

## Operas for April 2019

3 April	R Strauss	Elektra
10	G Verdi	Il Trovatore
17	P Tchaikovsky	Eugene Onegin
24	R Strauss	Daphne

### **Elektra** **Richard Strauss**

Elektra, Op. 58, is a one-act opera by Richard Strauss, to a German-language libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, which he adapted from his 1903 drama Elektra. The opera was the first of many collaborations between Strauss and Hofmannsthal. It was first performed at the Königliches Opernhaus [Semper Opera House Dresden] on 25 January 1909. It was dedicated to his friends Natalie and Willy Levin.

While based on ancient Greek mythology, the opera is highly modernist and expressionist in style. Hofmannsthal and Strauss's adaptation of the story focuses tightly on Elektra, thoroughly developing her character by single-mindedly expressing her emotions and psychology as she meets with other characters, mostly one at a time. The other characters are Klytaemnestra, her mother and one of the murderers of her father Agamemnon; her sister, Chrysothemis; her brother, Orestes; and Klytaemnestra's lover, Aegisthus.

Various aspects from the myth are minimized as background to Elektra's character and her obsession. Other facets of the ancient story are completely excluded, in particular the earlier sacrifice by Agamemnon of his and Klytaemnestra's daughter Iphigenia, which was the motivation for Klytaemnestra's subsequent murder of Agamemnon. These changes tightened the focus on Elektra's furious lust for revenge. The result is a very modern, expressionistic retelling of the ancient Greek myth. Compared to Sophocles' Electra, the opera presents raw, brutal, violent, and bloodthirsty horror.

Elektra is the second of Strauss's two highly modernist operas (the other being Salome), characterized by cacophonous sections and atonal leitmotifs. These works contrast highly with his earliest operas and his later period. The reception of Elektra in German-speaking countries was mostly divided along traditionalist and modernist lines

### **Synopsis**

**Prologue:** King Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, before he sets out to Troy to wage war. His wife, Klytaemnestra, grows in hatred of him and is determined to kill him upon his return. When he comes home from war, she murders him with the help of Aegisth, her lover. However, Klytaemnestra becomes weary for her safety, fearing that her three living children (Elektra, Chrysothemis, and Orest) will avenge their father's death.

### **ACT**

As five servants clean the palace courtyard, they gossip about Elektra's state of being - since her father's death, she has become wild and unpredictable. Elektra emerges from the shadows hurling a few insults and the servants take their leave.

Alone, Elektra prays to her father, swearing vengeance. It was in the courtyard where her mother and Aegisth dragged the lifeless body of her father whom they had murdered moments before while he took his bath. Elektra's younger sister, Chrysothemis, interrupts her prayer, begging that she give up her obsession with revenge. She wants them to lead normal,

happy lives, and enjoy the benefits of being princesses. The girls are startled when they hear the sound of their approaching mother. Chrysothemis quickly departs, but Elektra remains.

Klytaemnestra, a visible wreck, reeking of paranoia, asks Elektra for help. She wants to make another sacrifice to appease the gods, hoping they will grant her peace in return. Elektra tells her mother to sacrifice an impure woman. When Klytaemnestra asks for a name, Elektra shouts, "Klytaemnestra!" Elektra swears that she and her banished brother, Orest, will kill her and put an end to her maddening dreams - only then will she find the peace she so desperately seeks.

Klytaemnestra begins to cower in fear, that is, until her servant and confidante approach her and whisper in her ear. After they finish speaking, Klytaemnestra bursts into demented laughter. Chrysothemis returns bearing bad news. Orest has been killed. Elektra demands the Chrysothemis help her kill their mother and Aegisth, but Chrysothemis cannot commit. She runs away.

Left alone in the courtyard, Elektra starts digging frantically into the earth in search of the ax that was used to murder her father. As she digs, a cloaked man enters seeking Klytaemnestra and Aegisth. He tells Elektra that he has come to deliver news of Orest's death. Elektra tells the stranger her name, and he whispers to her that Orest is actually alive. Elektra, overcome with emotion, begins to tell the stranger where he may find her mother. He interrupts her and mocks her for not recognizing her own brother. She collapses into his arms and the two are happy to be reunited.

