

Frederick Frahm

JOYZELLE

a chamber opera in five scenes

Cover Image:
Merlin's Castle with Dandelions

Frederick Frahm
Joyzelle

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JOYZELLE

a chamber opera in five scenes

Libretto by the composer after a play by Maurice Maeterlinck (1903)
translated by A. Teixeira de Mattos (1912)

Instrumentation
organ solo

Duration
circa 35 minutes

Characters:

Joyzelle, mezzosoprano
Lancéor, tenor
Merlin, bass
Statue, dancer (silent rôle)

Synopsis

Joyzelle is shipwrecked on the shore of the enigmatic Isle of Merlin, where she meets Lancéor and falls in love. There, Merlin—Lancéor's estranged father, who orchestrated the encounter—devises cruel trials to test the strength and purity of their bond through temptation, jealousy, and moral conflict. Joyzelle resists each peril with resilience and unwavering devotion, while Lancéor falters more deeply. Her steadfast fidelity leads to self-discovery and spiritual transcendence, reflecting Maeterlinck's symbolism of destiny and human frailty.

Libretto **5**

Scene I **13**

Joyzelle and Lancéor arrive on Merlin's island, meet on the beach, and become enamored of each other. Merlin tests their mutual attraction by threats and separation.

Scene II **20**

Joyzelle and Lancéor meet in a gated and bewitched palace garden where eventually their love is revealed. Merlin discovers them and conjures illusions, tempting Lancéor with seductive apparitions and Joyzelle with jealousy.

Scene III **30**

Merlin, impersonating Lancéor, attempts to seduce Joyzelle. She sees through the ruse, and his attempt to further provoke her with jealousy.

Scene IV **35**

Lancéor is mortally wounded. Merlin offers to save and restore him to Joyzelle, but for a price. Joyzelle is forced to choose between self-sacrifice and passion as Merlin's magic intensifies.

Scene V **43**

Merlin reassures himself as a great magician and a purveyor of wisdom. In his bedroom, while he sleeps, Joyzelle stealthily appears intent on a more final resolution. At the last moment, Lancéor saves her from a disastrous fate and they depart in each other's company.

Joyzelle

Music by Frederick Frahm

Libretto after a play by Maurice Maeterlinck (1903)

Translated by A. Teixeira de Mattos (1912)

CHARACTERS

Joyzelle, mezzosoprano

Lancéor, tenor

Merlin, bass

Statue (dancer, silent rôle in Scene II)

SCENE I

[An island shore. Joyzelle and Lancéor enter from opposite sides and meet.]

LANCÉOR

Where am I?

Who are you?

JOYZELLE

I am Joyzelle.

Who are you?

LANCÉOR

I don't know...

Once my name was Lancéor.

Today, I am lost.

I wander in the mist, amid mirages...

JOYZELLE

Mist?

Mirages?

How did you come to this island?

LANCÉOR

I don't know—the sea was very still and the sky was clear. A deep fog rose like a veil, a wind blew our ship to this island.

JOYZELLE

This island,

here, is no-where...

LANCÉOR

No-where?

JOYZELLE

[changing the subject]

Someone is waiting for me...

LANCÉOR

Who?

JOYZELLE

Someone they chose for me.

LANCÉOR

Who?

JOYZELLE

One they thought right for me.

LANCÉOR

Do you love him?

JOYZELLE

No.

LANCÉOR

My father chose for me.

And, as he wished it, I must obey.

JOYZELLE

Why?

LANCÉOR

We cannot evade the wishes of the dead.

JOYZELLE

Why?

LANCÉOR

We must respect them.

JOYZELLE

Oh, why?

LANCÉOR

You would not obey?

JOYZELLE

No, the dead are horrible,
if they want us to love whom we do not love.

[Merlin is seen eavesdropping on Joyzelle and Lancéor.]

LANCÉOR

No more talk of the dead.

Who is the Lord of this island?

JOYZELLE

An old man, a restless shade,

I think he loves me.

LANCÉOR

What?

JOYZELLE

He is strange and sad.

They say he has a son.

[Enter Merlin.]

MERLIN

Joyzelle...

[Turning to Lancéor with a threatening glance.]

I know what you are.

Pretended shipwreck,
deceit, and treachery!

JOYZELLE
No!

MERLIN
Why?
Do you know him?

JOYZELLE
Yes.

MERLIN
Since when?

JOYZELLE
Since I first saw him.

