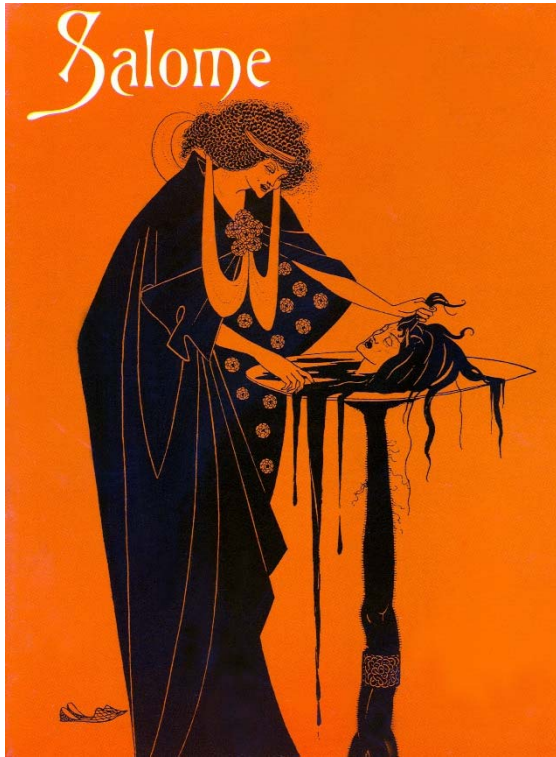


The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Salome



Music by Richard Strauss

**German translation
by Hedwig Lachmann**

**Taken from the French play
by Oscar Wilde**

**An Opera in One Act
Sung in German**

**Location: Debauched palace
in Nazi Germany
Time: 1930**

Characters

Herod, Tetrarch of Judaea and Perea (tenor) Thomas Moser
Herodias, his wife (mezzo-soprano) Michaela Schuster
Salome, his stepdaughter (soprano) Nadja Michael
Jochanaan (John the Baptist) (baritone)..... Michael Volle
Narraboth, Captain of the Guard (tenor)..... Joseph Kaiser
Page to Herodias (contralto) Daniela Sindram
Jews, Nazarenes, soldiers, a Cappadocian, a slave and royal guests

Conducted by Philippe Jordan

Directed by David McVicar

The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House

Première performance on December 9, 1905 at the Dresden Opera in Germany

Synopsis

In King Herod's Palace



Narraboth, captain of the guard, gazes rapturously at the beautiful Princess Salome, who is feasting with her stepfather, King Herod Antipas and his court. The voice of the prophet Jochanaan (John the Baptist) is heard from a deep palace cistern, where he is imprisoned by Herod, who fears him as a holy man.

Salome, bored with Herod's constant lechery and his coarse guests, leaves the banquet for fresh air. She hears Jochanaan cursing her mother, Herodias, and her curiosity becomes piqued. She demands that the palace guards bring Jochanaan to her. They refuse her orders. She then teasingly turns her wiles on Narraboth, promising to look at him through her veils when she passes by in her litter the next day. Despite his orders, Narraboth finally gives in and orders Jochanaan be sent for.

Salome gazes longingly at Jochanaan's body, fascinated by the prophet's deathly pallor. She begs him to let her touch him. The prophet rejects Salome's advances, speaking of the Son of God who will come to save mankind. Undeterred, Salome then begs Jochanaan to let her kiss him. Narraboth, watching this scene in horror, cannot bear to hear this, and kills himself. Jochanaan then descends into the cistern, urging Salome to seek salvation in the Messiah. Salome becomes frustrated with longing.

Herod appears, followed by his wife and court. He slips on Narraboth's blood and, seeing this as a bad omen, becomes unnerved. He begins to experience hallucinations, hearing the beating of wings; Herodias scorns him. Despite Herodias' objections, Herod stares lustfully at Salome, who spurns his attentions. From the cistern below Jochanaan again insults Herodias, calling her incestuous marriage to Herod sinful. She demands that Herod silence him. Herod refuses, and she mocks his fear. Herod's refusal incurs an argument among several Jews concerning the nature of God. A couple of Nazarenes tell of Christ's miracles and, at one point bring up the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which Herod finds frightening.