Their reunion is but a moment long as Klytaemnestra calls out to Orest. The servants notified her immediately upon his arrival. Elektra waits in the courtyard as Orest enters the palace. It isn't long until a scream is heard. Elektra smiles brightly, knowing that Orest has killed his mother. Aegisth rushes into the courtyard and Elektra happily ushers him inside the palace. He, too, is quickly murdered.

Elektra can finally let go of the hatred she has held on to for so long. She thanks the gods and begins to dance for joy. At the apex of her dance, she falls to the ground and breathes out her last breath.

## **Il Trovatore                  Verdi**

Il trovatore (Italian for "The Troubadour") is an opera in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi to an Italian libretto largely written by Salvatore Cammarano, based on the play *El trovador* (1836) by Antonio García Gutiérrez. It was Gutiérrez's most successful play, one which Verdi scholar Julian Budden describes as "a high flown, sprawling melodrama flamboyantly defiant of the Aristotelian unities, packed with all manner of fantastic and bizarre incident."

The premiere took place at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on 19 January 1853, where it "began a victorious march throughout the operatic world," a success due to Verdi's work over the previous three years. It began with his January 1850 approach to Cammarano with the idea of *Il trovatore*. There followed, slowly and with interruptions, the preparation of the libretto, first by Cammarano until his death in mid-1852 and then with the young librettist Leone Emanuele Bardare, which gave the composer the opportunity to propose significant revisions, which were accomplished under his direction. These revisions are seen largely in the expansion of the role of Leonora.

For Verdi, the three years were filled with operatic activity because work on this opera did not proceed while the composer wrote and premiered *Rigoletto* in Venice in March 1851 and also while his personal affairs limited his activities. Then, in May 1851, an additional commission was offered by the Venice company after *Rigoletto*'s success there. Another commission came from Paris while he was visiting that city from late 1851 and into March 1852. Therefore, even before the libretto for *Il trovatore* was ever completed, before the music was written, and before the opera premiered, Verdi had a total of four different operatic projects underway and in various stages of development.

Today, *Il Trovatore* is performed frequently and is a staple of the standard operatic repertoire.

### Cast

Count di Luna, a nobleman in the service of the Prince of Aragon	baritone
Manrico, a troubadour and officer in the army of the Prince of Urgel	tenor
Azucena, a gypsy, supposedly Manrico's mother	mezzo-soprano
Leonora, noble lady, in love with Manrico and courted by Di Luna	soprano
Ferrando, Luna's officer	bass
Ines, Leonora's confidante	soprano
Ruiz, Manrico's henchman	tenor
An old gypsy	bass
A messenger	tenor

### Synopsis

Place: Biscay and Aragon (Spain): Time: Fifteenth century.

### Act I: The Duel

Scene 1: The guard room in the castle of Luna (The Palace of Aljaferia, Zaragoza, Spain)

Ferrando, the captain of the guards, orders his men to keep watch while Count di Luna wanders restlessly beneath the windows of Leonora, lady-in-waiting to the Princess. Di Luna loves Leonora, and is jealous of his successful rival, the troubadour Manrico. In order to keep the guards awake, Ferrando narrates the history of the count to the guard. (Aria: *Di due figli vivea padre beato* / "The good Count di Luna lived happily, the father of two sons"). It appears that a gypsy had once bewitched the little brother of the count, making the child weak and ill, and for this had been burnt alive as a witch. Dying, she had commanded her daughter Azucena to avenge her, which she did by carrying off the younger brother. Although the burnt bones of a child were found in the ashes of the pyre, the father refused to believe in his son's death; dying, he commanded Count di Luna to seek Azucena.

### Scene 2: Garden in the palace of the princess

Leonora confesses her love for Manrico to her confidante, Ines. (*Tacea la notte placida* / "The peaceful night lay silent"... *Di tale amor* / "A love that words can scarcely describe"). When they have gone, Count di Luna hears the voice of his rival, Manrico, in the distance: (*Deserto sulla terra* / "Alone upon this earth"). While Leonora in the darkness mistakes the count for her lover, Manrico himself enters the garden, and she rushes to his arms. The count recognises Manrico as his enemy, who has been condemned to death, and compels him to fight. Leonora tries to intervene, but cannot stop them from fighting (*Trio: Di geloso amor sprezzato* / "The fire of jealous love" ).