MERLIN
And when was that?

JOYZELLE
When he entered this room.

MERLIN
That is hardly...

JOYZELLE
[Interrupting Merlin.] It is enough.

MERLIN
No, not enough.
An honest look, an innocent smile,
dangerous snares.

[To Lancéor]
As for you.
you are my prisoner!
Go to the tower,
there is no appeal.

LANCÉOR
Joyzelle, my love!

MERLIN
No, bid her farewell.
You shall not see her again.
Obey me, or you both are lost!

END OF SCENE

SCENE II

[The next morning. A wild, neglected garden, full of high weeds and brambles. On the right, a very high and gloomy wall, pierced by a railed gate. Joyzelle is seen in the garden alone. It is daylight.]

JOYZELLE
This is the garden, which no one visits.
The sun does not enter here;
these poor wild flowers
which men besiege,
because they are not beautiful,
here await death.
And the birds are silent.

LANCÉOR
[Calling out from behind the gate.]
Joyzelle?

JOYZELLE
Go away! It is death if he sees you!

LANCÉOR
He will not see us,
I saw him go..

JOYZELLE
But he may return!

LANCÉOR
No.

JOYZELLE
Then I shall go...

LANCÉOR
Open the gate, Joyzelle,
open the gate!

JOYZELLE
No!

LANCÉOR
One kiss, and we shall be happy...

[Joyzelle turns the key; the gate opens; Lancéor crosses the threshold, taking her in his arms.]
Joyzelle!

JOYZELLE
Lancéor!

LANCÉOR
Do you love me?

JOYZELLE
I do.

There was nothing here but poor, dead flowers...

[She looks around her, stupefied; for, since Lancelor's entrance, without their noticing it, the gloomy garden has become gradually transfigured by magic. The wild plants, flowers, and weeds have grown, blossoming to a prodigious size. Butterflies flit to and fro, as the light streams down. The perspective of the garden has become infinitely extended; and the audience now sees a marble basin, half-hidden behind a hedge of oleanders and turnsole cut into arches.]

What have we done?
We are going to die for this!

LANCÉOR
Joyzelle!

JOYZELLE
Can't you see?

LANCÉOR
See what?

JOYZELLE
Those flowers betray us!
The birds were silent,
the trees were dead,
there was nothing here but weeds,

LANCÉOR
Listen!

JOYZELLE
Merlin!

JOYZELLE
Go!
Hide there,
behind the oleander.

LANCÉOR
Joyzelle...

JOYZELLE
Whatever he does,
be silent.

[Lancelor hides behind a cluster of oleanders. The railed gate opens, and Merlin enters.]

MERLIN
Is he here, Joyzelle?

JOYZELLE
No.

MERLIN
Where is he, Joyzelle?
These flowers do not lie.

Joyzelle, answer me!
[Joyzelle stands motionless and silent.]

Let fate take its course.
[A cry of pain is heard from behind the oleander.]

JOYZELLE
[Rushing behind the cluster to embrace Lancelor.]
Lancelor!

LANCÉOR
Joyzelle!
A viper!

MERLIN
[Approaching them and examining the wound.]
The wound is mortal.
But I can heal it.

JOYZELLE
Lancelor, answer me!

MERLIN
Withdraw, Joyzelle,
or he will die...

JOYZELLE
Make the sign that will save his life!
Lancelor!

MERLIN
[Looking at her gravely.]
Joyzelle, I will save him.
[Joyzelle exits slowly, turns back and withdraws at last, before a grave and imperious gesture from Merlin. Now left alone with Lancelor, he kneels beside him to dress his wound.]

Have no fear, my son, it is for your happiness...

[He embraces him long and fervently and then gently releases Lancelor. Merlin then approaches a statue of a nude greek athlete which has been standing in the garden. He mutters a spell, and gesturing, animates the statue which eventually fixes its gaze on the sleeping Lancelor.]

LANCÉOR
[Awakening, groggy.]
Where? ...
Poison...
My heart...

[Catches sight of the statue.]

But who is that?

[Approaching the hedge and looking.]
So beautiful!

[*Passing through the hedge.*]
No, don't run!

[*Taking the statue in his arms.*]
What is your name?
Kiss me...

[*He kisses the statue passionately. A cry of distress is heard from behind the bushes. The statue escapes his embrace, flies and disappears. Enter Joyzelle.*]

JOYZELLE
Lancéor!

LANCÉOR
Joyzelle?

