

BEDŘICH SMETANA

(1824–1884)

The Kiss

An opera in two acts from 1876

Story line:

Years ago, a young man named Lukáš was forced by his parents to marry a woman he did not love. He became a widower and in **Act One**, he is courting Vendulka, his first true love. Vendulka's father gives them his blessing, but warns Lukáš that their marriage will not be a happy one as they both are equally stubborn and quick-tempered. Lukáš cannot imagine ever being in an argument with Vendulka. However, when Vendulka's father leads the bride to Lukáš, they immediately argue – over a kiss. Vendulka does not wish to kiss Lukáš before marriage as she believes it would make his deceased wife grieve. The argument continues even after everyone leaves the ceremony and Lukáš bursts out in anger. He goes to a pub where he collects a group of girls and musicians and brings them to Vendulka's father's house. There, under her window, they all dance and rage and make fun of her. Vendulka feels embarrassed and cannot stay in her father's home. So she runs to her old aunt named Martinka and decides she would rather go with her to the woods at night to be a carrier for smugglers than be around Lukáš.

In **Act Two**, chief smuggler Matouš leads his gang through the woods at night and they walk in all sorts of directions. Matouš awaits his carrier Martinka and hears Lukáš, who is feeling bad for what he did, wander through the dark woods confused. Lukáš cries on the shoulder of his brother-in-law Tomeš, who followed him to make sure he did not hurt himself out of desperation. Tomeš advises him to invite a few virtuous neighbours as witnesses first thing in the morning and beg Vendulka for forgiveness. Lukáš is full of hope and leaves with Tomeš. Martinka approaches Matouš to pick up his smuggled goods and Vendulka is next to her. Matouš realizes that Vendulka is only hiding out with Martinka and since he feels sympathy for Lukáš, he decides to tell him where she is and lead him there. Martinka tries to persuade Vendulka to reconcile with Lukáš, but she swears she hates him. In the morning, when Martinka and Vendulka come home to their cottage, they see Lukáš with the neighbours waiting for them. Vendulka is so touched by his visit that she runs to him lovingly and wants to give him a kiss of reconciliation. However, he does not want to accept the kiss, not until he has asked for her forgiveness. Finally, they kiss each other passionately and that ends their argument.

E. K.

(Citation of the story line by Eliška Krásnohorská from the first edition of the libretto.)