

Cervantes & Governor

5

Overture

(Orchestra)

See p. 62

No. 1

Prison Scene (Flamenco)

(Cantaor, Guitar & Recording)

See p. 62

After the Overture, the orchestra is lost to sight as lights fade in on the prison vault. A number of PRISONERS are discovered. SOME are huddled in the shadows asleep; ONE strums a guitar of the period; ANOTHER dances to its rhythm; STILL OTHERS occupy themselves eating, playing a game of dice using stones, etc., as the CANTAOR sings.

Sound and motion cease as a strange, half-musical sound is heard. It is a chant, accompanied by drums, chains and hand-claps: the Inquisition Theme [pre-recorded]. As the PRISONERS hear the sound, the stairway high above their heads is lowered into the vault. A little procession descends the stairs: first, a uniformed CAPTAIN of the Inquisition; then TWO SOLDIERS assisting a MANSERVANT with a sizable but shabby straw trunk; then MIGUEL DE CERVANTES, who peers about, uncertainly. The CAPTAIN and SOLDIERS start back up the stairs.

CERVANTES. (*Turning and calling up to the CAPTAIN*) Captain ...

CAPTAIN. (*Turning back, on the stairs*) Anything wrong? The accommodations?

CERVANTES. No, no they appear quite ... interesting.

CAPTAIN. The cells are below.

This is the ... uh ... (*A tiny joke.*) ... common room, for those who wait.

CERVANTES. How long do they wait?

CAPTAIN. (*Turning to leave again*) Some an hour... some a lifetime...

CERVANTES. Do they all await the Inquisition?

CAPTAIN. Ah, no, these are merely thieves—murderers.

If you need anything, just shout. (*An afterthought*) If you're able.

The CAPTAIN goes, and through the following the stairway is withdrawn.

MANSERVANT. What did he mean by that?

CERVANTES. Calm yourself, there is a remedy for everything but death.

MANSERVANT. That could be the very one we need.

During the above, some of the PRISONERS have risen and are circling, examining the new arrivals.

CERVANTES. (*Sensing potential danger—turning on all his charm*) Good morning gentlemen ... ladies. I regret being thrust upon you in this manner, and hope you will not find my company objectionable. In any case I trust I shall not be among you long. The Inquisition—

With a yell, the PRISONERS attack. CERVANTES and the MANSERVANT are seized, tripped up, pinned to the floor. The PRISONERS are busily rifling their pockets as the GOVERNOR, a big man of obvious authority, who has been asleep in a corner, awakens and yells.

GOVERNOR. Enough! Noise, trouble, fights ... kill each other if you must but for God's sake, do it quietly! (To CERVANTES) Who are you? Eh? Speak up!

CERVANTES. (*Gasping, as his throat is freed*) Cervantes. Don Miguel de Cervantes.

GOVERNOR. A gentleman!

CERVANTES. (*Still on the floor, pulling himself together*)
It has never saved me from going to bed hungry.

GOVERNOR. (*Indicating the MANSERVANT*) And that?

CERVANTES. My servant. May I have the honor?

GOVERNOR. (*Indicating the PRISONERS*) They call me The Governor. What's your game?

CERVANTES. My game...?

GOVERNOR. Your specialty, man. Cutpurse? Highwayman?

CERVANTES. Oh, nothing so interesting! I am a poet.

THE DUKE. (*A PRISONER of draggle-tailed elegance*) They're putting men in prison for that?

CERVANTES. No, no, not for that.

THE DUKE. Too bad.

GOVERNOR. (*Moving towards Cervantes' belongings*) Well, let's get on with the trial!

*CERVANTES is unceremoniously hauled to his feet and then held
by TWO OF THE MORE VILLAINOUS-LOOKING PRISONERS.*

CERVANTES. Excuse me ... what trial?

GOVERNOR. Yours, of course.

CERVANTES. But what have I done?

GOVERNOR. We'll find something.

CERVANTES. You don't seem to understand. I'll only be here—

GOVERNOR. (*Interrupting*) My dear sir, no one enters or leaves this prison without being tried by his fellow prisoners.

