

OPERAS FOR MARCH 2020

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Ariadne auf Naxos: Composer: Richard Strauss Librettist: Hugo von Hofmannsthal
Ariadne auf Naxos (Ariadne on Naxos), Op. 60, is an opera by Richard Strauss with a German libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Combining slapstick comedy and music, the opera's theme is the competition between high and low art for the public's attention.

A detailed history of its origins and revisions is available here

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariadne_auf_Naxos

PROLOGUE

Vienna, 18th century. In the house of a rich man, preparations are in progress for the performance of a new opera seria, "Ariadne auf Naxos." The major-domo enters to inform the music master that immediately after the opera an Italian comedy will be performed, followed by a fireworks display in the garden. The outraged music master replies that the composer, his young pupil, will never tolerate that, but the major-domo is unimpressed by his objections and leaves. When the composer appears, hoping for a last-minute rehearsal, a disdainful servant tells him that the musicians are still playing dinner music. Suddenly the tenor rushes from his dressing room, arguing with the wigmaker. The prima donna furiously comments on the presence of the comedy troupe and their leading lady, Zerbinetta. In the middle of the confusion, the major-domo returns with an announcement: in order for the fireworks to begin on time, the opera and the comedy are to be performed simultaneously.

General consternation soon gives way to practical reactions. The dancing master suggests cutting the opera's score. The music master persuades the despairing composer to do so, while the two lead singers independently urge him to abridge the other's part. Meanwhile, Zerbinetta gives her troupe a briefing on the opera's plot. Ariadne, they are told, has been abandoned by her lover Theseus on the island of Naxos, where she now waits for death. Zerbinetta, however, claims that all Ariadne really needs is a new lover. When the composer vehemently disagrees, Zerbinetta begins to flirt with him. Suddenly the young man finds new hope. Filled with love and enthusiasm for his work, he passionately declares music the greatest of all the arts ("Musik ist eine heilige Kunst"). But when he catches sight of the comedians, ready to go on stage, he realizes with horror what he has agreed to. He blames the music master for the artistic debacle and runs off.

THE OPERA

The Ariadne myth tells how Prince Theseus of Athens set out for Crete to kill the Minotaur, a creature half man, half bull, who was concealed in a labyrinth. Princess Ariadne of Crete fell in love with Theseus and gave him a ball of thread that enabled him to find his way out of the labyrinth after he had killed the Minotaur. When Theseus left Crete, he took Ariadne with him as his bride. During their voyage home they stopped at the island of Naxos. While

Ariadne was asleep, Theseus slipped away and continued his journey to Athens without her. The opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* begins at this point.

Ariadne is alone in front of her cave. Three nymphs look on and lament her fate. Watching from the wings, the comedians are doubtful whether they will be able to cheer her up. Ariadne recalls her love for Theseus (“Ein Schönes war”), then imagines herself as a chaste girl, awaiting death. Harlekin tries to divert her with a song (“Lieben, Hassen, Hoffen, Zagen”) but Ariadne ignores him. As if in a trance, she resolves to await Hermes, messenger of death. He will take her to another world where everything is pure (“Es gibt ein Reich”). When the comedians’ efforts continue to fail, Zerbinetta finally addresses Ariadne directly (“Grossmächtige Prinzessin!”), woman to woman, explaining to her the human need to change an old love for a new. Insulted, Ariadne leaves. After Zerbinetta has finished her speech, her colleagues leap back onto the scene, competing for her attention. Zerbinetta gives in to Harlekin’s comic protestations of love and the comedians exit.

The nymphs announce the approach of a ship: it carries the young god Bacchus, who has escaped the enchantress Circe. Bacchus’s voice is heard in the distance (“Circe, kannst du mich hören?”) and Ariadne prepares to greet her visitor, whom she thinks must be death at last. When he appears, she at first mistakes him for Theseus come back to her, but he majestically proclaims his godhood. Entranced by her beauty, Bacchus tells her he would sooner see the stars vanish than give her up. Reconciled to a new existence, Ariadne joins Bacchus as they ascend to the heavens. Zerbinetta sneaks in to have the last word: “When a new god comes along, we’re dumbstruck.”