Salomé
by Gustave Moreau (1865-1898)

Herod turns again to Salome. He asks for Salome to eat with him and drink with him. Indolently, she twice refuses, saying she is not hungry or thirsty. Herod then begs Salome to dance for him, though Herodias vehemently objects. Herod then promises to reward Salome with her heart's desire — anything she wants, even half his kingdom. Her interest now piqued, but distrusting of this final offer, Salome first makes Herod swear that he will live up to his promise. He excitedly agrees.

Salome performs the sensual "Dance of the Seven Veils," which ends with her taking her clothes off at Herod's feet. Herod is delighted with Salome's performance and asks her what she wants. Salome demands the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger (platter). Herodias cackles with pleasure and agreement. Terrified, Herod tries to



Salome's Dance by Mauryc Gottlieb (1856-1879)

dissuade Salome with other rewards of jewels, rare white peacocks, and even the sacred veil of the Temple. Salome remains undeterred, forcing Herod to keep his promise and concede to her demands. Reluctantly Herod succumbs and orders the beheading of John the Baptist.

After a long and tense pause, the arm of the executioner rises from the cistern, offering to Salome

Jochanaan's head on a silver charger. As clouds obscure the moon, in one of the most voluptuously gorgeous musical love scenes ever written, Salome seizes her reward passionately, addressing Jochanaan as if he were alive. Salome makes necrophilic love to the severed head, triumphantly kissing his lips passionately, "Ah! I have kissed your mouth, Jochanaan." Overcome with revulsion, the terrified and superstitious Herod then orders his soldiers to kill Salome.



Salome with the head of John the Baptist (Lowre) by Bernardo Luini (1481-1532)



Salome with head of John the Baptist by Andrea Solari (1460-1524)



Salomé by Pierre Bonnard (1865-1930)

Richard Strauss

Born: June 11, 1864 in Munich, Germany; Died: September 8, 1949 in Garmisch, Germany



Richard Strauss is considered to be one of the great composers of Lieder, and almost single-handedly carried the Wagnerian opera tradition and the Romantic Lisztian tone poem into the twentieth century.

Born Richard Georg Strauss (no relation to the Viennese Waltz family), he was the son of Franz Strauss, a well-known horn player. He began taking piano lessons at five, followed quickly by his first instruction in composition.

Still in his teens, Strauss wrote a string quartet (1879), a symphony (1880), a piano sonata (1880), a cello sonata (1882), and a violin concerto (1882). Though they showed serious miscalculations of form, each new work, however, showed an increasing mastery.

Strauss attended university in Munich, but did not study music. His conducting debut came in 1884 in Munich. His first appointment was as an assistant to Hans von Bülow with the Meiningen Court Orchestra. Shortly thereafter, he became principal conductor. Other positions included conductor at the Munich Opera, and Director of the Vienna

State Opera.

Strauss met Alexander Ritter, a composer and poet, who converted him to the school of Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. It took Strauss some time to master this new form, but the tone-poem *Don Juan* (1889) immediately established Strauss as an important figure. In it, he found his artistic self, particularly in the creation of astonishing, unheard-of orchestral effects, which was to occupy him throughout most of his career. He also found a new sense of dramatic movement, which was derived from Wagner, but more quickly paced.

Strauss married soprano Pauline de Ahna and focused his compositional output on tone poems and operas. His tone poems (programmatic instrumental works intended to portray a story) included *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Sprach Zarathustra*, and *Don Quixote*. Among his better known operas are the groundbreaking *Salome* and *Electra* (whom he worked on with librettist Hugo von Hoffmanstahl, and who was to become a regular collaborator), *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Arabella*, *Die schweigsame Frau* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. While *Salome* and *Electra* pushed the limits of compositional technique and tonality (and caused quite a stir doing so), his later operas were written in more of a “Romantic” style.

In 1929, Strauss’ librettist, Hugo von Hoffmanstahl, died suddenly, and Strauss was forced to search for new librettists. He found good ones as well as bad ones, causing his operas as well as the instrumental works became increasingly variable in quality.

