

Operas for February 2019

6 February	Les Danaïdes	Antonio Salieri
13	Prince Igor	Alexander Borodin
20	Un Ballo in Maschera	Giuseppe Verdi
27	Arabella	Richard Strauss

Details of the Operas

Les Danaïdes is an opera by Antonio Salieri, in five acts: more specifically, it is a tragédie lyrique. The opera was set to a libretto by François-Louis Gand Le Bland Du Roullet and Louis-Théodore de Tschudi, who in turn adapted the work of Ranieri de' Calzabigi (without permission). Calzabigi originally wrote the libretto of Les Danaïdes for Christoph Willibald Gluck, but the aged composer, who had just experienced a stroke, was unable to meet the Opéra's schedule and so asked Salieri to take it over.

The plot of the opera is based on Greek tragedy and revolves around the deeds of the mythological characters Danaus and Hypermnestra.

History

Emperor Joseph II assured that Salieri wrote the music "almost under the dictée of Gluck," in a letter (dated 31 March 1783) to Count Mercy-Argenteau, the Austrian ambassador in Paris. Then Mercy told the directors of the Opéra that Gluck had composed the first two acts, and Salieri supplied the third act's music (Mercy did not realize the opera was in five acts). Even when the libretto was published, Gluck and Salieri shared billing as the composers.

Though flattered, Gluck was not foolish enough to risk too close an association with young Salieri's work and diplomatically informed the press: "The music of Danaïdes is completely by Salieri, my only part in it having been to make suggestions which he willingly accepted." Gluck, who had been devastated by the failure of his last Paris opera, Echo et Narcisse, was concerned that Les Danaïdes would suffer a similar fate. He wrote to Roullet the same day that the opera premiered, crediting Salieri with the entire work, and the press noted this confession. Salieri made a positive twist on Gluck's statement, claiming that he was "led by [Gluck's] wisdom and enlightened by his genius"

Synopsis

Act I: Danaus and his fifty daughters, the Danaïdes, vow loyalty to their enemy Aegyptus, Danaus's brother. Aegyptus dies and is succeeded by his eldest son, Lynceus (Lyncée). He and his brothers each agree to marry one of the Danaïdes; Danaus instructs his daughters to take revenge by killing their husbands on their wedding night.

Act II: Lynceus's wife Hypermnestra (Hypermnestre) is alone in refusing to obey her father's order, even after Danaus confronts her with the prophecy that he will be murdered himself if she fails to satisfy his lust for vengeance.

Act III: After the wedding ceremony, Hypermnestra manages to escape with Lynceus, just as his brothers are being killed.

Act IV: Danaus is enraged when news of Lynceus's escape reaches him, but he is distracted from his anger when Lynceus storms the city, killing all fifty of the Danaïdes except Hypermnestra and burning the palace to the ground.

Act V: The Danaïdes are sent to Hades where their father is seen chained to a rock, his entrails being torn from him by a vulture. The Furies promise an eternity of suffering.

Prince Igor

Synopsis

Time: The year 1185

Place: The city of Putivl (prologue, Acts 1 & 4); a Polovtsian camp (Acts 2 & 3)



Konstantin Korovin's costume design for Igor in the production of *Prince Igor* at the Mariinsky Theatre, 1909

Prologue

The cathedral square in Putivl

Prince Igor is about to set out on a campaign against the Polovtsy and their Khans who have previously attacked the Russian lands. The people sing his praise and that of his son, the other leaders and the army (*Chorus: "Glory to the beautiful Sun"*). A solar eclipse takes place to general consternation. Two soldiers Skula and Yeroshka desert feeling sure that Vladimir Yaroslavich, Prince Galitsky, will offer them work more to their liking. Although Yaroslavna, Igor's wife, takes the eclipse for a bad omen, Igor insists that honour demands that he go to war. He leaves her to the care of her brother, Prince Galitsky, who tells of his gratitude to Igor for sheltering him after he was banished from his own home by his father and brothers. The people sing a great chorus of praise (*Chorus: "Glory to the multitude of stars"*) as the host sets out on their campaign against the Polovtsy.