Gloriana, Op. 53, is an opera in three acts by Benjamin Britten to an English libretto by William Plomer, based on Lytton Strachey's 1928 *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History*. The first performance was presented at the Royal Opera House, London, in 1953 during the celebrations of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. *Gloriana* was the name given by the 16th-century poet Edmund Spenser to his character representing Queen Elizabeth I in his poem *The Faerie Queene*. It became the popular name given to Elizabeth I. It is recorded that the troops at Tilbury hailed her with cries of "Gloriana, Gloriana, Gloriana", after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

The opera depicts the relationship between Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, and was composed for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953. Several in the audience of its gala opening were disappointed by the opera, which presents the first Elizabeth as a sympathetic, but flawed, character motivated largely by vanity and desire. The premiere was one of Britten's few critical failures, and the opera was not included in the series of complete Decca recordings conducted by the composer. However, a symphonic suite extracted from the opera by the composer (Opus 53a), which includes the *Courtly Dances*, is often performed as a concert piece.

Roles

Role

Queen Elizabeth I	soprano
Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex	tenor
Frances, Countess of Essex	mezzo-soprano
Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy	baritone

Penelope (Lady Rich) sister to Essex	soprano
Sir Robert Cecil Secretary of the Council	baritone
Sir Walter Raleigh, Captain of the Guard	bass
Henry Cuffe a satellite of Essex	baritone
A Lady-in-Waiting	soprano
A Blind Ballad-Singer	bass
The Recorder of Norwich	bass
A Housewife	mezzo-soprano
The Spirit of the Masque	tenor
The Master of Ceremonies	tenor
The City Crier	baritone
Chorus: citizens, maids of honour, ladies and gentlemen of the household, courtiers, masquers, old men, men and boys of Essex's following, councillors	
Dancers: country girls, fisherman, Morris Dancers	
Actors: pages, ballad-singer's runner, phantom of Queen Elizabeth	
Musicians on the stage: state trumpeters, dance orchestra, pipe and tabor, gittern, drummer	

Synopsis

Time: The late 16th century. Place: England.

Act 1

Scene 1: A tournament

Lord Mountjoy wins a jousting tournament. Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, provokes Mountjoy into fighting with him and is slightly wounded. Queen Elizabeth arrives and scolds the men for their jealousy. She requests that they attend her at court as friends. Mountjoy and Essex make peace and the crowd praise Elizabeth.

Scene 2: The Queen's apartment, Nonsuch Palace

Elizabeth and Cecil discuss the rivalry between Mountjoy and Essex. Cecil warns Elizabeth about the threat of another Armada from Spain and cautions her that it would be dangerous to show too much affection to the impulsive Essex. After Cecil has gone, Essex himself enters and sings to the Queen to take her mind off political problems. He asks her to let him go to Ireland to counter the rebellion led by the Earl of Tyrone. He grows impatient when the Queen shows reluctance, and accuses Cecil and Walter Raleigh of plotting against him. Elizabeth sends him away and prays for strength to rule her people well.

Act 2

Scene 1: Norwich

The Queen, accompanied by Essex, visits Norwich, and talks with the Recorder of Norwich. A masque celebrating Time and Concord is given in her honour.

Scene 2: Essex's house

Essex's sister Lady Penelope Rich meets Mountjoy for an illicit tryst in the garden. Essex and his wife Frances join them, and Essex denounces the Queen for thwarting his plans to go to Ireland. He, Mountjoy and Lady Rich imagine gaining power as the Queen gets older, but Frances urges caution.

Scene 3: The Palace of Whitehall

A ball is in progress at the Palace. Frances, Lady Essex, is wearing a beautifully ornate dress, which is much admired by members of the court. The Queen commands the musicians to play

an energetic melody; the courtiers dance a set of five energetic "Courtly Dances". The ladies retire to change their linen. Lady Essex enters, wearing a plainer dress than before and tells Lady Rich that her original dress has gone missing. The Queen arrives wearing Lady Essex's dress, which is far too short and tight for her. She mocks Lady Essex and withdraws again. Mountjoy, Essex and Lady Rich comfort the humiliated Lady Essex. Essex expresses his fury at the Queen's behaviour, but calms down when Elizabeth returns, in her own clothes. She appoints Essex Lord Deputy of Ireland. Everyone celebrates.