CERVANTES. And if I'm found guilty?

GOVERNOR. Oh, you will be.

CERVANTES. What sort of sentence ... ?

GOVERNOR. (*Rummaging among his belongings*)
We generally fine a prisoner all of his possessions.

CERVANTES. All of them ...?

GOVERNOR. It's not practical to take more.

The GOVERNOR pulls a sword in a scabbard from the trunk.

CERVANTES. One moment! These things are my livelihood.

GOVERNOR. I thought you said you were a poet.

The GOVERNOR pulls the sword from its scabbard.

CERVANTES. Of the theatre!

GOVERNOR. *(Brandishing the blade of the sword)* False!

CERVANTES. Costumes and properties. You see, actually I am a playwright and an actor. So of course these poor things could not possibly be of any use to ... to ...

CERVANTES reaches for the sword. The GOVERNOR tosses the sword to another PRISONER; they ALL dive for the trunk, maliciously tossing things about. CERVANTES breaks loose, retrieves a package from the trunk and tries to hide it. THE DUKE snatches it and tosses it to the GOVERNOR.

MANSERVANT. *(Who has tried to stop the PRISONERS and is now being sat upon for his pains)*
Master—!

CERVANTES. *(To the GOVERNOR, of the package)* No ... please ... not that—please!

GOVERNOR. Heavy! Valuable?

CERVANTES. Only to me.

GOVERNOR. We might let you ransom it.

CERVANTES. I have no money.

GOVERNOR. How unfortunate. *(Tears it open)* Paper!

CERVANTES. Manuscript!

GOVERNOR. Still worthless.

The GOVERNOR strides towards the fire with the intention of throwing the package in.

CERVANTES. Wait! You spoke of a trial. By your own word, I must be given a trial!

GOVERNOR. *(Hesitating for a moment)* Oh, very well. I hereby declare this court is session!

CERVANTES and the MANSERVANT are shoved into an improvised dock, and the "court" arranges itself.

Now, then. What are you here for?

CERVANTES. I am to appear before the Inquisition.

GOVERNOR. Heresy?

CERVANTES. Not exactly.

You see, I had been employed by the government as a tax-collector ...

GOVERNOR. Poet, actor, tax-collector?

CERVANTES. A temporary thing to keep us from starvation.

GOVERNOR. How does a tax-collector get in trouble with the Inquisition?

CERVANTES. I made an assessment against the monastery of La Merced.
When they refused to pay I issued a lien of property.

GOVERNOR. You did what?

MANSERVANT. He foreclosed on a church.

GOVERNOR. *(To the MANSERVANT)* But why are you here?

MANSERVANT. Someone had to tack the notice on the church door.
(Dolefully indicates himself)

GOVERNOR. These two have empty rooms in their heads!

CERVANTES. The law says treat everyone equally. We only obeyed the law!

THE DUKE. Governor, if you don't mind, I should like to prosecute this case.

GOVERNOR. Why?

THE DUKE. Let us say I dislike stupidity. Especially when it masquerades as virtue.
Miguel de Cervantes! I charge you with being an idealist, a bad poet,
and an honest man. How plead you?

CERVANTES. *(Considering a moment)* Guilty.

GOVERNOR. Bravo! It is the judgment of this court ... *(Rises, crossing again towards the fire)*

CERVANTES. Your Excellency! What about my defense?

GOVERNOR. *(Pausing; puzzled)* But you just pleaded guilty.

CERVANTES. *(With charm)* Since I had admitted guilt,
isn't the court required to hear me out?

GOVERNOR. For what purpose?

CERVANTES. The jury may choose to be lenient.

THE DUKE. He is trying to gain time!

CERVANTES. Do you have a scarcity of that?

GOVERNOR. *(Amused, to the PRISONERS)* Any urgent appointments?

PRISONERS *groan for an answer;*
the GOVERNOR *waves to CERVANTES to continue.*

CERVANTES. It is true I am guilty of these charges. An idealist?
I have never had the courage to believe in nothing. A bad poet?
That comes a bit more painfully ... still ...