JOYZELLE
I saw, I heard!

LANCÉOR
Look around you:
there is nothing to see...

JOYZELLE
Lancéor!

LANCÉOR
The flowers,
the fountain,
the doves are cooing...

JOYZELLE
What?
Do you love him?

LANCÉOR
What?

JOYZELLE
That creature?

LANCÉOR
There was no one.

JOYZELLE
Was this the first time?

LANCÉOR
What?

JOYZELLE
I shall not speak of it again.
I shall understand, perhaps,
In any case, I forgive.

LANCÉOR
There is nothing to forgive.

JOYZELLE
What?

LANCÉOR
There is nothing to forgive.

JOYZELLE
Then I did not see?

LANCÉOR
There was nothing to see..

JOYZELLE
Lancéor!

LANCÉOR
Lancéor, Lancéor!
If you called me by my name for a thousand years, it
would change nothing!

JOYZELLE
Do you love him, since you lie like that?

LANCÉOR
I love no one, and you even less.

JOYZELLE
Lancéor!
Why?

[*Joyzelle moves away silently, sobbing. When she has taken a few steps, she turns back, hesitates, looks sadly at Lancéor and disappears with a suppressed cry, "I love you!" Lancéor, overwhelmed, bewildered, staggers away and leans against the trunk of a tree.*]

LANCÉOR
What have I done?
What have I said?
I have lost everything,
the present,
the future.
Joyzelle.

END OF SCENE

SCENE III

[A day later in a grove. Joyzelle lies sleeping on a grassy bank, before a box hedge, cut into arches, in which lilies are flowering. It is night. A fountain ripples gently. The moon is shining.]
[Enter Merlin, wrapped in a long cloak.]

MERLIN

She sleeps.

How peaceful and beautiful she is.

JOYZELLE

[In her sleep.]

Lancéor!

MERLIN

Ah, faithful in sleep, constant in dreams.

[He takes off his cloak and appears taller, and younger, dressed in clothes similar to Lancéor's and presenting a strange resemblance to him. He approaches Joyzelle.]

Have no fear, my child,
 this is for your happiness.

[He leans over and kisses her on the forehead.]

JOYZELLE

Lancéor!

MERLIN

Yes, my love?

JOYZELLE

[Springing up and looking at him in terror.]
 Who are you?

MERLIN

[Putting out his arms to embrace her.]
 Joyzelle!

JOYZELLE

[Recognizing Merlin, with a movement of horror.]
 You!
 Don't touch me
 Stay away from me!

MERLIN

Joyzelle!
 I don't understand!
 Are you awake?

JOYZELLE

Where is he?

MERLIN

Joyzelle, wake up!

JOYZELLE

Where is he?

What have you done with him?

MERLIN

He is wherever I am.

JOYZELLE

Merlin, I know who you are.

[Seizing Merlin's hand.]

Where is he?

MERLIN

[At first, Merlin hesitates. Seeing that Joyzelle has seen through his ruse, he continues as himself.]

Joyzelle, I wish him no harm,
 so long as you love him.

Child, he will break your heart.

He doesn't love you, but another.

JOYZELLE

What?

MERLIN

There, behind us, in the thicket, they...

JOYZELLE

No.

MERLIN

Just turn your head, believe me.

JOYZELLE

No.

MERLIN

Joyzelle, open your eyes!

JOYZELLE

No.

MERLIN

The truth is there.
 you will face it alone.

[Exit Merlin. Joyzelle, for a long moment, remains seated on the bank, motionless, with wide open eyes, staring fixedly before her. Then she rises, draws herself up and goes out slowly, without turning her head.]

END OF SCENE

SCENE IV

[A room in the castle. At the back, to the right, is a large marble bed. The room also has several large mirrors. Lancelor is standing before one of the mirrors. He appears emaciated, bent, aged, unrecognizable.]

LANCÉOR

Who am I?

I have aged thirty years.
the venom...

Yet the mirror doesn't lie.

I am lost... *[Drawing the curtain of a tall window. He lies down in a dark corner of the room.]*

[A door opens. Enter Joyzelle.]

JOYZELLE

[Surprised by the darkness, she stands a moment on the threshold. Then, casting her eyes around the room, she finds Lancelor lying on the floor and rushes to his side.]

Lancelor!

I looked for you everywhere.

I went to the tower,

I called for you,

But no-one answered!

You look so pale, so thin,
give me your hands.