Act 3

Scene 1: Nonsuch Palace

The Queen's maids gossip about Essex's failure to control the Irish rebellion. Essex bursts in and insists on seeing the Queen immediately, even though she is wigless and in her dressing gown. Elizabeth sadly admits to Essex that she is an old woman. She receives him kindly and is initially sympathetic to his troubles, but grows impatient as he complains about his enemies at court. When he has left, her maids dress her and make up her face. Cecil arrives and warns her that the Irish rebels and the hotheaded Essex both pose a threat to her reign. Elizabeth agrees that Essex should be kept under house arrest.

Scene 2: A street in the City of London

A ballad singer recounts Essex's attempts to incite rebellion, while Essex's followers try to gather new recruits. A herald announces that Essex is branded a traitor, and that anyone who supports him will be guilty of treason.

Scene 3: The Palace of Whitehall

Essex has been sent to the Tower of London. Cecil, Raleigh and other councillors try to persuade the Queen to sentence Essex to death, but she is reluctant. Alone, she muses on her continued fondness for Essex. Lady Essex, Lady Rich and Lord Mountjoy arrive to beg for mercy for Essex. The Queen treats the gentle Lady Essex kindly and reassures her that she and her children will not suffer. However, she becomes angry when the proud Lady Rich implies that the Queen needs Essex to rule effectively. Elizabeth refuses to listen to further entreaties and signs Essex's death warrant. Alone again, she reflects on her relationship with Essex and her own mortality.

Fidelio

Fidelio (originally titled *Leonore, oder Der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe*; English: *Leonore, or The Triumph of Marital Love*), Op. 72, is Ludwig van Beethoven's only opera. The German libretto was originally prepared by Joseph Sonnleithner from the French of Jean-Nicolas Bouilly, with the work premiering at Vienna's Theater an der Wien on 20 November 1805. The following year, Stephan von Breuning helped shorten the work from three acts to two. After further work on the libretto by Georg Friedrich Treitschke, a final version was performed at the Kärntnertortheater on 23 May 1814. By convention, both of the first two versions are referred to as *Leonore*.

The libretto, with some spoken dialogue, tells how Leonore, disguised as a prison guard named "Fidelio", rescues her husband Florestan from death in a political prison. Bouilly's scenario fits Beethoven's aesthetic and political outlook: a story of personal sacrifice, heroism, and eventual triumph. With its underlying struggle for liberty and justice mirroring contemporary political movements in Europe, such topics are typical of Beethoven's "middle

period". Notable moments in the opera include the "Prisoners' Chorus" (O welche Lust—"O what a joy"), an ode to freedom sung by a chorus of political prisoners, Florestan's vision of Leonore come as an angel to rescue him, and the scene in which the rescue finally takes place. The finale celebrates Leonore's bravery with alternating contributions of soloists and chorus.

Roles

Florestan, a prisoner	tenor
Leonore, his wife, disguised as a man under the alias Fidelio	soprano
Rocco, gaoler (guard)	bass
Marzeline, his daughter	soprano
Jaquino, assistant to Rocco	tenor
Don Pizarro, governor of the prison	baritone
Don Fernando, King's minister	baritone
Two prisoners:	tenor and bass

Synopsis

Two years prior to the opening scene, the Spanish nobleman Florestan has exposed or attempted to expose certain crimes of a rival nobleman, Pizarro. In revenge, Pizarro has secretly imprisoned Florestan in the prison over which he is governor. Simultaneously, Pizarro has spread false rumours about Florestan's death.

The warden of the prison, Rocco, has a daughter, Marzeline, and an assistant, Jaquino, who is in love with Marzeline. The faithful wife of Florestan, Leonore, suspects that her husband is still alive. Disguised as a boy, under the alias "Fidelio", she gains employment working for Rocco. As the boy Fidelio, she earns the favor of her employer, Rocco, and also the affections of his daughter Marzeline, much to Jaquino's chagrin.

On orders, Rocco has been giving the imprisoned Florestan diminishing rations until he is nearly starved to death.

