

OPERAS FOR OCTOBER 2021

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Stories of the Operas

Die Frau ohne Schatten: [The woman without a shadow] Richard Strauss

Die Frau ohne Schatten (The Woman without a Shadow), Op. 65, is an opera in three acts by Richard Strauss with a libretto by his long-time collaborator, the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal. It was written between 1911 and either 1915 or 1917. When it premiered in Vienna on 10 October 1919, critics and audiences were unenthusiastic. Many cited problems with Hofmannsthal's complicated and heavily symbolic libretto but it is today a part of the standard European repertoire.

For a detailed discussion and performance history see
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Frau_ohne_Schatten

Synopsis

The opera's story is set in the mythical empire of the Southeastern Islands and involves five principal characters: the Emperor (tenor), the Empress (soprano), her Nurse (mezzo-soprano), Barak, a lowly dyer (bass-baritone), and the Dyer's Wife, (dramatic soprano). A sixth character, Keikobad, King of the Spirit Realm and father to the Empress, sets the plot in motion, but never appears on stage. The Empress is half human: she was captured by the Emperor in the form of a gazelle. She assumed human shape and he married her, but she has no shadow. This symbolizes her inability to bear children. Keikobad has decreed that unless the Empress gains a shadow before the end of the twelfth moon, she will be reclaimed by her father and the Emperor will turn to stone.

Act 1: Scene 1: It is dawn, outside the bedchambers of the Emperor and Empress. The Messenger of Keikobad arrives, and tells the Empress's nurse that the Empress must acquire a shadow within three days, or will be forcibly returned to his realm, and the Emperor turned to stone. The Nurse is excited about the prospect of returning to the spirit world, since she hates humans and having to dwell with them. The Messenger leaves and the Emperor emerges from his bedchamber. He departs on a three-day hunting trip, seeking his favourite falcon, which he drove away for attacking a gazelle that later turned into the Empress. He leaves his wife to the Nurse's care. The Empress emerges from her chamber and reminisces about times when she had the ability to turn into any creature she wanted; it is revealed that after being attacked by the red falcon that the Emperor is seeking, she lost a talisman that gave transformation powers, and on which was inscribed a curse that foresaw the fate she and the Emperor are about to face if she does not acquire a shadow. The red falcon appears and warns the Empress that the curse is about to be fulfilled. The Empress begs the Nurse to help her get a shadow. The Nurse, who is steeped in magic, suggests descending to the mortal world and finding a woman who will sell her shadow to the Empress.

Scene 2: Barak, a dyer, shares his hut with his Wife and his three brothers: the One-Eyed Man, the One-Armed Man, and the Hunchback. The three brothers fight about a stolen item and are separated by the Wife, who throws a bucket of water at them. The brothers-in-law then argue with the Wife. Barak enters and stops the argument. The Wife wants to have her in-laws thrown out, but her husband refuses. The Dyer desires children, but his Wife fears the responsibility and has secretly sworn not to have any. The Dyer and his brothers leave, and the Empress and the Nurse arrive in disguise. The Wife wants them out of her house but the Nurse conjures up visions of luxury and promises them to the Wife in return for her shadow. The Wife agrees to deny her husband for three days during which the Nurse and the Empress will live at the Dyer's hut as poor relatives who have come to work as servants. Barak approaches and the Wife is worried that dinner is not ready, the Nurse once more uses her magic to have everything ready, including the splitting of Barak's bed in two. The Nurse and Empress disappear, and the Wife is greatly upset by the offstage Voices of Unborn Children lamenting, which emerge from the fish that are cooking on the fire. The Dyer returns to find he is barred from his marital bed. The Wife curtly informs him of the impending stay of her "cousins" and goes off to her separate bed. From outside the Town Watchmen are heard singing of the importance of conjugal love. Barak sighs and lies down to sleep on the floor.

