blieb (*Faust, Mephistopheles, Chorus*)

8 Willst Du mir dienen? (*Faust, Mephistopheles*)

9 Draußen stehn die Gläubiger zuhauf, die Du hast betrogen
(*Mephistopheles, Faust*)

10 Credo in unum Deum – Was verlangst du noch? (*Chorus, Faust, Mephistopheles, Women's Voices*)

Scenic Intermezzo

Kapelle im Münster ('A chapel in the cathedral')

11 Sostenuto (organ solo)

12 Du, der Du nicht allein

(*A Soldier, Mephistopheles, Faust*)

13 Möchtest du mir nicht beichten?

(*Mephistopheles, A Soldier, Lieutenant*)

Principal Action

First Scene

Der herzogliche Park zu Parma
(*'The Ducal park at Parma'*)

14 Cortège, in carattere d'una polacca: Vivace, ma misurato – Sie nahn!
Der Fürst! Die Fürstin! (*Chorus*)

15 Nach dieser Feste rauschend bunter Reihe
(*The Master of Ceremonies, The Duke of Parma, Chorus, The Duchess of Parma, Mephistopheles, Faust*)

7:27

5:09

16 Was wünscht die schöne Herrin zu erschauen?

(*Faust, The Duchess of Parma, The Duke of Parma, The Master of Ceremonies, Chorus*)

5:17

5:26

17 Johannes und Salome! (*Chorus, Faust, The Duchess of Parma, The Duke of Parma, Mephistopheles*)

4:27

18 Er ruft mich... zieht mich... (*The Duchess of Parma*)

5:14

19 Ja, ich komme... – Was Wichtiges, sagt Ihr?

(*The Duchess of Parma, The Duke of Parma, Mephistopheles*)

4:33

20 Symphonic Intermezzo

5:26

Sarabande: Molto sostenuto e gravemente

5:35

3:33

Second Scene

Schenke in Wittenberg ('A tavern in Wittenberg')

21 So lang man Jugend hat (*Chorus, Students from Wittenberg [1, 2, 4, 5], Theologian, Jurist, Naturalist*)

4:03

5:50

22 Nichts ist bewiesen und nichts ist beweisbar

(*Faust, Students from Wittenberg [1, 2, 3, 4], Chorus of Catholic and Protestant Students*)

4:40

7:01

23 Ihr, Doktor, weit gereist, erfahren (*A Student,*

Chorus of Students, Faust, Mephistopheles)

4:52

5:01

24 Dort war ein dummer Herzog (*Mephistopheles,*

Chorus of Students, Faust)

6:35

5:12

25 Traum der Jugend, Ziel des Weisen! – Ich schaue dich...

(*Faust, Chorus*)

5:51

7:21

26 Der Mensch ist dem Vollkommenen

(*Faust, Students from Kraków*)

5:40

3:02

Last Scene

Straße in Wittenberg ('A street in Wittenberg')

4:58

27 Ihr Männer und Frauen (*Night Watchman*)

1:54

5:35

28 Das Haus ist mir bekannt

(*Faust, Chorus, The Duchess of Parma*)

7:43

29 Hilf, Sehnsucht, Urzeugerin (*Faust*)

4:28

30 Ihr Männer und Frauen (*Night Watchman*)

4:12

Recorded live on 14 February 2023 at the Sala grande, Teatro del Maggio
Musicale Fiorentino, Florence, Italy

Producer: Alberto Dellepiane

Engineers: Rino Trasi, Vera Zanotti • Editor: Rino Trasi



Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

Doktor Faust (1916–23)

The genesis of Busoni's *Doktor Faust* was complex, long, and tormented: a creative course that extended over twelve years and, unfinished, was cut off in 1924 by the composer's death. The first references to the subject of Faust date from 1910; besides representing a starting point, they are also an intermediate step on an even longer path in search of a dramatic subject that, Busoni hoped, would lead him to a work that would represent the apex and summary of his entire career. *Doktor Faust*, specifically, seems to summarise Busoni's love of the theatre (sung and spoken), his idea of opera as music's highest expression, a place where the art of sounds manifests its greatest potential.