## **Act 2: The Gypsy Woman: Scene 1: The gypsies' camp**

While Manrico sits at the bedside of his mother, Azucena, the gypsies sing the Anvil Chorus: *Vedi le fosche notturne* / "See! The endless sky casts off her sombre nightly garb.."). She is the daughter of the Gypsy burnt by the count and, although old, still nurses her vengeance. (Aria: *Stride la vampa* / "The flames are roaring!"). The Gypsies break camp while Azucena confesses to Manrico that after stealing him she had intended to burn the count's little son, but had thrown her own child into the flames instead (Aria: *Condotta ell'era in ceppi* / "They dragged her in bonds"). Manrico realises that he is not the son of Azucena, but loves her as if she were indeed his mother, as she has always been faithful and loving to him. Manrico tells Azucena that he defeated Di Luna in their duel, but was held back from killing him by a mysterious power (Duet: *Mal reggendo* / "He was helpless under my savage attack"). A messenger arrives and reports that Leonora, who believes Manrico dead, is about to enter a convent and take the veil that night. Although Azucena tries to prevent him from leaving in his weak state (*Ferma! Son io che parlo a te!* / "I must talk to you"), Manrico rushes away to prevent her from carrying out this purpose.

### **Scene 2: In front of the convent**

Di Luna and his attendants intend to abduct Leonora and the Count sings of his love for her (Aria: *Il balen del suo sorriso* / "The light of her smile" ... *Per me ora fatale* / "Fatal hour of my life"). Leonora and the nuns appear in procession, but Manrico prevents Di Luna from carrying out his plans and instead, takes Leonora away with him.

## **Act 3: The Son of the Gypsy Woman: Scene 1: Di Luna's camp**

(Chorus: *Or co' dadì ma fra poco* / "Now we play at dice") Di Luna's soldiers bring in the captured Azucena. She is recognised by Ferrando, and Di Luna sentences her to be burnt.

### **Scene 2: A chamber in the castle**

Leonora and Manrico live only for each other. (Aria, Manrico: *Ah si, ben mio coll'essere* / "Ah, yes, my love, in being yours"). As they are about to take their marriage vows, Ruiz, Manrico's comrade, reports that Azucena is to be burned at the stake. Manrico rushes to her aid (*Stretta: Di quella pira l'orrendo foco* / "The horrid flames of that pyre"). Leonora faints.

## **Act 4: The Punishment: Scene 1: Before the dungeon keep**

Leonora attempts to free Manrico, who has been captured by Di Luna (Aria: *D'amor sull'ali rosee* / "On the rosy wings of love"; Chorus & Duet: *Miserere* / "Lord, thy mercy on this soul"). Leonora begs Di Luna for mercy and offers herself in place of her lover. She promises to give herself to the count, but secretly swallows poison from her ring in order to die before Di Luna can possess her (Duet: *Mira, d'acerbe lagrime* / "See the bitter tears I shed").

### **Scene 2: In the dungeon**

Manrico and Azucena are awaiting their execution. Manrico attempts to soothe Azucena, whose mind wanders to happier days in the mountains (Duet: *Ai nostri monti ritorneremo* / "Again to our mountains we shall return"). At last the gypsy slumbers. Leonora comes to Manrico and tells him that he is saved, begging him to escape. When he discovers she cannot accompany him, he refuses to leave his prison. He believes Leonora has betrayed him until he realizes that she has taken poison to remain true to him. As she dies in agony in Manrico's arms she confesses that she prefers to die with him than to marry another. (Quartet: *Prima che d'altri vivere* / "Rather than live as another's") The count enters to find Leonora dead in his rival's arms and orders Manrico to be led to execution. Azucena arises and when Di Luna

shows her the dead Manrico, she cries in triumph: Egli era tuo fratello! / "He was your brother..You are avenged, oh mother!" At the same time as Azucena, the count screams in despair E vivo ancor! / "And I must live on!".