Strauss became a controversial figure because of his association with the Nazi party during World War II. He became an official of the Third Reich, chosen as President of the “Reichsmusikkammer,” although his job was largely ceremonial. He composed the Olympic Hymn for the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin. However, his music was banned for a year and he was forced to resign his post over correspondence with the Jewish librettist, Stefan Zweig, who wrote the libretto for *Die schweigsame Frau*. As his daughter-in-law was also Jewish, it is generally accepted that he tolerated his association with the Nazi party in order to protect her and his grandchildren. The fact that his grandchildren were part-Jewish made him keep his criticisms to himself. Even so, his private letters were read by Nazi officials and he was warned. His silence and his continued residence in Germany caused him problems during the postwar de-nazification programs.

In the forties, roughly twenty-five years after his last really good instrumental work, Strauss’ instrumental music revived. He became increasingly interested in chamber music and counterpoint. These late works present a puzzle. Indeed, many conductors today have trouble with them, requiring a degree of give-and-take found in the greatest chamber music.

Among his final compositions, Strauss wrote *Metamorphosen* upon the defeat of Germany and the bombing of the opera houses in Vienna, Munich and Dresden. He also wrote an oboe concerto and the *Four Last Songs* for soprano and orchestra. This last piece was performed for the first time, nine days after his death on September 18, 1949 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

Salome

“...tyrannical indulgence of power over life and death.”

“...characters incapable of resisting horrifying impulses that must lead to the destruction of themselves and others.”

Salomé: The French play by Oscar Wilde



Salomé Dancing before Hérod
by Gustave Moreau (1865-1930)

Oscar Wilde began discussing the idea of his play in the autumn of 1890, writing most of *Salomé* in French in Paris during the autumn of 1891. Robert Ross claimed that Wilde was inspired by seeing Gustave Moreau's series of paintings on the same theme. Rehearsals were underway in June of 1892 at the Palace Theater when Edward Pigott, the Examiner of Plays, refused to license it. The ostensible reason was the policy against representing biblical characters on stage, although the sexual perversity of the play was no doubt an important factor.

Elkin Mathews and John Lane published the French version of *Salomé*, dedicated to Pierre Louÿs, in Paris and London in 1893. In 1894 they published an English translation along with the famous illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley. The translation was originally written by Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, and the play was dedicated to him.

On February 11, 1896, *Salomé* premiered to mixed reviews at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris. Complications arising from Wilde's criminal status and fears of hostile publicity led the director, Aurélien Lugné-Poë, to keep preparations secret. Lugné-Poë cast an actress as the Page of Herodias to avoid the homosexual overtones of the Page's affection for the Young Syrian, a choice imitated by several subsequent directors. The program was designed by Toulouse-Lautrec. The play met with a mixed, but generally positive response. Many suspected, however, that much of the enthusiastic applause at the curtain fall was actually in support of the author.

The play was first publicly performed in Germany at the Neues Theater in Berlin in 1903. Max Reinhardt produced it based on the success of his earlier private production at the Kleines Theater in 1902. The production ran for 200 performances. Richard Strauss was in the audience of that earlier private performance. *Salomé* was privately performed in both London and New York that same year. These productions were small-scale, private affairs, and the play was not publicly performed in London until 1931. Wilde himself never saw *Salomé* performed.

Salome: The illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley



Salome and John the Baptist
by Aubrey Beardsley

Aubrey Vincent Beardsley was an English illustrator and author. His drawings in black ink, influenced by the style of Japanese woodcuts, emphasized the grotesque, the decadent, and the erotic. The illustrations of *Salome*, published in 1894 by Aubrey Beardsley, inspired some of Beardsley's finest work. It is questionable as to how suited the drawings actually are to the text that Oscar Wilde wrote, yet the play and the Beardsley illustrations have nevertheless become so identified with each other as to be inseparable.