Yet the choice of subject was made difficult, among other reasons, by a conflict the artist felt very deeply: his being a '*Grenzenatur*' (Paul Bekker), a 'boundary figure' divided between two identities, Italian and German, which strongly influenced him. While he remained primarily linked to German music, Busoni never abandoned the idea of composing an Italian opera (in subject and language), the ambitious desire to offer the country in which had been born – and where he had unsuccessfully tried to live and work – an artistic product of strong historical and cultural value, a long-lasting symbol that would reflect an entire tradition. This wish carried with it some grand plans he would never accomplish: to write a libretto drawn from various parts of Dante's *Divine Comedy*; or entrust D'Annunzio with the libretto of an opera on Leonardo da Vinci.

Indeed, it was the figure of Leonardo – who Busoni called the 'Italian Faust' – that marked the moment when the composer's great operatic project, with a further metamorphosis, left for good the Italian milieu and, in turning to the German one, became *Doktor Faust*. In this change of course it is interesting to note, with regards to the poetic text, that Dante was not replaced by Goethe, the only poet of equal height and universality. In fact, from the beginning, the musician only chose to refer to the German poet in very limited measure, despite knowing his work very well and admiring him deeply. Aside from some ideas taken from Marlowe's 16th-century *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (from which the opera's title derives), Busoni draws his inspiration, rather, from the German puppet shows, the secular *Faustschauspiele* and *Faustpuppenspiele*, which is in perfect syntony with his fondness – discovered as a child and never outgrown – of that innocent but wonderful popular theatre, simple yet richly seasoned with fantastic, magical and spectacular ingredients.

On the other hand, referring to the puppet theatre allows Busoni as a librettist not only to avoid an impossible comparison with Goethe but also greater stylistic and narrative freedom, the insertion of original inventions and hybridisation of the overall seriousness of the subject with elements of comedy, with bizarre, grotesque and sometime almost comical ideas. The fantasy – and in spots evasive and light – approach to the theme of Faust also emerges from the narrative style chosen by Busoni, who relinquishes all consequentiality in favour of an open, discontinuous form, 'in panels'. This is also due to the role of the orchestra, which at times becomes central: especially in the superb *Sarabande*, the symphonic intermezzo in between the first two tableaux of the *Principal Action*. Indeed, the instrumental element of the opera provides a further representative plane, different from that of the actual scene and which, in a prismatic way, segments and further diversifies the narrated story.

Clues to a particular dramaturgical conception are the rather peculiar titles Busoni gives to the various parts of the opera: *Prelude I* to the scene in which Faust receives the esoteric book *Clavis Astartis magica* as a gift from the students from Kraków (actually infernal emissaries); *Prelude II* to the scene in which Faust himself evokes the spirits and makes the pact with Mephistopheles; *Intermezzo* to the episode in church, where Faust and Mephistopheles get rid of the soldier who wants to avenge his sister, whom Faust seduced (in Goethe these characters are those of Valentin and Margarete); *Principal Action* to the three tableaux representing, respectively, the feast in Parma, where Faust performs some magic spells and the Duchess (the only female character of the opera) becomes smitten; the scene in a Wittenberg tavern, when the students quarrel and Helen of Troy appears; the conclusion, with Faust's frightening visions followed by his death and subsequent rebirth as a naked teenager.

The structural and symbolic centre of the opera is the feast at the Parma court, a scene that – though distantly inspired by the one at the imperial court in Goethe's *Faust II* – could appear as the most elliptical of all, compared to the German poet's drama and, in particular, to the crucial themes that rotate around its protagonist: the metaphysical doubt, the existential torment, the perdition-salvation dualism. But with its succession of marches, processions, dances, magic spells, visions and love ecstasies, this scene lends itself to summarise an important aspect of Busoni's poetics, the idea that theatre, despite its noble aspirations and serious contents, remains a spiritualised recreation, pretence and artifice, a game of musical styles and memories, an imaginative and playful entertainment: the unsurpassed model of which, according to Busoni, was set by Mozart's *Magic Flute* ('the opera par excellence').