Act 2: Scene 1: The Empress, acting as a servant, helps the Dyer leave for work, but is troubled by her role, because Barak is very kind to her. The Nurse conjures up the image of a handsome youth by bringing a broom to life, which tempts the Dyer's Wife. The Dyer returns with his hungry brothers and beggar children. He has had a magnificent day at the market, selling all his goods, and has invited everyone to celebrate. However, his Wife manages to ruin the celebration.

Scene 2: The Emperor is led to his hunting lodge in the forest by the red falcon, believing the Empress to be residing there. He sees the Empress and Nurse surreptitiously enter the lodge, and is suspicious. When he comes closer, he smells a human odour trailing the Empress. Thinking she has betrayed him, he resolves to kill her. He first thinks of using an arrow, and then his sword, and then his bare hands. Finally he realizes he can't do it. He resolves to seek out some isolated ravine to be alone with his misery.

Scene 3: At the Dyer's house, the Dyer is drugged into sleep by the Nurse. The Nurse again conjures up the young man for the Wife, who grows frightened and rouses the Dyer. Barak is surprised to learn that there is a man in his house but then is quickly turned on by his Wife, who shouts at him, then leaves for the city, leaving her confused husband. Left alone with Barak, the Empress feels more guilty than before.

Scene 4: The Empress goes to sleep at the hunting lodge, but in her sleep she is further troubled by her crime and by the possible fate of the Emperor. In a dream, she sees the Emperor enter her father's realm. Unseen choruses chant the curse of the talisman. Awakening, she is overcome with guilt and remorse.

Scene 5: The next day, the Wife announces that she has sold her shadow. When a fire reveals that she has no shadow, the enraged Barak is ready to kill her. The Empress cries out that she no longer wants the shadow. A sword appears in the Dyer's hand. His brothers restrain him as the Wife declares her remorse and urges Barak to kill her. An earthquake splits the ground and Barak and his wife are swallowed into the earth. The brothers flee, and the Nurse, recognizing Keikobad's hand, spirits the Empress away.

Act 3: Scene 1: In a grotto beneath the realm of Keikobad, the wife and the Dyer are seen in separate chambers, unaware of the other's presence. The Wife is haunted by the Voices of Unborn Children. She protests that she loves the Dyer, who regrets his attempted violence. A voice directs them up separate staircases.

Scene 2: The Empress and Nurse arrive before Keikobad's Temple. The Nurse tries to convince the Empress to escape but she remembers the doors from her dream and knows that her father is waiting for her on the other side. She dismisses the Nurse and enters. The Nurse foretells terrible tortures awaiting the Empress and misleads the Wife and Barak, who are looking for each other, she to die at her husband's hand, he to forgive her and hold her in his arms. Keikobad's Messenger condemns the Nurse to wander the mortal world.

Scene 3: Inside the Temple, the Empress speaks to Keikobad, asking for forgiveness and to find her place amongst those who cast shadows. Keikobad does not answer but shows the Emperor already almost petrified. The Fountain of Life springs up before the Empress, and a temple guardian urges her to drink from it and claim the Wife's shadow for herself. But the Dyer and the Wife are heard offstage, and the Empress refuses to steal their future happiness and become human by robbing humanity from someone else: "Ich will nicht!" ("I will not!"). This act of renunciation frees her: she receives a shadow, and the Emperor is restored to natural form

Scene 4: The scene changes to a beautiful landscape. Barak and his Wife are reunited and she regains her own shadow. Both couples sing of their humanity and praise their Unborn Children.

'La Perichole' by Offenbach.

Based on a real-life character, one Michaela Villegas, the wild and wayward daughter of José de Villegas, a local commoner in Lima, the capital of Peru, and Teresa Hurtado de Mendoza, heiress of an important Spanish family, the real Perichole was not only an entertainer but also the mistress of the Viceroy of Peru.

She lived between 1748 and 1819 and died a Carmelite sister devoted to good works.

Offenbach's operetta deals with this fascinating woman who owes her name to the nickname given to her Viceregal protector, perra chola; which means Creole Bitch.