Act 1: *Scene 1: Vladimir Galitsky's court in Putivl*

Galitsky's followers sing his praise. Skula and Yeroshka are now working as gudok-players. They entertain the followers and all sing of how Galitsky and his men abducted a young

woman and how she pleaded to be allowed to return to her father without being dishonoured. The prince arrives and sings of how, if he were Prince of Putivl, he would drink and feast all day while dispensing judgment and have the prettiest maidens with him all night (*Galitsky's Song*). The treasury would be spent on himself and his men while his sister would be praying in a monastery. A group of young women beg the prince to restore their abducted friend. He threatens them and drives them away, saying how she now lives in luxury in his quarters and does not have to work. The prince returns to his rooms having sent for wine for his followers. The gudok [a primitive fiddle] players and the prince's followers mock the women. They wonder what might happen if Yaroslavna hears of what happens, but then realise she would be helpless with all her men gone to war. They sing of how they are all drunkards and are supported by Galitsky. The men decide to go to the town square to declare Galitsky the Prince of Putivl, leaving just the two drunk musicians behind.

Scene 2: A room in Yaroslavna's palace

Yaroslavna is alone worrying about why she has not heard from Igor and his companions (*Yaroslavna's Arioso*). She sings of her tearful nights and nightmares and reminisces about when she was happy with Igor by her side. The nurse brings in the young women who tell Yaroslavna of their abducted friend. They are reluctant at first to reveal the culprit but eventually name Galitsky and talk of how he and his drunken followers cause trouble around Putivl. Galitsky enters and the women run away. Yaroslavna questions him as to the truth of their story and he mocks her saying she should treat him as a guest in her house. She threatens him with what Igor will do on his return, but Galitsky replies that he can seize the throne whenever he wants. Yaroslavna accuses him of repeating the betrayal that he carried out against their father, but he replies that he was only joking and asks if she has a lover now her husband is away. She threatens him with sending him back to their father. He replies that he will return the girl but will take another later and leaves. The council of boyars arrive to inform Yaroslavna that the Polovtsy under Khan Gzak are about to attack Putivl. Igor's army has been utterly destroyed and he has been wounded and captured with his son and brother. After a moment of faintness, Yaroslavna orders messengers sent to the city's allies, but the Boyars report that the roads are cut, some towns are in revolt and their princes will be captured. The Boyars say that they will organise the defence but Galitsky returns with his followers to demand that a new Prince be chosen. His retinue say it should be him as he is Yaroslavna's brother and Igor's brother-in-law. The boyars refuse. The argument is interrupted by the sight of flames and the sound of crying women. Some of the boyars flee; some join the battle, others guard the Princess. They call the attack God's judgment.

Act 2: *Evening in the Polovtsian Camp*

Polovtsian maidens sing comparing love to a flower that droops in the heat of the day and is revived at night. They dance together (*Dance of the Polovtsian Maidens*). Konchakovna joins in the singing hoping that her own lover will join here soon (*Konchakovna's Cavatina*). The Russian prisoners arrive from their day's work and express their gratitude when fed. Their

guards retire for the night leaving just Ovlur, a Christian, in charge. by Konchakovna and the maidens. Vladimir, son of Igor, sings of his hope that his love will soon join him now that the day is fading (*Vladimir's Cavatina*). His love is Konchakovna. She comes and the two sing of their love and their desire to marry (*Love Duet*). While her father will consent to the marriage, they know that his will not. They part when they hear Igor coming. He sings of his disgrace and torment at being captured with his followers dead (*Prince Igor's Aria*). Only his wife, he feels will be loyal. He hopes for the chance to regain his honour. Ovlur urges Igor to escape and the prince agrees to think about it. Khan Konchak asks him if all is well (*Konchak's Aria*) and he replies that the falcon cannot live in captivity. Konchak says that as Igor did not ask for mercy he is not a prisoner but an honoured guest equal to a Khan. Igor reminds him that he too knows what it is to be a captive. Konchak offers Igor freedom if he will promise not to wage war on him again, but he refuses saying he cannot lie. Konchak regrets that they were not born to be allies. They would then have captured all of Russia. He summons the Polovtsian slaves to entertain Igor and himself and offers Igor his choice of them. As the slaves dance the Polovtsy sing of Konchak's glory (*Polovtsian Dances*).

