

Rai Com

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Never Bet the Devil Your Head

a cappella cabaret for 4 voices

after Edgar Allan Poe and Federico Fellini

Commissioned by Musik der Jahrhunderte Stuttgart

Edizioni Musicali RAI COM

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FOR PERUSAL ONLY

Never Bet the Devil Your Head

Characters

Toby Dammit, a visionary and unstable young man, struggling with life, constantly risking and provoking the Devil, betting his head with him.

Baritone

Devil, an apparently old and respectable person, slowly preparing the final challenge for Toby Dammit.

Bass

Narrator, friend of Toby Dammit, trying to let him recede from his final bet.

Tenor

Mother of Toby Dammit, a strict, left-handed mother, flogging the little Toby Dammit with her left hand, causing his deviations.

Mezzo

—

Libretto

Text after Edgar Allan Poe and Federico Fellini

Narrator

It is not my design to vituperate my deceased friend, Toby Dammit.

He was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog's death it was that he died, but he himself was not to blame for his vices.

They grew out of a personal defect in his mother. She did her best in the way of flogging him while an infant. But, poor woman! She had the misfortune to be left-handed, and a child flogged left-handedly had better be left unflogged.

If each blow in the proper direction drives an evil propensity out, it follows that every thump in an opposite one knocks its quota of wickedness in.

Thus he had contracted a propensity for backing his assertions by bets.

The habit was an immoral one!

I remonstrated—but to no purpose.

I demonstrated—in vain.

I entreated—he smiled.

I implored—he laughed.

I preached—he sneered.

I threatened—he swore.

I kicked him—he called for the police.

I pulled his nose—he blew it, and offered to bet the Devil his head that I would not venture to try that experiment again.

Toby Dammit

I'll bet you a dollar.

I'll bet you what you please.

I'll bet you what you dare.

I'll bet you a trifle.

I'll bet the Devil my head.

I'll bet the Devil my head.

I'll bet the Devil my head.

Narrator

Again I collected my energies for a final attempt at expostulation.

Toby Dammit's Mother

For some moments he remained silent.

But presently he threw his head to one side, and elevated his eyebrows to a great extent.

Then he winked with the right eye.

Then he repeated the operation with the left.

Then he shut them both up very tight.

Then he opened them both so very wide that I became seriously alarmed for the consequences.

Toby Dammit

(from Fellini's *Toby Dammit*)

I am alright!

I am desperately happy!

The devil yes, I have seen him.

To me the devil is cheerful: a child, he looks like a little girl.

I have seen her.

She had been waiting for me with her white silent ball.

I can tell her to go away, but she would come back.

She seems to know sooner or later I would join her game.

But when?

Narrator

There was a bridge, and we resolved to cross it.

We approached the termination of the footway, when our progress was impeded by a turnstile of some height.

Toby Dammit insisted upon leaping the stile, and said he could cut a pigeon-wing over it in the air.

No!

Toby Dammit

I'll bet the Devil my head that I could.

Devil

Ahem!

Ahem!

Narrator

Dammit, don't you hear? Dammit, the gentleman says 'ahem!

Dammit, the gentleman says 'ahem!

Toby Dammit

Ahem!

Devil

My good fellow, I make it a point of conscience to allow you this much run. Wait here, till I take my place by the stile, so that I may see whether you go over it handsomely, and transcendently, and don't omit any flourishes of the pigeon-wing.

Toby Dammit

Ahem!

Narrator

Dammit! Dammit!

Devil

One—two—three—and—away!

Narrator

I saw him run, and spring grandly from the floor, cutting the most awful flourishes with his legs as he went up. I saw him high in the air, pigeon-winging it to admiration.

I hurried up to him. He had received a serious injury: he had been deprived of his head, which after a close search, I could not find anywhere.

Required material

**Percussions for the Baritone (possibly fixed around the hands
and at the clothes of the Baritone)**

1 Grelots

1 Maracas

1 Little tambourine

1 Little side drum

2 Finger cymbals

1 Little hand-bell

1 Little suspended cymbal

1 Wood mallet

1 Brass mallet

Material for the Bass

1 Elastic band (ca 1 m)

1 Soft Metal sheet (ca 20 cm x 1m) to be hold with the two hands

1 Felt mallet

Material for the Mezzo

1 Metal brush

Andante, in 4 (L=120a)

TOBY DAMMIT'S MOTHER

MEZZO: [penetrating with her left hand on a suspended cymbal held by the Baritone in front of his face, as if she slaps him]

NARRATOR: mf [spoken, like a reporter, free distillation of the text] [articulated] sff mf

TOBY DAMMIT: IS NOT MY DESIGN TO VITUPERATE MY DECEASED FRIEND, TOBY DAMMIT. HE WAS A SAD DOG, IT IS TRUE, AND A DOG'S DEATH IT WAS THAT HE DIED, BUT HE HIMSELF WAS NOT TO BLAME FOR HIS VICES. THEY ARE OUT OF A PERSONAL DEFECT IN HIS MOTHER.