In her day, she was a much loved character in Peru and well deserves the fame she achieved 50 years after her death by means of Offenbach's operetta.

That's the background, now to the story.

Act One

La Périchole takes place in Lima, Peru, in the eighteenth century.

In the main square of Lima, outside The Three Cousins tavern, the crowd is celebrating the birthday of Don Andrés de Ribeira, the Viceroy of Peru. Don Pedro de Hinoyosa (Mayor of Lima), Count Miguel de Panatellas (First Gentleman of the Bedchamber), and Don Andrés enter in disguise. Everyone recognizes them but pretends not to. La Périchole and Piquillo, poor young street singers, arrive in the square, trying to raise money for their marriage license. They please the crowd with romantic duets, but some acrobats entice the crowd away before they can collect any money. Piquillo sets off, hoping for better luck elsewhere, while Périchole escapes hunger in sleep.

The Viceroy, enchanted with her beauty, offers her a position as Lady in Waiting at the court as soon as she awakes. Despite her suspicions about what he has in mind, she is persuaded by his offer of banquets and accepts, writing a loving farewell letter to Piquillo. Since all Ladies in Waiting must be married, Don Pedro and Panatellas leave to search for a husband for Périchole. They find Piquillo, who is about to hang himself after reading Périchole's farewell letter. After plenty to drink, Piquillo reluctantly agrees to marry the Viceroy's new favorite, although he does not know who it is. Périchole has also been plied with drink by the Viceroy, but she agrees to the marriage when she recognizes Piquillo. He does not recognize his veiled bride, but he goes through with the marriage after warning her that he is in love with someone else. They are taken to the Viceroy's palace.

The performance tonight is a very famous one and comes from the Metropolitan Opera in New York where the Viceroy and the producer was the famous Australian actor Cyril Richard. Others in the cast were

Périchole..... Patrice Munsel
 Paquillo.....Theodor Uppman
 Andres.....Cyril Ritchard
 Old Prisoner.....Alessio De Paolis
 Guadalupe.....Emilia Cundari
 Estrella.....Madelaine Chambers
 Virginella.....Rosalind Elias
 Pedro.....Osie Hawkins
 Panatellas.....Paul Franke
 Tarapote.....Rudolf Mayreder
 Notary.....Charles Anthony
 Notary.....Calvin Marsh
 Ninetta.....Jean Melatti
 Frasinella.....Florence Holland
 Brambilla.....Dorothy Shawn
 Manuelita.....Gladys Lansing
 Jailer.....Calvin Marsh

The Metropolitan opera chorus & orchestra were conducted by Jean Morel.

Act Two

The Palace

The next morning, four ladies of the court gossip with the Marquis de Tarapote, Chamberlain of the Viceroy, about the Viceroy's new favourite. Piquillo arrives and is astonished to find that he is married to an unknown woman, the new mistress of the Viceroy. He tells the Mayor and First Gentleman that he loves another woman. He demands his payment so that he can go in search of Périchole, but they tell him that he must present his new wife to the Viceroy first. When Périchole appears, resplendent in her new court finery, Piquillo is crushed and throws her to the floor in front of the Viceroy instead of formally presenting her. Don Andres orders him to the dungeon for recalcitrant husbands.

Act Three

First tableau

In the dark and gloomy dungeon, an old prisoner enters through a trap door. After digging through the wall of his cell for twelve years with his tiny pen knife, he has finally emerged, unfortunately into another cell. He retreats to his cell when Don Pedro and Panatellas bring Piquillo in. Piquillo mourns the loss of both his lover and his freedom and eventually falls asleep. Périchole enters, tells Piquillo that she has remained true to him, and they renew their vows. Périchole tries to bribe a jailor, with jewels the Viceroy has given her, to buy Piquillo's freedom, but the jailor is the Viceroy in disguise. He calls the guards, and the lovers are chained to the dungeon wall. But the Viceroy still hopes to win Périchole and tells her to sing if she changes her mind and decides to cooperate. The old prisoner enters through his passage and releases them from the chains. Périchole sings, and when the Viceroy enters, the three prisoners chain him to the wall and escape.