Place: A Spanish state prison, a few miles from Seville Time: Late 18th century

Act 1

Jaquino and Marzeline are alone in Rocco's house. Jaquino asks Marzeline when she will agree to marry him, but she says that she will never marry him now that she has fallen in love with Fidelio, unaware that Fidelio is actually Leonore in disguise (Jetzt, Schätzchen, jetzt sind wir allein—"Now, darling, now we are alone"). Jaquino leaves, and Marzeline expresses her desire to become Fidelio's wife (O wär ich schon mit dir vereint—"If only I were already united with thee"). Rocco enters, looking for Fidelio, who then enters carrying a heavy load of newly-repaired chains. Rocco compliments Fidelio, and misinterprets her modest reply as hidden attraction to his daughter. Marzeline, Fidelio, Rocco, and Jaquino sing a quartet about the love Marzeline has for Fidelio (Mir ist so wunderbar—"A wondrous feeling fills me", also known as the Canon Quartet).

Rocco tells Fidelio that as soon as the governor has left for Seville, Marzeline and Fidelio can be married. He tells them, however, that unless they have money, they will not be happy. (Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben—"If you don't have any money"). Fidelio demands to know why Rocco will not allow for help in the dungeons, especially as he always seems to return short of breath. Rocco says that there is a dungeon down there where he can never take Fidelio, which houses a man who has been wasting away for two years. Marzeline begs her

father to keep Leonore away from such a terrible sight, but Leonore claims courage sufficient to cope with it. Rocco and Leonore sing of courage (Gut, Söhnchen, gut—"All right, sonny, all right"), and Marzeline joins in their acclamations.

All but Rocco leave. A march is played as Pizarro enters with his guards. Rocco warns Pizarro that the minister plans a surprise visit tomorrow to investigate accusations of Pizarro's cruelty. Pizarro exclaims that he cannot let the minister discover the imprisoned Florestan, who has been thought dead. Instead, Pizarro will have Florestan murdered (Ha, welch ein Augenblick—"Hah! What a moment!"). As a signal, Pizarro orders that a trumpet be sounded at the minister's arrival. He offers Rocco money to kill Florestan, but Rocco refuses (Jetzt, Alter, jetzt hat es Eile!—"Now, old man, we must hurry!"). Pizarro says he will kill Florestan himself instead, and orders Rocco to dig a grave for him in the floor of the dungeon. Once the grave is ready, Rocco is to sound the alarm, upon which Pizarro will come into the dungeon and kill Florestan. Fidelio, hearing Pizarro's plot, is agitated, but hopes to rescue Florestan (Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin? and Komm, Hoffnung, lass den letzten Stern—"Monster! Where are you off to so fast?" and "Come, hope, let the last star").

Jaquino once again begs Marzeline to marry him, but she continues to refuse. Fidelio, hoping to discover Florestan, asks Rocco to let the poor prisoners roam in the garden and enjoy the beautiful weather. Marzeline similarly begs him, and Rocco agrees to distract Pizarro while the prisoners are set free. The prisoners, ecstatic at their temporary freedom, sing joyfully (O welche Lust—"O what a joy"), but remembering that they might be caught by the prison's governor Pizarro, are soon quiet.

After meeting with Pizarro, Rocco reenters and tells Fidelio that Pizarro will allow the marriage, and Fidelio will also be permitted to join Rocco on his rounds in the dungeon (Nun sprecht, wie ging's?—"Speak, how did it go?"). Rocco and Fidelio prepare to go to Florestan's cell, with the knowledge that he must be killed and buried within the hour. Fidelio is shaken; Rocco tries to discourage Fidelio from coming, but Fidelio insists. As they prepare to leave, Jaquino and Marzeline rush in and tell Rocco to run, as Pizarro has learned that the prisoners were allowed to roam, and is furious (Ach, Vater, Vater, eilt!—"O, father, father, hurry!").

Before they can leave, Pizarro enters and demands an explanation. Rocco, thinking quickly, answers that the prisoners were given a little freedom in honor of the Spanish king's name day, and quietly suggests that Pizarro should save his anger for the prisoner in the dungeon below. Pizarro tells him to hurry and dig the grave, and then announces that the prisoners will be locked up again. Rocco, Leonore, Jacquino, and Marzeline reluctantly usher the prisoners back to their cells. (Leb wohl, du warmes Sonnenlicht—"Farewell, you warm sunshine").

