

Frederick Delius

**FENNIMORE AND GERDA**

Opera in Eleven Scenes

CAST

Niels Lyhne..... John Cameron  
Fennimore..... Sybil Michelow  
Erik Refstrup..... Max Worthley  
Consul Claudi..... Norman Lumsden  
His Wife..... Jean Allister  
Tenor Voice on the Water..... Alfred Hallet  
Sportsman..... Rankin Bushby  
Town Counciller..... John Frost  
Tutor..... Alfred Hallet  
A Distiller..... Leslie Fyson  
Counciller Skinnerup..... Rankin Bushby  
Ingrid..... Ellen Dales  
Lila..... Ann Dowdall  
Marit..... Doreen Murray  
Gerda..... Jeanette Sinclair  
Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Stanford Robinson, 1962

## SYNOPSIS

"Fennimore and Gerda," Delius' sixth and last opera was completed in 1910. It was produced at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1919, since when it remained unperformed until this production in 1962. The work is based on the novel "Niels Lyhne" by the Danish writer Jens Peter Jacobsen. Delius made his own libretto from the German translation of the novel. It is here sung in the English version by Philip Heseltine.

The opera is described as "two episodes in the life of Niels Lyhne, in eleven pictures" and represents an experiment in operatic form. The eleven pictures are so many short, realistic scenes linked mainly by orchestral interludes, and the characters -- wealthy, cultured Scandinavians of the type encountered in Ibsen's plays, converse in naturalistic dialogue. There are none of the usual extended operatic vocal pieces. The dialogue is set to musical declamation against a continuous orchestral texture which evokes the natural background of each scene and mirrors the psychological progress of the action.

Delius ignored the first part of the novel. The two episodes he selected concern two of the three women in Niels' life. The first episode occupies the first nine scenes and tells of his love for Fennimore before and after her marriage to his cousin Erik. It ends tragically with Erik's accidental death and the separation of Niels and Fennimore. The second episode, which occupies only the two final scenes and is quite separate from the first, shows Niels finding happiness with the eighteen-year-old Gerda, who becomes his wife.

Delius also ignored the latter part of the novel describing Gerda's early death and Niels' own death much later in a military hospital.

The action takes place in Denmark around the middle of the last century. The first two scenes, which run continuously, are set in Fjordby, the country home of Consul Claude. There is no overture. The curtain rises immediately on a spacious drawing room in the house one rainy spring afternoon. The Consul's daughter, Fennimore, is sitting at a window doing embroidery and Niels Lyhne, a poet, is sitting at her feet. Niels is glad to be back again after travelling abroad and is obviously hoping to marry Fennimore and settle down. But she is tired of her uneventful life and is longing for travel and adventure. As Niels is about to press Fennimore's hand to his lips, he is interrupted by the arrival of his cousin, Erik, a painter, followed by the Consul and his wife. Erik asks Fennimore to sing to them and she obliges with an old ballad accompanying herself on the lute. The ballad tells of a young girl longing for the "land of heart's desire" and Fennimore has clear-

ly chosen it to express her own frustration.

An orchestral interlude leads to the second scene, at the end of the garden, down by a fjord, later that night. In the distance, the lights of the harbor and the town can be seen; and, far off across the water, a tenor voice is singing a wordless song. Fennimore and Erik are sitting in a boat conversing quietly but when her father and mother arrive in another boat, with Niels, they steal off into the garden. Niels, left alone, sees them returning; and, hiding in the shadows, he witnesses a passionate love scene in which Fennimore pledges herself to Erik. As the two lovers go off toward the house, Niels expresses his grief at losing his beloved to his only friend.

Now follow four scenes at Mariagerfjord, on the northeast coast of Denmark where Fennimore and Erik are living after their marriage. Three years have passed. The first scene takes place on the veranda overlooking the fjord on a summer evening. The marriage is obviously not doing well. Erik is bored with his life and cannot settle to his painting. Fennimore tries in vain to encourage him. He is eagerly awaiting a visit from Niels and when Niels arrives he greets him warmly. The next scene which follows immediately, is still on the veranda later that night. The two men are sitting smoking and drinking, and Erik tells Niels of his sense of emptiness, of having come to the end of things. Niels advises travel, but to no avail.

The scene changes to a room in the house later that summer. Erik has now lost interest, even in Niels. He is trying vainly to paint, when he is interrupted by some of his boon companions from the town, who invite him to come out for a night of wine, women and song. He is merely bored by the prospect, but when Fennimore begs him to stay he gets angry and goes off after all. Niels enters and comforts Fennimore. She asks him to be a good friend to her and he says that he will stand by her whatever happens. Fennimore is sitting in an easy chair awaiting Erik's return and remembering the happy days of their early love. Erik arrives at last, completely drunk. He says a few surly words and then throws himself onto a sofa and falls asleep. Fennimore looks hard at him and goes out slowly.

The next three scenes bring the 'Fennimore Episode' to its conclusion. There is an orchestral interlude, after which Fennimore and Niels, alone together, declare their love for each other and the hopelessness of the present situation. "We could have been so happy together," exclaims Fennimore and they kiss. There follows a passionate love duet and they fall into each other's arms.

The scene changes to a veranda of the house in winter, and outside the grounds are covered with snow. It is twilight. Erik is out and Fennimore is waiting for him to come for her, but the maid brings her a telegram which says that Erik has been thrown out of his carriage in the forest and killed. Fennimore is overcome with horror and remorse at the thought that she has betrayed him and swears that everything is now over between Niels and her. The final scene of the episode takes place shortly afterwards outside the veranda, overlooking the frozen surface of the fjord. Niels arrives at last and Fennimore rushes out to meet him in a state of hysteria. "Erik is dead," she says, "while we sat in his home here and betrayed him." Niels is griefstricken himself on hearing of Erik's death, but he does his best to calm her. All his efforts are in vain, however. Fennimore turns on him bitterly, tells him she hates him now, and orders him to leave her forever. As he goes, Erik's body is borne home across the ice, and Fennimore collapses in the snow.

It is some years later. Time has carried Niels on beyond his personal tragedy and is about to bring him unexpected happiness. The last two scenes run continuously and after an orchestral introduction, the curtain rises on a farm at Loenborggaard, where Niels used to play as a boy, and to which he has now retired. It is harvest time and in the distance, the laborers can be heard singing in the fields. Niels is glad to have found peace at last, amid the scenes of his childhood, though his thoughts still turn regretfully to his lost love and his dead friend. The laborers voices are heard again as the curtain falls, and an orchestral interlude leads into the final scene. It is the following spring, in the garden of one of Niels' local acquaintances, Counciller Skinnerup. Niels has come on a visit and enters the house. Three of the councillor's young daughters run out into the garden and begin playing with a ball. The fourth and eldest, Gerda, turns watching them dreamily. They tease her and tell her that she is always thinking of Niels Lyhne. She must be in love with him, and as Niels appears, they run away, giggling. In a brief conversation we gather that Niels and Gerda share an unspoken secret, and she thanks him for all his kindness to her. He asks her to be his wife and she accepts. The councillor enters and as they begin to tell him he says that he knew about it all the time. The three other girls sing and dance with delight at the news, after which everyone returns to the house except Niels and Gerda. He kisses her tenderly as the opera ends.