

Abelard & Heloise

A Music Drama in Three Acts

Libretto by
FRANK HARTMAN

Music by
ROBERT WARD

CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

PETER THE VENERABLE (<i>doubles with Zophar</i>)	.....	BASS
THIBAUT , <i>protégé of Abelard</i>	.....	BASS-BARITONE
HELOISE , <i>Fulbert's niece, Abelard's pupil</i>	.....	SOPRANO
JOB'S WIFE	.....	MEZZO-SOPRANO
JOB (<i>doubles with Alberic</i>)	.....	BASS-BARITONE
ELIPHAZ (<i>doubles with Lotulf</i>)	.....	TENOR
BILDAD (<i>male attire</i>)	.....	CONTRALTO
ABELARD , <i>cleric, scholar and poet-philosopher</i>	.....	TENOR
BERNARD , <i>Abbot of Clairvaux</i>	.....	BASS
FULBERT , <i>a Canon of Notre Dame, Heloise's uncle</i>	.....	TENOR
DENYS , <i>a Canon of Notre Dame</i>	.....	BARITONE
BERTHE , <i>Fulbert's housekeeper*</i>	MEZZO-SOPRANO
SISTER SIMONE*	.....	MEZZO-SOPRANO
THE SUN and THE MOON , <i>two children</i>	.....	(Non singing)
CHORUS -variously NUNS, NOVICES, MONKS, STUDENTS, TRADESMEN, and TOWNSFOLK		

* both **BERTHE** and **SISTER SIMONE** may double with **JOB'S WIFE**, or the three roles may be cast separately.

ORCHESTRA

2 Flutes (II doubles Piccolo)	2 Horns in F	Timpani
2 Oboes (II doubles English Horn)	1 Trumpet in C	Percussion (2 players)
2 Clarinets in B-flat (II doubles Bass Clarinet)	1 Trombone	Harp
2 Bassoons		Strings

Orchestral Materials are available on rental from the publisher.

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(212) 874-2100

SYNOPSIS

Prologue (*Outside the gates of the Paraclete late at night.*)

Nuns singing a Latin hymn are heard. Peter the Venerable and Thibault enter pushing a cart carrying the coffin of Abelard. Heloise answers their knock at the gate. She thanks them for bringing Abelard's body back to the Paraclete, his "haven of peace." The coffin is rolled into the convent as Peter and Thibault depart. As they go Thibault remembers the first time he met Abelard many years before...

Act I, Scene 1 (*Spring, 1118. On the steps of Notre Dame.*)

It is morning. A group of students and tradesmen rehearse a mystery play about Job. They fall into an argument over the interpretation of Job's role. At the height of the argument, Abelard, young, handsome, and the most popular teacher in Paris, arrives. He is asked to settle their dispute. As they are cheering Abelard for his wise counsel, Bernard, enraged and dictatorial, emerges from the church to still the noise. He and Abelard have a heated exchange in which Bernard warns Abelard that his ideas smack of heresy. Abelard taunts him to the amusement of the crowd and Bernard retires warning Abelard to "beware."

Act I, Scene 2 (*A week later. The room of Denys, Canon of Notre Dame.*)

Fulbert and Heloise, his niece, are speaking to Denys of the possibility that the great Abelard will tutor the brilliant young Heloise. Abelard arrives and in a brief exchange with Denys, out of hearing of the others, asks if Fulbert is serious about his teaching Heloise. Denys counsels him to be patient, then warns him that Bernard is seeking to chase him from the Church. Abelard then meets Fulbert and Heloise. Arrangements are made for Abelard to live with Fulbert in return for teaching Heloise. All are delighted with this agreement except Denys, who has some presentiment of misfortune.

Act I, Scene 3 (*Early summer. Abelard's study in Fulbert's house with a window overlooking Paris.*)

It is evening. Abelard sits over his books while Heloise, weary of study, tunes her lute. Berthe enters with their supper, followed by Fulbert. He expresses his pleasure at the scholarly pursuits. Berthe feels that more is going on than study. After Berthe and Fulbert leave, Heloise gaily sings one of Abelard's songs, drawing him away from his studies. She tries to teach him to dance to the merry tune. Their closeness as they dance leads to a passionate embrace and then a duet, in which they confess their love for each other which has grown beyond their powers of restraint.

Act I, Scene 4 (*November. Denys' room.*)

Bernard and Denys are discussing Abelard, who is now publicly known to be involved with Heloise. Bawdy songs about the lovers are being sung in the streets. Bernard again accuses Abelard of heresy and wants him expelled from the Church. When Denys defends his friend, Bernard leaves in anger. Heloise, dressed for travel, then comes asking Denys for advice. Since Fulbert has learned of the clandestine love of Abelard and Heloise, he has made their lives unbearable. She reports that Fulbert has driven Abelard from the house and is insisting on marriage. She is pregnant and speaks of her fears for the future. Abelard arrives. He insists that she go with him to his sister in Brittany to bear the child. She tries to persuade him to let her go alone so that he can continue his teaching in Paris. Abelard will brook no argument, however, and they depart. Denys blesses them as they leave, but when they are gone prays that his forebodings are false and that God will protect them.

