

# The Sound of Music

## Synopsis

### Act I

It is 1938. In Nonnberg Abbey in Austria, the busy nuns are going about their daily tasks, but towards evening it becomes apparent that the postulant, Maria Rainer, is not among them. Maria is out on the mountain, singing of the joy she finds in nature (**The Sound of Music**), and she returns to the Abbey late, as usual. The Mother Abbess and her assistants are forced to conclude that Maria is not yet ready for the religious life (**Maria**). Although the Mother Abbess shares many enthusiasms with Maria (**My Favourite Things**), she decides to send her out of the Abbey to become temporary governess to the children of Captain Georg von Trapp, a retired naval officer. Since the death of his wife, the Captain has taken to running his home like a battleship, and treating his children like naval recruits. When Maria and the children have a few days alone together, however, she teaches them how to play, to sing (**Do-Re-Mi**), to enjoy life. Liesl, the oldest child, is in the throes of first love with Rolf Gruber, a village boy, and she steals from the house to meet him (**Sixteen Going On Seventeen**). Maria wins over Liesl, indeed all the children, when she comforts them with her singing during a thunderstorm (**The Lonely Goatherd**).

The Captain returns from Vienna with his fiancée, Elsa Schröder, and a family friend, Max Detweiler. At first astonished and angry at Maria's dismantling of the martial law he had imposed on his children, the Captain's cold reserve melts away when he hears the sound of music in his home for the first time in many years. Maria has made him realise how important it is to know and love his children.

At a party given to introduce Elsa to the Captain's neighbours, the children charm the guests with their goodnight song (**So Long, Farewell**). Against this innocence, however, the ominous rumblings of the imminent German Anschluss can be heard. Some of the guests almost come to blows over the possibility of Hitler's take-over of Austria, and one of them threatens the Captain, who is firmly opposed to the Nazi regime. In an effort to reduce the tension Maria induces the Captain to join her in demonstrating an charming Austrian folk dance, the ländler. During the dance, Maria is confronted with a sudden realisation: she has fallen in love with the Captain. In dismay, she flees to the Abbey, where the Mother Abbess advises her that the love of a man and a woman is holy, and that the Abbey is not a place to hide from one's problems but a place in which to confront them. She urges Maria to reach out to meet life (**Climb Ev'ry Mountain**).

### Act II

Returning to the Trapp villa, Maria finds a bitter quarrel going on among the Captain, Elsa and Max, over the Nazi invasion of Austria. While the Captain is prepared to stand up to the Nazis and defy them if necessary, Elsa is unwilling to take such risks or in any way endanger her own comfortable position. She and the Captain decide to dissolve their engagement, and she leaves. At the same time, Maria and the Captain acknowledge their love for each other (**An Ordinary Couple**) and two weeks later they are married at the Abbey. When they return from their honeymoon, they find that the Anschluss has become fact, and that Rolf, Liesl's love, has emerged as a Nazi supporter. Max, meanwhile, is determined (against the Captain's wishes) that the children will sing at a music festival in Salzburg as planned. Unexpectedly, the Nazis press the Captain into military service to the Third Reich; Maria gains time for him by convincing the new authorities that, in fact the entire von Trapp family is scheduled to sing at the festival.

The Nazi officials allow the von Trapps to perform, while announcing that a military escort will be standing by to take the Captain to his new post in Berlin. On this, his last night in his beloved Austria, Captain von Trapp leads his wife, lady and fellow countrymen in singing a cherished folk song (**Edelweiss**). Swiftly, Maria leads the family, including the Captain, into their exit song and one by one, they disappear as Max stalls the escort. Fleeing to the Abbey, they seek refuge in the garden as soldiers, hot on their trail, search for them unsuccessfully. Finally, as the nuns wish them Godspeed, the von Trapps leave Austria for a new life and new hope, as they climb to freedom over Maria's beloved mountain.