### **Eugene Onegin                      Tchaikovsky**

Eugene Onegin (Russian: Евгений Онегин, Yevgény Onégin, IPA: [jɪv'ɟʲenʲɪj ɐ'nʲeɟʲɪn]), Op. 24, is an opera ("lyrical scenes") in 3 acts (7 scenes), composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. The libretto, organised by the composer himself, very closely follows certain passages in Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse, retaining much of his poetry. Tchaikovsky's friend Konstantin Shilovsky contributed M. Triquet's verses in Act 2, Scene 1, while Tchaikovsky himself arranged the text for Lensky's arioso in Act 1, Scene 1, and almost all of Prince Gremin's aria in Act 3, Scene 1.

Eugene Onegin is a well-known example of lyric opera, to which Tchaikovsky added music of a dramatic nature. The story concerns a selfish hero who lives to regret his blasé rejection of a young woman's love and his careless incitement of a fatal duel with his best friend.

The opera was first performed in Moscow in 1879.

#### **Synopsis**

Time: The 1820s: Place: St Petersburg and surrounding countryside

#### **Act 1: Scene 1: The garden of the Larin country estate**

Madame Larina and the nurse Filippyevna are sitting outside in the garden. They can hear Madame Larina's two daughters, Tatyana and her younger sister Olga, singing a love song. Madame Larina begins to reminisce about her own courtship and marriage. A group of peasants enter, and celebrate the harvest with songs and dances. Tatyana and Olga watch. Tatyana has been reading a romantic novel and is absorbed by the story; her carefree sister, on the other hand, wants to join in the celebrations. Madame Larina tells Tatyana that real life is very different from her novels. Filippyevna announces that visitors have arrived: Olga's fiancé Lensky, a young poet, and his friend Eugene Onegin, visiting the area from St Petersburg. The pair are shown in and Lensky introduces Onegin to the Larin family. Onegin is initially surprised that Lensky has chosen the extrovert Olga rather than her more subtle elder sister as his fiancée. Tatyana for her part is immediately and strongly attracted to Onegin. Lensky expresses his delight at seeing Olga and she responds flirtatiously. Onegin tells Tatyana of his boredom in the country and describes the death of his uncle and his subsequent inheritance of a nearby estate. Filippyevna recognizes that Onegin has had a profound effect on Tatyana.

#### **Scene 2: Tatyana's room**

Tatyana is dressed for bed. Restless and unable to sleep, she asks her nurse Filippyevna to tell her about her youth and early marriage. Tatyana confesses that she is in love. Left alone, Tatyana pours out her feelings in a letter to Onegin. She tells him that she loves him and believes that she will never feel this way about anyone else, and begs him to understand and help her. She finishes writing the letter at dawn. A shepherd's pipe is heard in the distance. Filippyevna enters the room to wake Tatyana. Tatyana persuades her to send her grandson to deliver the letter to Onegin.

### **Scene 3: Another part of the estate**

Servant girls pick fruit and sing as they work. Tatyana waits anxiously for Onegin's arrival. Onegin enters to see Tatyana and give her his answer to her letter. He explains, not unkindly, that he is not a man who loves easily and is unsuited to marriage. He is unworthy of her love and can only offer her brotherly affection. He warns Tatyana to be less emotionally open in the future. The voices of the servant girls singing are heard again. Tatyana is crushed and unable to reply.

### **Act 2: Scene 1: The ballroom of the Larin house**

A ball is being given in honour of Tatyana, whose name day it is. Onegin is dancing with her. He grows irritated with a group of neighbours who gossip about him and Tatyana, and with Lensky for persuading him to come to the ball. He decides to avenge himself by dancing and flirting with Olga. Lensky is astounded and becomes extremely jealous. He confronts Olga but she cannot see that she has done anything wrong and tells Lensky not to be ridiculous. Onegin asks Olga to dance with him again and she agrees, as "punishment" for Lensky's jealousy. The elderly French tutor Monsieur Triquet sings some couplets in honour of Tatyana, after which the quarrel between Lensky and Onegin becomes more intense. Lensky renounces his friendship with Onegin in front of all the guests, and challenges Onegin to a duel, which the latter is forced, with many misgivings, to accept. Tatyana collapses and the ball ends in confusion.