LANCÉOR

Joyzelle!

I have deceived...

truth is dead in our one heart.

JOYZELLE

Was I mistaken?

LANCÉOR

My faithless voice betrayed me,
my arms, my hands, my eyes...

JOYZELLE

I love you.

LANCÉOR

[Lancelor's health is visibly beginning to fail. He writhes in agony.]

Joyzelle!

JOYZELLE

Lancelor!

I love you!

I am here!

Look at me!

I give you my strength, my hours, my years!

[Lancelor is now unconscious.]

[Joyzelle takes him in her arms.]

Stay with me!

[She falls sobbing on Lancelor's body.]

[Enter Merlin.]

JOYZELLE

[Starting up, as though to go to him, while still holding Lancelor in a close embrace.]

You!

Look at him!

Tell me what to do!

Save him!

MERLIN

Joyzelle, fear nothing.

JOYZELLE

He cannot breathe!

I can no longer hear his heart!

MERLIN

His life is in my hands.

He cannot escape without my consent.

JOYZELLE

What is his beauty to me, if he dies?

MERLIN

I can bring him back to you.

However, I will be paid...

in advance...

JOYZELLE

What are you saying?

MERLIN

Tonight,

this room,

on this bed,

shameless,

without reserve.

JOYZELLE

[Now comprehending.]

Is that the bargain?

Is this chess or checkers?

MERLIN

I care little for your smile.

I want what he will have if only for a moment.

[Approaching Lancelor.]

Joyzelle, the danger!

JOYZELLE

[Casting a bewildered glance around her.]

Nothing bursts!

Nothing falls!

I hate this world!

[Merlin stares at her silently.]

Tonight...

But save him first!

MERLIN

Remember your promise,

or he dies.

JOYZELLE

I will remember.

Lancéor...

MERLIN

[Merlin goes to Lancéor and takes him in his arms.

He speaks to him aside.]

My son, all is for your happiness...

[He leans over Lancéor and presses a long kiss on his forehead.]

[Exit Merlin. Joyzelle has taken Lancéor in her arms and looks at him in anguish. Soon he wakes, but feebly.]

LANCÉOR

Joyzelle...

JOYZELLE

I'm here, my love.

LANCÉOR

What happened to me?

Cold... dark... so strange

A phantom there who hated me...

Joyzelle, what's wrong?

JOYZELLE

Nothing...

LANCÉOR

Your voice seeks a smile,

yet it breathes sorrow.

JOYZELLE

I am smiling now.... See?

LANCÉOR

Do not cry, my love,

all the rest is nothing,

forgiven,

forgotten.

JOYZELLE

[Staring fixedly before her.]

Yes, my love,

END OF SCENE

SCENE V

[Merlin is seen center stage, lost in thought.]

MERLIN

Are there hidden gods
as many as hearts that throb?

To them, I'm a genius to be avoided,
a wicked sorcerer in league with their enemies!

My secret virtue,
obeyed by the plants and stars,
by water, stone, and fire,
is hidden in philtres,
horrible charms,
hellish herbs,
awful signs

I have only taken two or three bolder steps in the
dark...

I have done a little earlier what they will do later...

[Merlin stretches himself out on the bed, closes his eyes and appears to be sleeping soundly. On the left, at the opposite end of the room, a little door opens, and Joyzelle enters, wrapped in a long cloak and carrying a lamp in her hand. She takes two or three steps and stops at the foot of the bed.]

JOYZELLE

[Stopping, haggard, hesitating, and trembling.]

Now and here...

In this moment...

[She advances with a mechanical step to the foot of the bed. She lifts the lamp, looks at the bed, sees Merlin sleeping, and in her surprise, takes a step back.]

He sleeps?
Must I wait still?

Enough...

[Putting out the lamp, she places it on the stairs in front of her and withdraws a dagger which has been concealed in her cloak. She raises it and looks at it for a moment. It shines in the moonlight.]

[She raises the dagger to strike Merlin, at that moment Lancéor enters the chamber.]

LANCÉOR

[In a soft voice.] Joyzelle...

[Joyzelle is started by the sound of Lancéor's voice. He stands in the doorway where she entered. She drops the dagger which falls and clatters on the floor.]

Leave him.

[Lancéor, fully restored, waits for her in the doorway where she entered. Joyzelle turns to see him there. Walking toward him slowly, she takes his hand, and they depart. Merlin, now apparently awake, watches the door close.]

END OF OPERA