

. Scenes from
“*THE WIFE OF MARTIN GUERRE*”
An Opera in Three Acts
Libretto by JANET LEWIS

WILLIAM BERGSMA

.CAST:

Bertrande, the wife of
Martin GuerreMARY JUDD

Diane, his sister LYNN CLARKE

Annette, his sister ANNAMARIA SARITELLI

Catherine, a servant REGINA SARFATY

Sanxi, his son LYNN CLARKE

Pierre Guerre, his uncle JOHN PARELLA

Martin (the
Imposter) STEPHEN HARBACHICK

Father Antoine GUY BAKER

Steward FRANK PORRETTA

Man-at-arms MALCOLM NORTON

First Court Crier FRANK PORETTA

Second Court Crier MALCOLM NORTON

Espagnol RICHARD KUELLING

First Judge WILLIAM SPARKS

Man FRANCIS BARNARD

ORCHESTRA:

Chamber orchestra conducted by
FREDERIC WALDMAN

Paul Wolfe and Harold Levine, violins; Herbert Feldman, viola; Lorin Bernsohn and Phillip Cherry, celli; Georges Andre, bass; Andrew Lolya and Kenneth Schmidt, flutes; Melvin Kaplan, oboe; Aldo Simonelli, clarinet; Morris Newman, bassoon; Robert P. Bobo, horn; Robert Nagel, trumpet, Christine Stavrache, harp; Elayne Jones, percussion.

The first public performance of *The Wife of Martin Guerre* was given by the Juilliard Opera Theater February 15, 1956, under the direction of Frederic Cohen, Frederic Waldman conducting.

THE STORY OF THE OPERA

In 1548, Martin Guerre, a young peasant of the village of Artigues in southern France, left his wife, Bertrande, and their infant son in order to evade the anger of his father over a minor theft. He planned to be gone only a week. Eight years, however, elapsed before his family had any news of him. Then, as far as his family could judge, he returned, improved by the years, and took control of his farm, his father having died during his absence. It was not until she was pregnant by him that Bertrande, in bewilderment and torment, came to the conviction that it was not her husband who had returned, but another man. To her guilt and horror at this conviction was added the realization that she loved him more than she had loved her husband.

Her own household believed she had gone mad. One day, a wandering blackguard, rebuffed by her husband, called him an imposter; the true Martin Guerre, he said, had lost a leg in the wars. Distraught, Bertrande made her strange and tragic accusation.

Two trials followed. The first, at Rieux, condemned the accused to death. The second, which decided for the prisoner, was interrupted by her true husband's return. Bertrande knelt at her true husband's feet, exhausted by the suffering she had endured to restore her honor, and met with his cold statement: "The error into which you plunged could only have been wilful blindness. You and you alone, Madame, are responsible for the dishonor which has befallen me."

The following scenes are presented in this recording:

BAND 1: *Interlude and Lullaby.*

CATHERINE: (*Sings to Sanxi*)

Naked and shivering he lay,
The Son of God on the cold hay,
We have presents for Him.

The wheaten loaf, warm and brown,
Chestnuts fallen to the ground,

Raisins from the autumn vine
For the Child Divine.

We have brought a lamb for Him
Whom the Heavens adore
Shepherds all, sing a shepherd's hymn.
We have gifts in store.

Underneath a roof of sod,
In walls of wattles bound together,
Lamb of Robin, Lamb of God
Comfort one another
In the bitter weather . . .
Bertrande, waiting from day to day in expectation of Martin's return, is reassured by
Catherine.

CATHERINE:

Freedom is sweet, Madame.
I should myself like to see the Garonne, the Rhone,
The plain of Provence, Vendome,
And the Isle de France.
I, who have never been but to Luchon, Madame.
He will return in the spring.

BERTRANDE: The spring is far away. Freedom is sweet — for Martin. He shames me while he
stays away! His freedom is more precious than my love!

CATHERINE: You will see. As soon as the snows are melted, as soon as a man can ford the
flooded streams, he will be back. He knows his duty, Madame. Sanxi has need of a brother.
(turns to the cradle)

We have gifts in store,
As our song discloses,
Cheese and wine,
Honey fine,
Eggs as fresh as roses . . .

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BAND 2: *The Return; the Accusation*

Bertrande sits with Sanxi by the hearth. He is eight years old and recites his catechism,
mischievously trying to mix his mother up. A confused noise is heard, approaching voices:

CATHERINE: It is he, Madame!

PIERRE: It is Martin, my child!

ANNETTE: Bertrande, it is our brother Martin!
(Martin, the Imposter, comes slowly forward)

MARTIN: You are very beautiful, Madame. . .

PIERRE: Blessed Jesu! Are you surprised?

ANNETTE : You are right, Martin, she has changed. It is a greater beauty.

PIERRE: But why stand there? Embrace her!

BERTRANDE: Martin, Martin, is it you, Martin?
Cruel, cruel! Even your voice is strange, strange
in my ears!

PIERRE: My niece, this is no proper welcome.
I praise God, Martin, that you are safely home!

BERTRANDE: I too praise God, and ask your
pardon, my husband.

MARTIN:
Happy that man who like Ulysses came
Home to his father's house, and found
All things the same.
There his paternal ground,
The son who bore his name,
All safe and sound.
After the years of travel and of war
Happy the man who found his heart's desire,
Fair as before
Waiting beside his fire.
What treasure more
Should any man require?
But where is Sanxi?

Sanxi yells in panic at the strange embrace. Members of the household crowd around their supposed master with happy reminiscence. The Imposter makes one mistake, calling a servant by the wrong name; but no notice is taken. Bertrande, hardly daring to believe, presses close to him in surrender and acceptance. The scene fades on an impromptu dance.