Act II, Scene 1 (*Summer, 1119. Street in front of Fulbert's house and an interior room.*)

It is night. Rowdy students are taunting Fulbert who has gone mad with grief over Abelard's betrayal of his trust and the ruin of his niece. Abelard and Thibault enter and drive the students off. Abelard has come secretly to tell Fulbert he wishes to marry Heloise, but without any public announcement so that he can keep his position at the church. Fulbert agrees, but gives the impression that in his maddened state he sees that the agreement gives him a terrible power over Abelard.

Act II, Scene 2 (*Fulbert's home a few weeks later.*)

Fulbert is talking to Alberic and Lotulf, fellow canons, who have come on the pretext of church business, but are in fact probing the rumors of Abelard's marriage to Heloise. He is led by them to brag proudly that his niece is the wife of the great Abelard. Heloise denies it and says that Fulbert only wishes it were true. Fulbert, enraged, moves to attack her and when Abelard enters, Fulbert's fury causes him to have a seizure. His friends carry him off to bed. When Abelard learns that Fulbert has attacked Heloise before, he insists that she leave with him immediately and go to the convent in

Argenteuil where she will be safe. There it will seem that she has come to take the veil thus allaying the rumors of marriage. They hope that their separation will be brief.

Act II, Scene 3 (*Abelard's bedroom and the street below, a few nights later.*)

A dissolute servant guards the entry to the house where Abelard is asleep. Fulbert rouses the dozing servant and bribes him to leave his post. Two thugs are then beckoned by Fulbert who gives them money and leaves. The thugs steal into Abelard's room, attack and secure him and then castrate him. They rush off leaving Abelard unconscious.

Act II, Scene 4 (*Abelard's room, the next afternoon.*)

Thibault, students and townspeople hover over the stricken Abelard. Denys enters and is told that the attack has been avenged. Abelard objects; he wants no revenge. He feels that he has been justly punished and that now he can fully pursue his labors. He stoically maintains that "his weakness has been cut away. Now he can turn to a life of contemplation and thereby soar ever closer to God."

Act III, Scene 1 (*On the street in front of Denys' house. 1140.*)

Bernard, Alberic and Lotulf have come to persuade Denys to join them in their plan to bring Abelard to trial for heresy in Sens. When Denys returns home and learns of their plans, he defends Abelard. Berthe comes down the street with Fulbert who is now completely mad and can think of nothing but Abelard's betrayal. Berthe unwittingly stirs the churchmen to further condemnation of Abelard by insinuating that the lovers are still involved at the Paraclete. Denys refuses to go along with Bernard in his condemnation of Abelard and warns him that his attacks are based on malicious motives. Bernard and his followers remain determined to bring Abelard to trial and see him ousted from the Church.

Act III, Scene 2 (*The yard of the Paraclete, same as Act I, but it is daytime.*)

The novices are relaxing and singing "Let's Away with Study" which Heloise had sung in Act I, Scene 3. Heloise is occupied with administrative duties. A sister enters to announce Abelard. With difficulty Heloise restrains her impulse to rush to him. After the novices have withdrawn, Abelard speaks optimistically of the forthcoming debate at Sens in which he expects to put to rest a new attempt to condemn him of heresy. He asks whether the Sisters have any needs and compliments Heloise on her splendid work. Suddenly Heloise, unable to restrain herself longer, bursts out with a confession of how desperately she misses Abelard. He reminds her that she is now the Bride of Christ, and that he is no longer the man he was, and that through his suffering he has become "God's pure creature." Heloise cannot accept being the "Bride of Christ" for in her heart she is Abelard's and none other's. Thibault enters to tell Abelard that Bernard has maneuvered the debate in Sens in such a way that it will be a second trial for heresy against Abelard. Abelard, alarmed, sends Thibault off to Sens to get any information he can. When Thibault leaves, Heloise, seized with a foreboding that she may never see Abelard again, rushes to him, embraces him and again passionately tells him that she can never be anything but his. Abelard, in great pain, tries to comfort her and tells her that she must direct her prayers to Christ.

Act III, Scene 3 (*The Cathedral at Sens, resplendent in early morning light*)

The crowd is gathering for the great debate. Denys watches the opposing groups taunt each other. Abelard and Thibault enter at the side unrecognized by the crowd. Denys tells them that a decision to condemn Abelard has already been made the previous night by the bishops. Abelard, greatly disturbed, leaves them. There is now a solemn processional climaxed by Bernard's entrance. Abelard is summoned and as he enters, the crowd reflects hostility toward him. The accusation is made and, following a hushed expectant silence, Abelard rises and states simply that he will not accept any verdict of this court but will go to Rome to place his case before the Pope. He stalks out. The assembly is awestruck. Bernard seizes the moment and states that Abelard's action is an admission of guilt. He then exhorts the throng to join him in casting corruption out of the Church.

Act III, Scene 4 (*The yard of the Paraclete, before dawn on the same day as the Prologue. Abelard's coffin is set before an improvised altar.*)

Heloise has come for a last communion with Abelard's spirit before his burial. As she remembers the time of her first passionate love, she sees and hears Abelard in a vision and they sing of love which transcends earthly existence. Over their duet is heard again *Veni creator spiritus* as nuns and priests carrying candles enter for Abelard's requiem service.