Second tableau

The three fugitives hide in The Three Cousins tavern as the Viceroy and his soldiers search for them in the plaza outside. Périchole and Piquillo, dressed as street performers, plead for their freedom with a ballad about clemency that flatters the Viceroy. He forgives the couple and allows Périchole to keep the jewels he has given her. Meanwhile, the old prisoner has turned out to be the long lost Marquis of Santarém. The Viceroy is happy to pardon him as well (and no one can remember what his original crime was supposed to be), rather than send him back to destroy more walls in prison.

Il segreto di Susanna [Susanna's Secret]: Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari

Il segreto di Susanna (English: Susanna's Secret, German: Susannens Geheimnis) is an intermezzo in one act by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari to an Italian libretto by Enrico Golisciani. The premiere of the opera was in German, in a translation by Max Kalbeck, at the Hoftheater in Munich on 4 December 1909.

Synopsis

Time: Early 20th century

Place: Piedmont

Count Gil returns home suspecting that he has seen his wife, Susanna, walking alone in the street, something he had forbidden her to do after their wedding. He is relieved when he discovers that she is playing the piano in the living room. However, it was the countess whom he had seen but she returned home shortly before her husband.

Gil's happiness is short-lived. The room smells of tobacco, and he is surprised since he does not smoke and neither does Susanna, nor the servant, Sante. Suddenly a horrible thought strikes him: is it possible that Susanna is unfaithful to him with a smoker? He speaks with his wife and is soon ashamed of having such suspicions. Gil wants to hug Susanna, but he notices that the tobacco smell comes from Susanna's clothes. She finally admits to having a secret, but does not want to tell him what it is. Gil becomes angry and starts to turn the house upside-down after she locks herself in her bedroom. Finally, as Gil is leaving the house to go to his club, she brings him his umbrella. He softens, they become reconciled, and he exits.

As soon as he leaves the house, she closes the door and opens the small packet she gave to Sante when she came home. She takes out a cigarette and the two smoke. That is her secret! But while she is smoking with Sante, Gil comes back. Smelling the tobacco he starts to search the house for Susanna's lover on the pretext of looking for the umbrella he forgot. Having no success, Gil furiously goes out again and Susanna lights a second cigarette. Once

more Gil enters and, this time, he is sure that he will catch her in the act. Trying to seize her hand, he gets burned thus finally unveiling her secret. They forgive each other and swear eternal love while smoking together.

The Tsar's Bride

This is Rimsky-Korsakov's 10th opera and although a standard repertoire piece in Russia, it has rarely been performed outside.

It was first staged by the 'Private Opera Society', a company organised and financed by the railway magnate Mamontov. This group flourished between 1885 and 1909 and did much to encourage the composers of Russian operas. Starting at the country estate of Abramtsevo North of Moscow, it was due to move to a newly constructed large hotel / theatre complex in Moscow but financial troubles caused only the hotel to be built [nowadays the upmarket Metropol opposite the Bolshoi Theatre in Theatre Square] and the private opera company eventually disappeared.

The Tsar's Bride (Russian: Царская невеста, tr. Tsarskaya nevesta) is an opera in four acts by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The libretto, by Ilya Tyumenev, is based on the drama of the same name by Lev Mey. Mey's play was first suggested to the composer as an opera subject in 1868 by Mily Balakirev. (Alexander Borodin, too, once toyed with the idea.) However, the opera was not composed until thirty years later, in 1898. The first performance of the opera took place in 1899 at the Moscow theatre of the Private Opera of S.I. Mamontov. Rimsky-Korsakov himself said of the opera that he intended it as a reaction against the ideas of Richard Wagner, and to be in the style of "cantilena par excellence".