Act 2

Florestan is alone in his cell, deep inside the dungeons. He sings first of his trust in God, and then has a vision of his wife Leonore coming to save him (Gott! Welch Dunkel hier!—"God! What darkness here" and In des Lebens Frühlingstagen—"In the spring days of life"). Florestan collapses and falls asleep, while Rocco and Fidelio come to dig his grave. As they dig, Rocco urges Fidelio to hurry (Wie kalt ist es in diesem unterirdischen Gewölbe!—"How cold it is in this underground chamber" and Nur hurtig fort, nur frisch gegraben—"Come get to work and dig", the "Gravedigging Duet").

Florestan awakes and Fidelio recognizes him. When Florestan learns that the prison he is in belongs to Pizarro, he asks that a message be sent to his wife, Leonore, but Rocco says that it is impossible. Florestan begs for a drop to drink, and Rocco tells Fidelio to give him one. Florestan does not recognize Fidelio, his wife Leonore in disguise, but tells Fidelio that there will be reward for the good deed in Heaven (Euch werde Lohn in bessern Welten—"You shall be rewarded in better worlds"). Fidelio further begs Rocco to be allowed to give Florestan a crust of bread, and Rocco consents.

Rocco obeys his orders and sounds the alarm for Pizarro, who appears and asks if all is ready. Rocco says that it is, and instructs Fidelio to leave the dungeon, but Fidelio hides instead. Pizarro reveals his identity to Florestan, who accuses him of murder (Er sterbe! Doch er soll erst wissen—"Let him die! But first he should know"). As Pizarro brandishes a dagger, Fidelio leaps between him and Florestan and reveals her identity as Leonore, the wife of Florestan. Pizarro raises his dagger to kill her, but she pulls a gun and threatens to shoot him. Just then, the trumpet is heard, announcing the arrival of the minister. Jaquino enters, followed by soldiers, to announce that the minister is waiting at the gate. Rocco tells the soldiers to escort Governor Pizarro upstairs. Florestan and Leonore sing to their victory as Pizarro declares that he will have revenge, while Rocco expresses his fear of what is to come (Es schlägt der Rache Stunde—"Revenge's bell tolls"). Together, Florestan and Leonore sing a love duet (O namenlose Freude!—"O unnamed joy!").

The overture to "Leonore No. 3" is often played at this point.

The prisoners and townsfolk sing to the day and hour of justice which has come (Heil sei dem Tag!—"Hail to the day!"). The minister, Don Fernando, announces that tyranny has ended. Rocco enters, with Leonore and Florestan, and he asks Don Fernando to help them (Wohlan, so helfet! Helft den Armen!—"So help! Help the poor ones!"). Rocco explains how Leonore disguised herself as Fidelio to save her husband. Previously in love with Fidelio, Marzelline is shocked. Rocco describes Pizarro's murder plot, and Pizarro is led away to prison. Florestan is released from his chains by Leonore, and the crowd sings the praises of Leonore, the loyal saviour of her husband (Wer ein holdes Weib errungen—"Who has got a good wife").

A detailed summary of its history and performances is available here

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidelio>

Dimitrij Antonín Dvořák

Grand opera in four acts, 1894-5 version, (3h 15m)

Libretto by Marie Červinková-Riegrová, after Friedrich Schiller and Ferdinand Mikovec

Composed 1881 -1882; rev., 1883, 1885, 1894-5

In the territory of grand opera Dvořák, for the first time in the history of Czech national opera, succeeded in overcoming the contradiction between a historical opera and a musical drama. He rose up to the tradition represented by Giacomo Meyerbeer and Richard Wagner having understood the essence of both dramatic types, and having developed freely his individuality in a synthesis of their aesthetic premises. With its immense musical wealth and dramatic power, Dimitrij is Antonín Dvořák's most important stage composition, equalled only by Rusalka.