### **Scene 2: On the banks of a wooded stream, early morning**

Lensky is waiting for Onegin with his second Zaretsky. Lensky reflects on his life, his fear of death and his love for Olga. Onegin arrives with his manservant Guillot. Both Lensky and Onegin are reluctant to go ahead with the duel, reflecting on the senselessness of their sudden enmity. But it is too late; neither man has the courage to stop the duel. Zaretsky gives them the signal and Onegin shoots Lensky dead.

### **Act 3: Scene 1: The house of a rich nobleman in St Petersburg**

Five years have passed, during which Onegin has travelled extensively around Europe. Standing alone at a ball, he reflects on the emptiness of his life and his remorse over the death of Lensky. Prince Gremin enters with Tatyana, his wife, now a grand, aristocratic beauty. She is greeted by many of the guests with great deference. Onegin is taken aback when he sees Tatyana, and deeply impressed by her beauty and noble bearing. Tatyana, in turn, is overwhelmed with emotion when she recognizes him, but tries to suppress it. Gremin tells Onegin about his great happiness and love for Tatyana, and re-introduces Onegin to his wife. Onegin, suddenly injected with new life, realizes that he is in love with Tatyana. He determines to write to her and arrange a meeting.

### **Scene 2: A room in Prince Gremin's house**

Tatyana has received Onegin's letter, which has stirred up the passion she felt for him as a young girl and disturbed her. Onegin enters. Tatyana recalls her earlier feelings and asks why Onegin is pursuing her now. Is it because of her social position? Onegin denies any cynical motivation: his passion is real and overwhelming. Tatyana, moved to tears, reflects how near they once were to happiness but nevertheless asks him to leave. He asks her to have pity. Tatyana admits she still loves Onegin, but asserts that their union can never be realized, as she is now married, and determined to remain faithful to her husband despite her true

feelings. Onegin implores her to relent, but she bids him farewell forever, leaving him alone and in despair.

### **Daphne**                      **R Strauss**

Daphne, Op. 82, is an opera in one act by Richard Strauss, subtitled "Bucolic Tragedy in One Act". The German libretto was by Joseph Gregor. The opera is based loosely on the mythological figure Daphne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and includes elements taken from *The Bacchae* by Euripides. The opera premiered at the Semperoper in Dresden on 15 October 1938, originally intended as a double bill with Strauss' *Friedenstag*, but as the scale of *Daphne* grew, that idea was abandoned. The conductor of the first performance was Karl Böhm, to whom the opera was dedicated.

#### **Synopsis**

The chaste girl Daphne sings a hymn of praise to nature. She loves the sunlight as trees and flowers do, but she has no interest in human romance. She cannot return the love of her childhood friend Leukippos, and she refuses to put on the ceremonial clothes for the coming festival of Dionysos, leaving Leukippos with the dress she has rejected.

Daphne's father Peneios tells his friends he is certain that the gods will soon return among men. He advises preparing a feast to welcome Apollo. Just then a mysterious herdsman appears. Peneios sends for Daphne to care for the visitor.

The strange herdsman tells Daphne that he has watched her from his chariot, and repeats to her phrases from the hymn to nature she sang earlier. He promises her that she need never be parted from the sun, and she accepts his embrace. But when he begins to speak of love she becomes fearful and runs out.

At the festival of Dionysos, Leukippos is among the women wearing Daphne's dress, and he invites her to dance. Believing him to be a woman she agrees, but the strange herdsman stops the dance with a thunderclap and says she has been deceived. Daphne answers that both Leukippos and the stranger are in disguise, and the stranger reveals himself as the sun-god Apollo. Daphne refuses both her suitors, and Apollo pierces Leukippos with an arrow.

Daphne mourns with the dying Leukippos. Apollo is filled with regret. He asks Zeus to give Daphne new life in the form of one of the trees she loves. Daphne is transformed, and she rejoices in her union with nature. This transformation scene, the metamorphosis, is opulently silvery in the string section.