Some months later, in early autumn, Martin and the farm workers go happily about their accustomed tasks. Bertrande comes in, walking slowly, hums with Catherine while they sew. Suddenly she stops: "Catherine, I mistrust so much happiness . . . Catherine, shocked and amused, clucks away: "Bearing takes some women one way, some another. You were too long alone, Madame . . . Now that is cured. Believe in your happiness. It is your duty, surely."

BERTRANDE: Good Catherine, go your way.

CATHERINE: I go, I go!

BERTRANDE: Never more happy nor more well. . . . I love; I am with child; and well beloved.
Yet I am haunted by so strange a fear, so strange I dare not name it; yet it haunts me like the
crying of wolves on winter nights, when we are safe indoors, and the hearth fire is bright. . .

SANXI: (*runs in; Martin follows*) I rode the white mare!

MARTIN: He rode the white mare bravely. SANXI: Will you tell me about the wars again? Will
you take me to hunt bear?

MARTIN: Surely, my son.

SANXI: When will you take me?

BERTRANDE : Later, Sanxi.

MARTIN: I will come out to you, my son . . .
What has distressed you, Bertrande?

BERTRANDE: Who are you? What is your
name?

MARTIN: Do you joke, Bertrande?

BERTRANDE: You are not Martin Guerre! It is not possible you should be Martin Guerre! For
Martin Guerre, son of the old Master, proud and stern, like the old Master, could never in this
world speak so gaily to his son.

MARTIN: You are distraught, Bertrande.

BERTRANDE : Ah! Give me proof! Forgive me! Give me some proof you are indeed my
husband!

Martin, incredulous, asks, "Proof? But why proof? . . . Is not my voice the same? Our past the
same? My lips the same? Here are my hands, scarred as you remember. The blows my father
dealt still scar me . . . Why should I not be myself?" The scene which follows is part love scene,
part accusation. To Bertrande's restrained but tormented questioning, the Imposter opposes
loving indulgence.

MARTIN: Weep no more. You are demented. It happens, sometimes, when women are with
child. It will pass; and when your time is over, you will look back on it with astonishment.

BERTRANDE: (*yielding*) May that be so; for God knows I love you and desire you. When I was in
Rieux, at my Aunt's house, in a strange town, I was confused in direction, and it seemed to me
always that the east was the west. (*Holds him by the shoulders at arms length*) So is it with me

now. For when I look at you I see the flesh and bones of Martin Guerre, but in them dwelling the spirit of another man. (*Embraces him passionately*)

Band 3: The First Trial

Bertrande, unable to endure her suspicion, which has been strengthened by the statement by a wandering roughneck that Martin Guerre lost a *leg* in the wars, has persuaded her uncle Pierre to take legal action. A crier calls the court in Rieux to order; spectators comment; Bertrande, having no objective facts to support her belief, testifies. Martin's sisters, the village priest, all the household swear that the accused is truly Martin. The Imposter is called to the stand. His testimony is blended with the introspective comments of Bertrande, Annette, Catherine, and Pierre to create a large musical ensemble. The chorus comments; another soldier is called to testify.

JUDGE: Your name?

ESPAGNOL: Espagnol, my lord.

JUDGE : Occupation?

ESPAGNOL: Soldier of fortune.

JUDGE: You know the prisoner?

ESPAGNOL: Oh, from the cradle, my lord.

JUDGE : His name?

ESPAGNOL: Du Tilh, my lord. Arnaud du Tilh.
(*a murmur from the crowd*)

JUDGE: Have you more to say?

ESPAGNOL: He told me, not a month ago, that he was playing the part of Martin Guerre; that he had met this Guerre in the wars; that this Guerre had sold him, for a little money, the right to impersonate him, and to pick up what gold he could.

BERTRANDE: It is a lie, it is a lie!

MARTIN: Well said, Madame!

CRIER: Silence in the court! (*Espagnol steps down, grinning maliciously at Martin. The judges confer.*)

A WOMAN: She's proved nothing against him.

A MAN: Why didn't she ask questions when he first came back? She lived with him long enough. Why complain now?

BERTRANDE: (*overhearing*) My God, deliver me from my sin . . .

JUDGE: Whereas this man's identity is not proved, although his resemblance to Martin Guerre is great; and whereas the wife of Guerre has testified against him, we declare that he is in fact du Tilh. And we condemn him to do penance before the church of Artigues, and to be hanged by the neck before the house of Martin Guerre.

BERTRANDE: Not death, not death! I did not ask his death! (*She is facing Martin. He*

looks at her almost with joy.)

The judgement is appealed. Annette, Father Antoine, and Catherine come singly to Bertrande to entreat her to withdraw her accusation. Alone, condemned by the household whose happiness she has destroyed, she awaits the second trial.

BERTRANDE: Their tears and their reproaches follow me. And for their peace, if I could be deceived, so would I be.

On the long ride down from the mountains to the sultry plain
Their voices, at my side, command retreat.
Here in Toulouse, along this endless street,
Amid these endless walls of dusty brick,
Consumed by love and hate,
Consumed by sin,
Exhausted, sick,
Amid this clamor and this stench, this heat,
Dear God! I suffocate!
I am pursuing to his death
A man held dear by those whom most I love,
Whom I have loved, to my most deep distress,
Nor can I now retreat.
“Mistress,” they say, “sister, withdraw the charge,
Accept deceit.” Ah, no!
Martin, my true love, Martin my true love,
See how your absence wrong’s your wife;
Robs her of peace, robs her of purity,
Of youth – her far-off, happy youth –
I have no comfort save the bitter truth.

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(Original notes from CRI LP jacket)