Act 3

The Polovtsian camp

The Polovtsian army returns in triumph singing the praise of Khan Gzak (*Polovtsian March*). Konchak sings of the sack of Putivl and other victories and confidently predicts that they will soon capture all of Russia. Igor and his son Vladimir have their worst fears confirmed by the new captives. Vladimir and the other prisoners urge Igor to escape, but he is at first reluctant, singing of his shame and saying that it is the duty of the other Russian princes to save the homeland (*Igor's Monologue*, Mariinsky edition only). Ovlur now arrives to say that he has prepared horses for Igor and Vladimir and Igor now agrees to escape. The distressed Konchakovna comes, challenging Vladimir to show his love by either taking her with him or by staying. Igor urges his son to come, but Vladimir feels unable to leave Konchakovna who threatens to wake the camp. Eventually Igor flees alone and Konchakovna sounds the alarm. She and her father refuse to let the Polovtsy kill Vladimir. Instead Konchak orders the death of the guards and marries Vladimir to his daughter. As for Igor, Konchak thinks more of him for his escape.

Act 4: Dawn in Putivl

Yaroslavna weeps at her separation from Igor and the defeat of his army, blaming the very elements themselves for helping the enemy (*Yaroslavna's Lament*). Peasant women blame not the wind but Khan Gzak for the devastation. As Yaroslavna looks around to acknowledge the destruction, she sees two riders in the distance who turn out to be Igor and Ovlur. The two lovers sing of their joy of being reunited and of the expectation that Ivan will lead the Russians to victory against the Khan. Unaware of Igor's return, Skula and Yeroshka, the drunken gudok players, sing a song that mocks him. Then they notice him in the distance. After a moment of panic about what will happen to them, Skula says that they should rely on

their cunning and decides on a plan that will save them. They ring the church bells to summon a crowd. Although people at first treat them with suspicion, the gudok players manage to convince the crowd that Igor has returned and the boyars that they are loyal followers of the true prince and not Galitsky. All joyously celebrate Igor's return.

Un ballo in maschera (A Masked Ball) is an 1859 opera in three acts by Giuseppe Verdi. The text by Antonio Somma was based on Eugène Scribe's libretto for Daniel Auber's 1833 five act opera, *Gustave III, ou Le bal masqué*.

The plot concerns the assassination in 1792 of King Gustav III of Sweden who was killed as the result of a political conspiracy against him. He was shot while attending a masked ball and died of his wounds thirteen days later.

It was to take over two years between the time of the commission from Naples and planned for a production there and its premiere performance at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on 17 February 1859. In order to become the *Un ballo in maschera* which we know today, Verdi's opera (and his libretto) was forced to undergo a significant series of transformations and title changes. Based on the Scribe libretto and begun as *Gustavo III* set in Stockholm, it became *Una vendetta in domino* set in Stettin, and finally *Un ballo in maschera* set in Boston during the colonial era. These changes were caused by a combination of censorship regulations in both Naples and Rome, as well as by the political situation in France in January 1858. It became one of the most frustrating experiences of Verdi's career.

From the mid-20th century, it has become more common for the setting to revert to its original 18th-century Stockholm location. A re-creation of the original *Gustavo III* has been staged in Sweden.

Synopsis

Place: Stockholm, Sweden or Boston Massachusetts.

Time: March 1792 in Sweden or the end of the 17th century in Boston.

Act 1

Scene 1: A public audience at Riccardo's palace, attended by his supporters, but also by his enemies who hope for his downfall

Riccardo (Gustavo) reviews the list of guests who will attend an upcoming masked ball. He is elated to see the name of the woman he loves on the list – Amelia, the wife of his friend and advisor, Renato (Count Anckarström). (Aria: *La rivedrà nell'estasi* / "There I will be in ecstasy to see her again"). When Renato arrives, he tries to warn Riccardo about the growing conspiracy against him (aria: *Alla vita che t'arride* / "Your life, so full of joy and hope"), but Riccardo refuses to listen to his words.

Next, Riccardo is presented with a complaint against a fortune-teller named Ulrica (Madame Arvidson), accused of witchcraft. A magistrate calls for her banishment, but Oscar the page defends her (Aria: *Volta la terrea* / "Turning her eyes from the earth"). Riccardo resolves to investigate for himself and tells the members of the court to disguise themselves and to meet him at Ulrica's lodging later that day.