On the composer's explicit indication, *Doktor Faust's* nature is essentially poetic, not philosophical: which implicitly distances it from the complex intellectual implications presented by Goethe's *Faust*, especially in part two. This does not mean that the issue of knowledge, central to the myth of Faust, is altogether disregarded: Busoni, rather, makes it his own in an autobiographical sense, reinterprets it as a personal creative drama. With a typically Romantic mechanism, the author identifies himself with his character; so that both end up asking the same question about the meaning of things, the manifestation of their potential, the task they are given to accomplish.

Through *Doktor Faust*, an opera meant as the ultimate masterpiece, Busoni wanted to provide an answer to this question, reply in a creative way to the issue of knowledge of oneself and of the world. The fact that he was not able to finish the work (completed, after the composer's death, by his pupil and assistant Philipp Jarnach [1892–1982], and then in 1982 by Anthony Beaumont) was seen by some as a sign of impossibility, or even of artistic failure; by others, more simply as the consequence of an unfortunate biographical situation: the illness and subsequent death of the musician at the age of 58. Be that as it may, in this incompleteness, in this finale which, already ambiguous in the text, was not even set to music by the author, we undoubtedly find part of the opera's aesthetic identity and, perhaps, also of Busoni's human and artistic nature.

Maurizio Biondi

English translation by Daniela Pilarz

Courtesy of the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

Synopsis

Symphonia

Easter Vespers and spring buds. Easter day, when the story begins, is evoked by mystical and pastoral sounds, ringing bells, and rejoicing on the word 'Pax!' by an off-stage chorus.

The Poet to the Spectators [speaker]

Speaking to the public, the poet retraces the work's genesis. At the origin of everything is his childhood attraction to stories involving the devil, the idea of theatre as a magical mirror of life and of a type of music that stems from the fabulous. He then tells them of his uncertainty when it came to choosing a subject, his wavering between Merlin and Don Giovanni (but this, after Master Wolfgang, is no longer approachable), finally arriving at Faust, 'master of thoughts, servant of instinct: he who scrutinises all things but arrives at no solution'. Lastly, he speaks of the awareness of an impossible comparison with Goethe and of the return to a source which, in collective and personal history, has never ceased fuelling a fantastic adaptation of the myth of Faust: the puppet theatre [2](#).

Prelude I

Wittenberg. Morning in the study

While busy carrying out a chemical experiment, Faust is informed by his assistant Wagner that three students from Kraków have come to offer him a book [3](#). At first, he is annoyed; but when, to his surprise, he learns that it is the *Clavis Astartis magica* (the magical key of Astaroth, prince of hell), he welcomes the visitors, secretly thrilled with the idea that the book could finally give him supernatural power. After recalling his youthful years in Kraków, Faust receives the gift, a key, and the certificate of ownership. He tries to entertain the students, but they, always speaking with one voice, quickly leave without asking for anything in return (Faust: 'How can I repay you?' Students: 'Later'). When Faust's assistant returns, the doctor enquires after the three, but Wagner declares that he has never seen them. Suddenly, as the chemical mixture loudly overflows on the stove, Faust understands the diabolical nature of their visit ('Now I know who they were!') [4](#).

Prelude II

The same room, midnight

At the stroke of midnight Faust stands inside a circle drawn on the ground to protect himself, opens the magical book and begins to summon the forces of hell ('Lucifer! Lucifer! You fallen angel') 5. With disembodied voices and tongues of fire, the spirits manifest themselves, declaring their identity in turn: Gravis, slow as the sand in the hourglass; Levis, light as a falling leaf; Asmodus, flowing like the stream; Beelzebub, as fast as an arquebus ball; Megäros, wild as a hurricane. But none of these spirits satisfies the wise man's thirst for power, and one after the other they are chased away with contempt 6. Disappointed and fearing the 'disgusting void', Faust would like to abandon the delusional, hellish temptations and turn to the nobility of the human spirit and 'the purifying wave of work'. But a sixth and final flame calls him, revealing himself as Mephistopheles, a spirit quick as thought, who, having assumed human form, promises to fulfil Faust's every desire: to embrace the totality of being, to obtain 'genius and all its trials', and to know freedom and happiness 7-8. Though reluctant in the face of a pact that will enslave him to his own servant, Faust is forced to accept. Creditors are pressing, the brother of a girl he seduced wants revenge, the clergy are about to burn him at the stake: only the devil can save him from all this. While an Easter choir sings a *Credo* and a *Gloria* offstage, a desperate Faust signs the satanic contract. Finally, after the victorious Mephistopheles disappears ('Captured!'), a *Hallelujah* rings out from afar, while the scene gradually brightens in the early morning sunlight 9-10.

