

DAUGHTER OF THE SOUTH (opera in one act and two scenes)
by Edward Joseph Collins (libretto and music)

THE STORY OF THE OPERA

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

<i>Col. Edmond "Ezra" Randolph</i> of Virginia (plantation owner)	baritone
<i>Mary Lou Randolph</i> , his daughter	soprano
<i>Robert Warren</i> , a young man from the North (engaged to Mary Lou)	tenor
<i>Esmelda (Melda)</i> , Mary Lou's Mammy (a plantation slave)	mezzo-soprano
<i>Jonah</i> , head slave	bass-baritone
<i>A Confederate sergeant</i>	baritone
<i>Detachment of Confederate soldiers</i>	chorus tenors and basses
<i>Male and female slaves and children</i> (and plantation neighbors)	chorus and dancers

SYNOPSIS

All action takes place on Colonel Edmond Randolph's Virginia plantation. At the outbreak of the American Civil War in spring 1861, the old soldier is widowed, but eagerly prepares to celebrate his daughter Mary Lou's engagement to Robert Warren, a northerner. During the festivity, war is declared and Robert, facing detainment, flees to join the Union Army. Four years later, in the second scene, Robert has escaped from a Confederate prison and rushes to Mary Lou, only to be arrested as a Northern spy. Shortly thereafter, an exhausted Colonel Randolph returns home, following General Robert E. Lee's surrender. Carrying a copy of General Ulysses S. Grant's *Letters of Paroles* or amnesty, Colonel Randolph is able to stop Robert's execution, and all are joyfully reunited.

SCENE I (Outside Colonel Randolph's plantation house, Spring 1861, outbreak of the Civil War)

Two slaves, Jonah and Melda, are doing chores around the house. Jonah says that he overheard "a man on a hoss" in Leesburg, telling the people there may be war between the North and South, and that President Lincoln may free the slaves. Jonah tells Melda that they should go north and work on the President's plantation. Melda crossly declares that she would never leave Mary Lou, whom Melda has raised from birth, following the death of her mother. With Mary Lou soon to marry Robert, Melda insists she will stay and watch the cycle of life unfold on the plantation.

Colonel Randolph and Mary Lou come outside from the house, each in turn lamenting the impending war. Comforting his daughter, Colonel Randolph sings of his happiness for Mary Lou's engagement to Robert.

Jonah enters to announce the arrival of carriages, neighbors, and slaves, all in the company of Robert. The Colonel warmly greets everyone, asking Jonah to have his people dance. There follows a lively ballet, *Allegro barbaro*. Colonel Randolph toasts Robert as the "conq'ring hero" who has captured his daughter, "the pride of the South." Robert in turn salutes to "life, love and youth," while all declare that there "ain't goin' be no war," as if this incantation alone will prevent the tragedy.

A declaration of war falls upon the celebrants, making Robert "an enemy among friends." Everyone withdraws in lamentation, leaving Mary Lou and Robert alone to sing of their eternal love. Suddenly Jonah rushes in announcing that Confederate soldiers are at the gate looking for Robert. The Northerner flees just as the detachment arrives. There follows an instrumental section that intertwines two popular Civil War era tunes, *Dixie* and *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, which evoke the opposing forces at war.

SCENE II (Four years later, Spring 1865, end of the war)

The curtain rises to find Mary Lou on the veranda, mourning her four lonely years without Robert, praying that he will return to save her. Jonah, ever the bearer of news, has overheard that General Lee will surrender his army. Melda sings a lullaby to comfort Mary Lou, who falls asleep. Robert staggers in, winded by his recent escape from a nearby Confederate prison. Slumping near the veranda, he sings of how he must see Mary Lou before returning to his command. She awakens and they embrace joyously, only to be set upon by a Confederate detachment, which arrests Robert as a spy for the North.

Mary Lou protests that Robert is not a spy but a Union Army Captain, who has come to assure her of his love. "Tell that to the firing squad. Take him along," retorts the Sergeant. In horror, Mary Lou runs to the house.

An exhausted Colonel Randolph then enters, with a contingent of soldiers and neighbors, and sings of the devastation of his "cherished land." He then tells Jonah of General Lee's surrender to General Grant, who in turn has given a "letter of safe passage" to all combatants. Mary Lou and Melda rush to greet Colonel Randolph, excitedly warning of Robert's impending execution. The Colonel orders Jonah to rush Grant's letter to the firing squad and save Robert.

Shortly thereafter, Robert, Jonah and the soldiers enter, along with more plantation neighbors and freed slaves. All rejoice over the blessed end to the war. The sergeant surrenders his Confederate flag to Robert, who in turn unfurls his own Union flag. Mary Lou joins their hands together and, just as she and Robert are finally reunited, "Love triumphant rules the land."