SUSPENDED CYMBAL [held by the Baritone, played by the Mezzo] SIDE DRUM [played by the Baritone]

ELASTIC BAND [played by the Bass, wrapped around a foot, held in the hand]

BARITONE: [basso continuo, like a lamento] mf

VIOLIN: [basso continuo, with string] mf

BASS: [percussing with the fingertips a little side drum, like trombing] sff [pizz. the elastic with rope] f

M. SHE DID HER BEST IN THE WAY OF FLOGGING HIM, WHITE AN INFANT. BUT POOR WOMAN! SHE HAD THE MISFORTUNE TO BE LEFT-HANDED! AND A CHILD FLOGGED LEFT-HANDEDLY HAD BETTER TO BE LEFT UNFLOGGED. IF EACH BLOW IN THE DIRECTION DRIVES AN EVIL PROPENSITY OUT, IT FOLLOWS THAT EVERY THUMP IN AN OPPOSITE ONE, KNOCKS IS QUOTA

T. [falset] [distorted] [spoken] [whispered] sff [as high as possible with air] mf

SUSP. CYM. SIDE DRUM [repeat]

ELASTIC BAND

BAR. [falset] [distorted] [whispered] sff OH → UH → OH OH → UH →

M.
T.
PERC.
BAR.
B.

OF WICKEDNESS IN. THUS HE HAD CONTRAC-TED A PROPENSITY FOR BACKING HIS ASSERTIONS BY BETS

mf [whispered]

mf [spoken]

ff [showing agitation]

ff

ff

THE HABIT WAS AN IMMORAL ONE!

BARITONE!
SIDE DRUM

[repeat]

[inhalation]

[exhalation]

OH UH OH OH

Allegro spiritoso, in 2 (♩=78)
 (from the Comedian Harmonists, Berlin, 1930)

Tutti: [p, leggero, non vibrato, swing itonic, imitating the sound of an old recording]

M.
T.
PERC.
BAR.
B.

1. DEMONSTRATED - BUT TO NO PURPOSE. | 2. DEMONSTRATED - IN VAIN. | 3. ENTREATED - HE SMILED. | 4. IMPLORED - HE LAUGHED. | 5. PREACHED - HE SNEE - - - - RED.

pp, sempre [bocca chiusa]

M.
T.
PERC.
Baz.
B.

THREATENED - HE SWORE I KICKED HIM - HE CALLED FOR THE POLICE - I PULLED HIS NOSE - HE BLEW IT - AND OFFERED TO GET THE DEVIL HIS HEAD THAT I WOULD NOT VENTURE TO TRY

for all. Acciso, esasperato, in 5 (♩=60)

pp [sound/breath]

M.
T.
PERC.
Baz.
B.

THAT EXPERIMENT. A - - - GAIN, A - - - GAIN, A - - - GAIN, A - - - GAIN.

SCREWDS [possibly wrapped around the baritone's arm]
WITH THE HAND BELL

[laughing]
UH!
AH! AH! AH!
RET
I'LL

SIDE DRUM [with a wood mallet]

pp YOU → A

in 3

Andante

in 5

a tempo

M.

T.

PERC. **PERCUTORS**
FINGER CYMBAL 7:2
 [possibly keeping the finger-cymbals in two fingers of the same hands letting one to slide to the other]
BARITONE: [possibly keeping the finger-cymbals in two fingers of the same hands letting one to slide to the other]
BARITONE: TAMBOURINE
BARITONE: SIDE DRUM

Baz. [as high as possible, provocative] [as deep as possible like a roar]
 [as high as possible, provocative] [as deep as possible like a roar]
 [free gliss] [inhaling/exhaling]

B. I'LL BET YOU WHAT YOU PLEASE AH! I'LL B [BEBB...] ET [TTTT:] YOU W [wwwww...] HAT YOU DARE! [AAARG!] I'LL BET YOU A TRIFLE, AH

Andante

a tempo

M.

T. **BARITONE**: [possibly keeping the suspended cymbal on his head, like an hat, percussing it as if percussing him self]
 [Free repetitions]

SUSP. CYMB. [Free repetitions]

PERC. ff, sempre
 [Free repetitions]

Baz. I'LL BET THE DEVIL MY HEAD, I'LL BET THE DEVIL MY HE... AD, I'LL BET THE DEVIL MY HEAD, I'LL BET THE DEVIL MY HEAD.

B. I'LL BET THE DEVIL MY HEAD, I'LL BET THE DEVIL MY HEAD.

AGAIN, I COLLECTED MY ENERGIES FOR A FINAL ATTEMPT AT EXPSTUATION!