Intermezzo

A chapel in the cathedral

The sombre sound of an organ fills the sacred place. A soldier in armour is kneeling: he is the brother of the girl seduced by Faust and is praying for God to help him find the man responsible for the crime, so that he may take his revenge. Faust, upon arriving at the church, has been warned of the danger and wants the soldier dead, but without sullyng his own hands 11-12. Mephistopheles, disguised as a monk, takes charge of the task. He provokes the soldier using a grotesque and frightening spell: an entire patrol bursts into the cathedral to the sound of trumpets and drums looking for the man responsible for wounding their commander, and kills the soldier. Mephistopheles can only be pleased with the result: sacrilege in church, premeditated murder, and an eternal stain on the conscience of the wise Faust ('Three mice with one trap!'). With the organ still playing in the empty scene, a moonbeam illuminates the body of the dead soldier 13.

Principal Action

First Scene

The Ducal park at Parma

On the wedding day of the Duke and Duchess, a magnificent feast is underway in the park, with peasants and bagpipe players, hunters with horns and dogs, pages and ladies. The Master of Ceremonies introduces the married couple 14 and, while warning of possible dangers, announces that he has invited Doctor Faust to hold a magic show. Preceded by a herald (Mephistopheles), the mysterious character enters with a bizarre entourage of creatures, arousing shivers of fear and admiration among those present. First, to favour the spells, Faust turns day into night 15, and then, to fulfil the wishes of the bride, he presents a series of illustrious couples from the past, where the man and woman appear with the features of Faust and the duchess. First to appear are Solomon, playing his harp, and the Queen of Sheba. Next it is the turn of Samson and Delilah: but the Duchess interrupts the scene when a slave appears brandishing the scissors for emasculation. Finally, it is the turn of John the Baptist and Salome. An executioner, resembling the Duke, is about to behead the Baptist, but the Duchess stops him, crying out, 'He must not die!', thus revealing that she is in love with Faust. The latter manages to seduce her completely and, speaking to her privately, urges her to elope with him; but the Duke abruptly interrupts the show and angrily invites the magician to his table. Disturbed, the court leaves, while Mephistopheles remains to warn Faust that the food is poisoned 16-17. On the now empty scene, the Duchess appears in a state of ecstatic trance, determined to follow Faust ('He calls me... he draws me to himself...') 18. In the end, the Duke finds himself with Mephistopheles who, now disguised as court chaplain, advises him to forget his wife, who has eloped with Faust on a winged horse, and marry the sister of the Duke of Ferrara instead, thus avoiding a war between Parma and Ferrara. 'Venice will swallow them both' Mephistopheles comments ferociously to himself, while his hand, in blessing the Duke, changes into a claw 19.

Symphonic Interlude

20 Sarabande

Second Scene

A tavern in Wittenberg

Amid laughter, drinking and debates, a group of students discusses Plato's thought, drawing into their argument a jurist, a theologian and a naturalist. Faust, up to that moment gloomy and absorbed, expresses his negative vision of knowledge ('Nothing is proven, nothing is demonstrable'), but his words end up igniting a violent dispute between the Catholic students and Protestant ones. To appease them, he invites them all to celebrate wine, women, art and love, and also 'holy music'. But the uproar still continues, culminating in a clash in which the Catholic hymn *Te Deum laudamus* (in a caricatured and licentious version) is set against the Lutheran chorale *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott* 21–23. After the Protestant students leave, calm returns, and the doctor is invited to recount some of his gallant adventures around the world. Having overcome an initial, painful reluctance ('Only the eyes of those who look forward are happy'), Faust recalls his love story with the Duchess of Parma: a most beautiful woman, who loved him like no other, now lost. Suddenly, amid the general horror, Mephistopheles enters disguised as a dusty messenger announcing the death of the Duchess and throwing to the ground 'her last gift' for Faust: it is the body of a child, the fruit of their love. Then, like a ballad, he cruelly retraces the entire story of the two lovers up to its epilogue, where he tells how the child, alive when it was given to him, had 'died along the way', leaving him 'with a carcass in his arms.' Faced with the indignant and violent reaction of those present, Mephistopheles turns the story into a joke, transforming the child into a bunch of straw, to which he sets fire. Through the smoke a wonderful classic scenario appears, and a female figure: Helen of Troy 24. The enthralling apparition captivates Faust, making him hope in a possible, ultimate fulfilment ('Dream of youth, ambition of the wise'), but then it quickly vanishes, tragically breaking the illusion 25. The three students reappear, they have come to retrieve the book, which, however, has been destroyed and can no longer be returned: a decisive event that sanctions the imminent and irrevocable death of Faust, who at this point welcomes it ('Last stretch of my evening road, I welcome you') 26.