The Tsar's Bride is a repertory opera in Russia, although it is not part of the standard operatic repertoire in the West.

Roles

Vasily Stepanovich Sobakin, Novgorodian merchant	bass
Marfa, his daughter	soprano
Grigory Gryaznoy, an oprichnik	baritone
Malyuta Skuratov, an oprichnik	bass
Boyar Ivan Sergeevich Likov	tenor
Lyubasha	mezzo-soprano
Yelisey Bomeliy, the Tsar's physician	tenor
Domna Ivanovna Saburova, a merchant woman	soprano
Dunyasha, her daughter, Marfa's girlfriend	mezzo-soprano
Petrovna, the Sobakins' housekeeper	mezzo-soprano
The Tsar's stoker	bass
A maiden	mezzo-soprano
A young lad	tenor

Chorus, silent roles: Two distinguished horsemen, riders, oprichniki, male and female choristers, dancers, boyars and boyarinyas, maidens, servants, people.

Synopsis

Time: Autumn, 1572

Place: Aleksandrovsky settlement, Moscow, Russia

Act 1: The Feast

The Oprichnik Gryaznoi loves Marfa, daughter of the merchant Sobakin, even though Gryaznoi already has a mistress, Lyubasha, whom he has neglected of late. Marfa is already beloved of the boyar Lykov. In a jealous rage against Lykov, Gryaznoi arranges to cast a spell on Marfa with a magic potion from Bomelius, the Tsar's physician. Lyubasha has overheard Gryaznoi's request.

Act 2: The Love Philtre

Lyubasha in turn obtains from Bomelius another magic potion with which to cancel any feelings of Gryaznoi for Marfa. Bomelius consents, but at the price of an assignation with Lyubasha for himself.

Act 3: The Best Man

In the meantime, the Tsar of the title, Ivan IV (known as "Ivan the Terrible"), is looking for a new bride from the best aristocratic maidens in Russia, through the newly adopted custom of bride-show. The Tsar settles upon Marfa. At the celebration of the engagement of Marfa to Lykov, everyone is surprised when the news arrives of the Tsar's choice of Marfa as his bride. Gryaznoi had slipped what he thought was the love potion from Bomelius into Marfa's drink at the feast.

Act 4: The Bride

At the Tsar's palace, Marfa has become violently ill. Lykov has been executed, at the instigation of Gryaznoi, on charges of attempting to kill Marfa. When Marfa learns that Lykov is dead, she goes insane. Eventually, Gryaznoi admits that he had slipped a potion into her drink, and after learning that it was poisonous, asks that he himself be executed. Lyubasha then confesses that she had substituted her potion from Bomelius for Gryaznoi's. In a rage, Gryaznoi murders Lyubasha, and is then taken to prison eventually to be executed. In her madness, Marfa mistakes Gryaznoi for Lykov, inviting him to return the next day to visit her, then dies.

There is an interesting article here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_Opera

Troilus & Cressida **Walton**

Composition history: The genesis of the opera dated back to the mid-1940s, after the success of Benjamin Britten's first great operatic success, *Peter Grimes*. Walton intended to counter this work with an opera of his own, and Alice Wimbourne, Walton's companion at the time, suggested the story of *Troilus and Cressida* as a subject. Wimbourne had suggested Hassell as librettist, in spite of the fact that he had never written an opera libretto. During the course of composition, Walton and Hassell carried out an extensive correspondence. Walton edited passages by Hassell from the libretto that he deemed inappropriate. The opera took seven years to complete.

The first Australian performances were given in Adelaide at the 1964 Festival.

