

**BEDŘICH SMETANA**  
(1824–1884)

***The Bartered Bride***  
**A comic opera in three acts from 1866**

**Act One**

At the village square, villagers are rejoicing in the beautiful day. A fair is taking place and joy is in the air. Only Mařenka and her beloved Jeník are feeling uneasy. Because today, Mařenka is meeting her bridegroom, the son of a wealthy farmer named Mícha. Years ago, Mařenka's father, a farmer named Krušina, promised to give his daughter to Mícha's son. This promise is also a part of a debt agreement. Mařenka's parents are meeting the village matchmaker named Kecal, who is to arrange the marriage. Krušina wants to know which of Mícha's two sons is to be the bridegroom. Kecal reassures the parents that it is the honourable Vašek. The older son from Mícha's first marriage is a wanderer who left the village. Mařenka does not wish to hear about the agreement or her bridegroom. She is already in love with someone else – Jeník. Kecal promises Mařenka's parents to find Jeník and talk to him.

**Act Two**

Young workers are drinking beer in a pub and chatting about how nothing is as good as the beer they are enjoying right now. Jeník is among them and says that love is better than that particular beer. The young workers warn Jeník about Kecal, who could thwart his plans. In the meantime, Mařenka is meeting Vašek. She tells him that his bride-to-be is mean and that she will trouble and deceive him. She persuades him to give Mařenka up and marry a different girl, one that loves him very much. The naïve Vašek agrees and swears to give the marriage with Mařenka up. Kecal is trying to talk Jeník into marrying another girl who is pretty, kind and rich, and leaving Mařenka to Mícha's son. Jeník agrees but in return asks for 300 florins and for Mícha to forgive Krušina the rest of his debt. Kecal includes all of this in a contract. In the pub, in front of everyone in the village, Jeník signs the contract under the name Jeník Horák. Everyone then condemns Jeník for asking for the 300 florins and he has to run away from the angry crowd.

**Act Three**

Vašek is lonely at the village square and worries about his and Mařenka's safety. A group of entertainers who came to the fair to perform relieve him of his sad thoughts. The ringmaster finds out that the person who was supposed to play a bear during the evening show got so drunk that he cannot stand upright. With the help of the young entertainer Esmeralda, he persuades Vašek to wear the bear costume in the evening

and perform with them. Vašek then accidentally sees Mařenka and rejoices that she is the one who wants him and to whom he has sworn to renounce Mařenka. Mařenka cannot believe her eyes when Kecal shows her the contract with Jeník's signature. Jeník comes to her and wants to explain everything, but Mařenka is offended and does not want to hear him out. She decides to listen to her parents and marry Vašek. But then, Jeník reveals that he is Mícha's son from his first marriage and asks Mařenka to marry him. He lets her choose which one of Mícha's sons she wants to marry. Finally, Mařenka understands Jeník and jumps into his arms. Kecal becomes the laughing stock of the village. Only the stepmother, Háta, does not want to accept it and calls Jeník's contract a fraud. In that moment, a bear comes running up and everyone flees in horror. It turns out it was just Vašek in costume running from the entertainers. Mícha admits that Vašek is not yet mature enough for marriage. He reconciles with Jeník and gives his blessing to the young couple. The whole village rejoices: good has not failed, faithful love has prevailed!