Scene 2: At Ulrica's dwelling

Ulrica summons her magical powers: *Re dell'abisso, affrettati* / "King of the abyss, make haste". Disguised as a fisherman, Riccardo arrives before the others. He makes the fortune of a sailor named Silvano come true by spiriting a document of promotion into his pouch, convincing the crowd of the truth of Ulrica's powers. When he realizes that Amelia is coming to see Ulrica, he hides and watches. Alone with Ulrica, Amelia confesses that she is

tormented by her love for Riccardo, and asks for a means to bring peace to her heart. Ulrica tells her to gather a certain herb with magical powers; Riccardo resolves to be there when she does so. Amelia leaves.

Now Riccardo presents himself again, along with all of the courtiers, and asks to have his fortune told. (Aria: *Di' tu se fedele* / "Tell me if the sea awaits me faithfully"). Ulrica reveals that he will be killed by the next man who shakes his hand. He laughingly dismisses her prophecy and offers his hand to the courtiers, who refuse to take it. Renato arrives and shakes Riccardo's hand in greeting. Riccardo's true identity is now revealed and he is acclaimed by the people.

Act 2

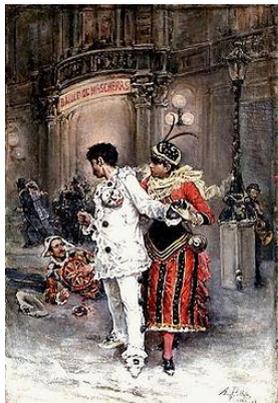
On the outskirts of the town, at the gallows-place. Midnight

Amelia, conquering her fears, has come here alone to pick the herb of which Ulrica told her (Aria: *Ma dall'arido stelo divulsa* / "But when I have plucked the herb"). She is surprised by Riccardo, who has come to meet her, and the two finally declare their love for each other.

Unexpectedly, Renato arrives, and Amelia covers her face with her veil before he can recognize her. Renato explains to Riccardo that the conspirators are pursuing him, and his life is in danger. Riccardo leaves, making Renato promise to escort the veiled woman safely back to town, not asking her identity. When the conspirators arrive, they confront Renato; in the struggle, Amelia's veil drops. Renato assumes that Amelia and Riccardo have been involved in an adulterous love affair. He asks the two leaders of the conspiracy, Samuel and Tom, to meet him the next day.

Act 3

Scene 1: Renato's house



Death of Gustavo, act 3, sc. 2, by August Pollak

Renato has resolved to kill Amelia for the dishonour she has brought on him. She protests her innocence and begs to see her son one last time. (Aria: *Morrò, ma prima in grazia* / "I will die, but first, a kindness"). Renato relents, and declares that it is Riccardo, not Amelia, who deserves to die (Aria: *Eri tu che macchiavi quell'anima* / "You were the one who stained her soul").

Samuel (Count Ribbing) and Tom (Count Horn) arrive, and Renato asks to join their plot, pledging the life of his son as proof of his sincerity. They agree to draw lots to decide who will kill Riccardo. Amelia is forced to draw the winning name – Renato.

Oscar, the page, arrives with invitations to the masked ball; Samuel, Tom and Renato agree that this is where the assassination will take place.

Scene 2: The ball

Riccardo, torn between love and duty, has resolved to renounce his love for Amelia and send her and Renato back to England (Aria: *Ma se m'è forza perderti* / "But if I am forced to lose her").

At the ball, Renato tries to learn from Oscar what costume Riccardo is wearing. Oscar at first refuses to tell (Aria: *Saper vorreste* / "You want to know"), but he finally answers: a black cloak and a red ribbon. Riccardo manages to identify Amelia and tells her of the decision he has made. As they say goodbye, Renato stabs Riccardo. The wounded Riccardo discloses that though he loved Amelia, she never broke her marriage vows. He pardons all the conspirators, bidding farewell to his friends and his country as he dies.

Arabella, Op. 79, is a lyric comedy, or opera, in three acts by Richard Strauss to a German libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, their sixth and last operatic collaboration.

It was first performed on 1 July 1933 at the Dresden Sächsisches Staatstheater. The opera received its premiere in the UK on 17 May 1934 at London's Royal Opera House. Two decades later, on 10 February 1955, it was performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York with Eleanor Steber in the title role. The Met has given 58 performances of the work since that date. In 2008, the production by Opera Australia won the Helpmann Award for Best Opera. Productions since 2012 have included performances in Vienna, Tokyo, Paris, Salzburg, Nuremberg, Hamburg, Budapest, Amsterdam, Santa Fe Opera, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, and San Francisco.