Roles

Cressida, Trojan priestess, daughter of Calkas	Soprano or mezzo-soprano	[1976 version]
Troilus, Prince of Troy, son of King Priam	tenor	
Calkas, high priest of Pallas Athene, father to Cressida	bass	
Antenor, Trojan captain	baritone	

Evadne, servant to Cressida	mezzo-soprano
Pandarus, brother to Calkas	tenor
Horaste, friend to Pandarus	bass
Diomedes, Greek prince of Argos	baritone

Synopsis

Place: Troy Time: The tenth year of the Trojan War

Act 1

Calkas announces to the people that the oracle at Delphi has conveyed signs that Greece will prevail in the conflict. The Trojan people refuse to accept this interpretation of the oracle and are suspicious of Calkas. Antenor demands proof, but Troilus defends Calkas from the crowd. Cressida, a priestess in the temple of Pallas Athene and daughter of Calkas, then receives declarations of love from Troilus, whom she has noticed prior, but she retreats into the temple. Pandarus, uncle to Cressida, has overheard this conversation and offers his services to further Troilus' romantic cause. Evadne then brings the news that Calkas has defected to the Greek side. Pandarus then finds Cressida in tears, and tells her that the protection of a prince might be helpful to her. Troilus comes in with the news that Antenor has been captured, and that he must be retrieved by any means necessary. They look for Calkas to ask his blessing for such an enterprise, but Calkas is absent, and they go in search of him. Pandarus then pleads Troilus' case with Cressida, and she becomes sympathetic. She gives Pandarus her red scarf to give to Troilus as a pledge of her affection, and he invites her to his residence the next evening. Troilus returns to the temple, aware of Calkas' betrayal, and receives an initial sign of Cressida's approval.

Act 2

Scene 1: The next evening, at the house of Pandarus

Cressida and Horaste are at a game of chess. As all are about to go home, a storm is on the horizon. Pandarus persuades Cressida and her company, including Evadne, to stay the night. He then secretly sends a messenger to bring Troilus to his house. As Cressida is about to retire, Troilus enters the house. He reaffirms his love for her, and she reciprocates. They leave to a side chamber, and their love scene is depicted in the orchestra.

Scene 2: The next morning, same as in Scene 1

Troilus and Cressida are about to part. Pandarus then enters to tell the news that Greek soldiers are on his grounds, and that Troilus must hide. There is to be a prisoner exchange, with Cressida going to the Greeks and Antenor to be returned to the Trojans. Diomedes enters and demands to see Cressida. Pandarus denies her presence, but Diomedes discovers her behind a curtain. Her beauty immediately strikes him, and he orders her to prepare for the journey. After all parties have left, Troilus emerges from hiding, and the two lovers acknowledge fate. Troilus promises that he will bribe the sentries to be able to meet her, and that she should look for him at one end of the Greek camp. He returns the red scarf, the token of their love.

Act 3: The Greek camp, ten weeks later

Cressida has still not heard anything from Troilus. Cressida asks Evadne to await a messenger, but Evadne has been secretly destroying Troilus' messages on orders from Calkas. Evadne urges Cressida to accept Diomedes as suitor, but Cressida strongly refuses. Calkas further rebukes Cressida for continuing to refuse Diomedes. Diomedes appears, and at his final

proposal after Cressida has still not heard anything from Troilus, she yields to Diomedes' entreaties. Diomedes asks of her the red scarf as a token of her pledge.

Troilus and Pandarus then appear with the news that they have arranged for a ransom for Cressida, during a truce in the hostilities. Cressida says that they are too late, and the Greeks then appear to hail Cressida, betrothed to Diomedes. Diomedes bears the red scarf, which Troilus recognizes. Troilus claims Cressida as his. Diomedes asks Cressida to denounce Troilus, but she cannot. Troilus then challenges Diomedes, and they engage in single combat. As Troilus is about to overpower Diomedes, Calkas stabs Troilus in the back. Troilus dies in Cressida's arms. Diomedes orders Troilus to be borne back to Troy in honour, Calkas to be returned to Troy in chains, and Cressida to remain with the Greeks as an unprivileged prisoner. Left alone, Cressida finds Troilus' sword and conceals it. As the Greeks come to take her away, she pledges her loyalty one last time to Troilus, and stabs herself.