

Land des Lächelns, Das ('The Land of Smiles')

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Romantische Operette in three acts by Franz Lehár to a libretto by Ludwig Herzer and Fritz Löhner; Berlin, Metropoltheater, 10 October 1929.

This operetta, a revised version of *Die gelbe Jacke* (Vienna, Theater an der Wien, 9 February 1923), was the greatest international success among Lehár's later pieces, and the most successful of the works he created for Richard Tauber, whose leading lady was Vera Schwarz. The setting of Vienna and China had popular appeal, and Lehár was able to combine his popular Viennese waltz style with ambitious vocal writing and a more serious plot. Tauber sang the role of Sou-Chong in London and New York, as well as under Lehár's baton at the Theater an der Wien in 1930 (again with Schwarz) and the Vienna Staatsoper in 1938 (with Maria Reining as Lisa, Adele Kern as Mi and Alfred Jerger as Tschang). The song 'Dein ist mein ganzes Herz' became virtually Tauber's signature tune and has remained a popular favourite of tenors ever since, attracting many eminent singers to the role on stage, among them Giuseppe di Stefano, Nicolai Gedda and Siegfried Jerusalem.

The librettist of the original *Die gelbe Jacke*, Victor Léon, dedicated it to the memory of his daughter, whom he credited with the idea for the work. *Das Land des Lächelns* was an extensive reworking, but with several numbers taken over from *Die gelbe Jacke* virtually unchanged ('Immer nur lächeln', 'Von Apfelblüten einen Kranz' - which includes lines adapted from a Chinese poet - 'Ich möcht' wieder einmal die Heimat seh'n', 'Zig, zig, zig!', 'Liebes Schwesterlein') or with a new text ('Meine Liebe, deine Liebe'). Other songs were completely new: Lisa's waltz 'Gern, gern wär' ich verliebt', 'Bei einem Tee à deux', 'Wer hat die Liebe uns ins Herz gesenkt?', 'Im Salon zur blau'n Pagode' and, above all, 'Dein ist mein ganzes Herz', worked up from a few bars in the original. The discarded numbers included a shimmy with the topical lines 'Wir woll'n in's Kino geh'n und den Charlie Chaplin seh'n'. In *Die gelbe Jacke*, Hubert Marischka was Sou-Chong, Betty Fischer was Lea (whose name was changed to Lisa in the revised version) and Louise Kartousch was Mi.

The action opens in Vienna in 1912, where a ball is taking place at the home of Count Lichtenfels (spoken) in honour of his daughter Lisa (soprano). She is, however, disenchanted with the empty flirting of such occasions ('Gern, gern wär' ich verliebt'). Her greatest admirer is Count Gustl von Pottenstein of the dragoons (tenor *buffo*), but his attentions are somewhat overshadowed by the gift of a magnificent Chinese statuette from a Chinese admirer, Prince Sou-Chong (tenor), who keeps his true feelings hidden behind a mask of Chinese inscrutability ('Immer nur lächeln'). The difference in their backgrounds makes for difficulties in communication. He doesn't touch alcohol, but common ground is found in a cup of tea ('Bei einem Tee à deux'), and he captivates the young ladies with his account of how courting takes place in China ('Von Apfelblüten einen Kranz'). He is then suddenly summoned back to China to take up the position of Prime Minister, but by that time he and Lisa have expressed their feelings in ways that both understand.

Act 2 takes place in Sou-Chong's palace in Peking, where he is installed in office with the ceremonial yellow jacket. Lisa is living with him, and their love for each other is profound ('Wer hat die Liebe uns ins Herz gesenkt?'). But the differences between the restrictions women suffer in the East and the freedom to which Lisa is accustomed in the West are pointed up by Sou-Chong's sister Mi (soprano) ('Im Salon zur blau'n Pagode'). She nevertheless seems to have managed to strike up an instant friendship with Gustl, who has arrived from Vienna in pursuit of Lisa ('Meine Liebe, deine Liebe'). Sou-Chong is reminded by his uncle Tschang (baritone) that, according to Chinese custom, he must take four wives, but the Prince declares that his whole heart belongs to Lisa ('Dein ist mein ganzes Herz'). For Lisa's part, the sight of Gustl excites a longing for home ('Ich möcht' wieder einmal die Heimat seh'n'). She decides to leave, but Sou-Chong forbids it, instantly turning from western lover to eastern master.

Act 3 begins a week later, when Gustl comes up with a plan to help Lisa escape. This arouses an ambivalent response in Mi - joy for Lisa but regret at the imminent departure of Gustl ('Zig, zig, zig!'). But Lisa's and Gustl's attempt to escape through the sacred temple of Buddha is foiled when they find their way barred afresh by Sou-Chong. Lisa pleads with him, and finally he relents, committing Lisa to Gustl's care and hiding his own sorrow at Lisa's departure behind the enigmatic Chinese smile.