Synopsis

Time: 1860s

Place: Vienna

Act 1: *In a hotel in Vienna*

As the curtain opens, Countess Adelaide is having her fortune told. The fortune teller predicts Arabella will marry a man from far away, but that trouble may be in store. The Waldners have a second daughter, Zdenka, but since they cannot afford two daughters marrying, they have indulged her tomboyishness by pretending she is a boy, whom they present as "Zdenko." Zdenka secretly loves Matteo, a penniless officer who loves Arabella. To prevent him from committing suicide, Zdenka writes him love letters she signs with Arabella's name. Zdenka reproaches Arabella for her unsympathetic treatment of Matteo, but Arabella says that she is hoping for the "Right Man," to whom she can give her heart completely. Meanwhile, Arabella is wooed by three suitors, Elemer, Dominik and Lamoral, and acknowledges that she may have to accept one of them, but has fallen in love at first sight with a stranger she passed in the street.

Count Waldner, in dire straits, has written to all his friends for financial help, to no avail. He was hopeful for an answer from an old and immensely wealthy Croatian friend of his, Mandryka, even sending him a portrait of Arabella in hopes of a marriage. A visitor announced as Mandryka arrives and Waldner is surprised to see that it is not his friend. The man explains he is Mandryka's nephew, also named Mandryka. His uncle is dead, and as his only heir, he has acquired his fortune; he also received the letter and portrait. From seeing the portrait, he has fallen in love with Arabella. He offers to marry her and gives Waldner money.

A carnival ball is to be held that night. Matteo asks "Zdenko," his supposedly male friend, when he will receive another letter from Arabella; "Zdenko" answers that he will have one that very evening at the ball. Arabella continues to muse about the strange man she noticed, but when Count Elemer arrives to be her escort for the evening, she tries to banish these thoughts and look forward to the excitement of the Fasching.

Act 2: In a ballroom [The Coachman's Ball]

Arabella meets Mandryka, who turns out to be her fascinating stranger. Mandryka tells her about his life and his country's customs, in which young women offer their fiancés a glass of water as a token of agreeing to be married. Mandryka tells Arabella that she will be mistress of all the things he owns, and that she will be the only thing ranked above him besides the Emperor himself; Arabella happily agrees to marry him, saying, "I give myself to you, for eternity." Then Mandryka agrees to Arabella's request that she be allowed to stay for another hour to say farewell to her girlhood, during which she thanks her suitors for their interest in her and bids them goodbye.

Meanwhile, Zdenka gives Matteo a letter with the key to the room next to Arabella's, saying that it is Arabella's room and promising that Arabella will meet him there that night. Mandryka overhears this conversation and, mad with jealousy and disappointment (after first trying to evade these feelings), raises a commotion, flirting with the Fiakermilli, the ball's mascot. Since Arabella is nowhere to be found, the Waldners insist that he meet Arabella to talk things out, and they head for the hotel.

Act 3: A lobby in the hotel

A passionate orchestral prelude depicts the lovemaking of Matteo and Zdenka.

Arabella enters the lobby and comes across Matteo. As Matteo is in love with Arabella and thinks it is she with whom he has just made love in a darkened room, their conversation is at once confused and emotional. The Count, the Countess, and Mandryka arrive and further the misunderstanding. After Mandryka accuses Arabella of infidelity and plans to go back to his land, Zdenka rushes in, no longer in disguise and in her negligee (making it clear that it was she who had the encounter with Matteo). She declares her intention to drown herself in disgrace. The situation is finally cleared up. Matteo learns that the letters were forged by Zdenka and that it was she and not Arabella in the room. He suddenly realizes he is in love with Zdenka, whom he agrees to marry. Mandryka begs forgiveness, and Arabella tells him they will think no more of the night's events. Arabella asks his servant to bring her a glass of water, and Mandryka thinks she has requested it for her refreshment. Arabella goes upstairs and Mandryka, ruminating on his indecorous behaviour and blaming himself, stays downstairs. Arabella comes down the stairs and, seeing that he has stayed and having forgiven him, offers him the glass of water, signifying reconciliation and marriage. They happily kiss and Arabella goes up the stairs to her room.