Last Scene

A street in Wittenberg

On a snow-covered street between the cathedral and the house once inhabited by Faust – now home to the new Rector Magnificus, Faust's former assistant Wagner – the night watchman announces the stroke of ten 27. Faust contemplates the house where the pedantic Wagner now lives, then turns to the night in search of peace. A hymn on the theme of guilt and forgiveness comes from inside the cathedral, making him wonder about the possibility of doing one last good deed when he sees a beggar woman with a child. As he approaches her to give her his last coins, he fearfully recognises the Duchess, who holds out her son to him saying: 'complete the deed before midnight'. Desperate and shocked by the vision, he would enter the church, which suddenly appears brightly lit from inside, but his way is barred by the soldier with a drawn sword. With the child in his arms, he turns to the large crucifix in front of the cathedral, searching for words with which to pray to God. However, in the light cast by the night watchman's lantern, who has mysteriously reappeared, Faust sees with horror that the figure on the cross, instead of Christ, is Helen of Troy ('Damnation! Is there no grace then? No reconciliation with you?') 28. Having placed the child on the ground, with a supreme effort he casts a last spell: the passage of his life into another life, the highest deed after which he finally finds death 29. While the night watchman announces the arrival of frost and the stroke of midnight, a naked teenager rises from the inanimate body of the child and with a blossoming branch in his hand walks in the snow towards the city. The night watchman, who now reveals himself to be Mephistopheles, approaches Faust's body and, before loading it on his shoulders and leaving, asks the enigmatic and disturbing question about what really happened to the man (the original *verunglückt* can be interpreted as 'damned' but also as the 'victim of an accident') 30.





All production photos by Michele Monasta
(Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino)



Doktor Faust, which Busoni considered a personal creative drama and which occupied him for over twelve years, was left incomplete on his death at the age of 58. He had searched for a dramatic subject that he hoped would represent the apex and summary of his entire career. The opera was completed by Philipp Jarnach in 1925. As the librettist, Busoni managed to avoid comparison to Goethe, and in favouring an open, discontinuous form ‘in panels’, he developed a unique structure cast in two preludes, an orchestral intermezzo and three scenes to investigate poetic questions of operatic artifice.

TEATRO



MAGGIO
MUSICALE
FIORENTINO

Ferruccio
BUSONI
(1866–1924)

Doktor Faust

Poem for Music in two preludes,
an intermezzo and three principal scenes, BV 303
(1916–23; completed by Philipp Jarnach, 1925)

Doktor Faust **Dietrich Henschel, Baritone**
Mephistopheles (Night Watchman) **Daniel Brenna, Tenor**
Wagner / The Master of Ceremonies **Wilhelm Schwinghammer, Bass**
The Duke of Parma / A Soldier **Joseph Dahdah, Tenor**
The Duchess of Parma **Olga Bezsmertna, Soprano**

Andrea Severi, Organ CD 2 [1]–[3]

Coro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

Lorenzo Fratini, Chorus Master

Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino • Cornelius Meister

[1] Symphonia 5:09 [2] The Poet to the Spectators 5:26 [3]–[4] Prelude I 8:59
[5]–[10] Prelude II 36:07 [11]–[13] Scenic Intermezzo 13:35 [14]–[19] First Scene 31:59
[20] Symphonic Intermezzo 5:35 [21]–[26] Second Scene 31:42 [27]–[30] Last Scene 18:18

A detailed track list and full recording details can be found inside the booklet

The German libretto and an English translation can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660531.htm

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