The plot of Dimitrij is a continuation of the story of Boris Godunov, with four characters in common: Dimitrij (assumed son of Ivan the Terrible who, however, genuinely believes in his claim), the Polish Marina of the princely Sandomir family (now his wife), the Russian Xenie (the daughter of Boris Godunov) and Prince Šujsky [Shuisky], surprisingly now a supporter of Boris, and Dimitrij's chief antagonist.

SYNOPSIS

Moscow: 1605 - 1606

Act I: After Boris's death the people of Moscow are confused and factionalized. In Moscow's square in front of the Kremlin, people gather after the death of Boris Godunov awaiting the naming of the new tsar. In the meantime, the city is approached by the Polish army led by Dimitrij. Some (led by the Patriarch Jov and Šujsky) continue to support the Godunov family; the people and the boyars, who had taken an oath of allegiance to Godunov's children, decide in favour of Dimitrij as soon as commander Basmanov announces that the army has gone over to his side.

Boris's daughter Xenie, escaping the revolting crowd, takes refuge with Šujsky. The triumphant Dimitrij enters Moscow and meets Marfa, the widow of Ivan the Terrible. Marfa is disappointed to find out that he is not her child, but moved by his behaviour and longing for revenge for the wrong she had suffered, she recognizes him publicly as her son.

Act II. –

Scene 1: Dimitrij and Marina's wedding is celebrated in the Kremlin. A dispute breaks out after Marina rejects Dimitrij's request that she become a Russian. In the course of the court ball, a controversy erupts between the Russians and the boisterous Poles which is pacified only after Dimitrij's resolute intervention.

Scene 2: Dimitrij searches for peace at the tomb of Ivan the Terrible, in the vault of Uspenski Cathedral. Xenie is hiding there from the drunken Poles. Dimitrij protects her from molestation. A relationship forms between him and Xenie. After she leaves, the boyars arrive led by Šujsky to ally against Dimitrij. When Šujsky swears that the real Dimitrij has long been dead, Dimitrij emerges in front of the surprised plotters and wins the majority of them over for his side.

Act III: In the throne hall, Dimitrij remembers Xenia. The Patriarch asks the tsar, in front of the assembled court, to intervene against Polish imperiousness. Xenia pleads for mercy for Šujsky who faces execution. Horrified, she recognizes her protector in the tsar. The pardoning of Šujsky fills the Poles with indignation. Driven by jealousy, Marina reveals to Dimitrij his real origin: he had been passed off for the murdered son of Ivan the Terrible since childhood. In an attempt to prevent the further chaos which would follow his resignation, Dimitrij decides to keep the throne and reject Marina. She is crushed by his heroic stance: he repudiates her.

Act IV: In the courtyard of Šujsky's house, Xenia mourns her betrayed love. Dimitrij succeeds in convincing her of the sincerity of his emotions but Xenia holds him responsible for the death of her family and calls on him to live only for the benefit of Russia. Marina takes revenge by having Xenia killed. Caught at the scene of the murder by Šujsky, she reveals Dimitrij's real origin to the astonished people. Šujsky begs Marfa to tell the truth.

Dimitrij himself prevents Marfa from committing perjury Šujsky shoots the false tsar over whose dead body the people pray

For all its resemblance to Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* (the central figure of an impostor, with a crucial mother—son 'recognition' scene in full public gaze, and the generally French grand-opera conventions), there are vital differences between this opera and an actual French opera on the same subject (Joncières's *Dimitri*). In the French opera, there is no Russian-Polish confrontation (most of the plot takes place before Dimitrij gets to Russia); whereas Dvořák uses his double-chorus confrontations to great effect for opposing nationalities, and with surprisingly convincing imitations of Orthodox chant. Joncières's hero is a philandering weakling, a lyric tenor caught between mistresses; Dvořák's Dimitrij is heroic in voice and action and chooses his consorts politically — the Polish Marina discarded for the Russian Xenie. Dvořák's opera unfolds unevenly, but in its dialectic confrontations, particularly that of Marina and Dimitrij in Act 3, and in one of the greatest scenes in all Czech opera, Marfa's hesitation in Act 4, Dvořák shows a handling of dramatic tension that is immensely powerful and unparalleled in his other operas.