Salome: The opera by Richard Strauss

Richard Strauss, in addition to writing such unconventional and popular works as *Elektra* (1909), composed the opera for the German translation of Oscar Wilde's adaptation of *Salome*. It is fitting that Strauss was the man who transformed Wilde's *Salome* — the text of which features the attempted seduction of John the Baptist (Iokanaan) followed by Salome's unprecedented passionate post-mortem kiss for the prophet. Both Wilde and Strauss were criticized widely for unconventionality in their works. Strauss' opera was broadly rejected at first because of the "immorality" of its content — a sequence of events which raises uncomfortable questions about the deep sensuality of the Christian tradition — and for the heroine's disregard for the Christian morality. If many, including Lord Alfred Douglas (Wilde's lover and the translator of the English edition, the original having been authored in French), were surprised to see Wilde's version of *Salomé* performed on stage, Strauss' opera must have seemed appropriate given the lyricism of the text.

The première of *Salome* at the Dresden Opera in 1905 was a scandalous success — the opera paid the bill for Strauss' villa — that played to the critics' consternation and the bishops' condemnation. But what sounded controversial and disturbingly dissonant then, is today loved for the lush orchestration and the intense beauty of its music.

The music of *Salome* includes a system of leitmotifs, or short melodies with symbolic meanings, similar to those in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* by Richard Wagner. Some motifs are clearly associated with people; others are more abstract in meaning. The vocal demands of the title role are the same as those of a Wagnerian soprano, with the impossible added demand that she should look and behave like a sixteen-year-old prima ballerina. With the highest note in the soprano range and the lowest note actually in the alto range, most of the relatively low sopranos who attempted this role found themselves straining their voices throughout the opera, having reached the closing scene quite fatigued.

The production of Strauss' *Salome* was perhaps the most important event in the history of German opera since Wagner. It marked a new development in operatic art, this extraordinary work, with its sinister, eerie harmonies, its glittering orchestration, and its concentrated emotional force. Nothing like it, in fact, had been heard before. Naturally the opera aroused a storm of controversy, which lasted for a long time after. But now that time has passed since its production, even those who do not admire the opera personally will admit that it is a remarkable work of amazing technical brilliance, as well as a wonderful study in musical psychology. At its greatest moments the music of *Salome* has a rare and subtle fascination, terrible though the subject of the work may be. By many it is considered as Strauss' operatic masterpiece.



Astrid Varnay
as *Salome* 1953

In both the Oscar Wilde play and Strauss opera, “The Dance of the Seven Veils” remains unnamed, except in the acting notes. The visual content of that scene (which is about seven minutes in length) has varied greatly, depending upon the aesthetic notions of the stage director, choreographer and soprano, as well as on the choreographic skills and body shape of the soprano. This dance has also inspired imitation in the world of burlesque and striptease, with Sally Rand adapting it to her distinctive style.

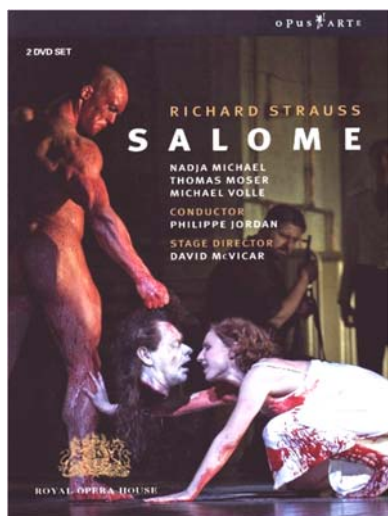
It was customary for sopranos to use stand-ins for the dance, or wear a body stocking under their veils. However, in 1909 the Russian ballet dancer, Ida Rubinstein, under the private tutelage of Mikhail Fokine, debuted the dance with a single private performance, stripping completely nude. More recently, various early 1990s productions in both London and San Francisco starring American soprano Maria Ewing, clearly wore nothing beneath her veils. In the 2004 Metropolitan Opera production, Karita Mattila actually changed the color of her pubic hair to blonde because of the visual focus of the scene.

Salome: The films

Several film versions of *Salome* were made, beginning with an American version in 1908, British and French versions in 1910, an Italian effort in 1913 and a Russian film in 1916. In 1918 a Hollywood version of *Salome* starred Theda Bara in the title role and, in 1953, Rita Hayworth played Salome in yet another Hollywood production.

Salome: The Video (2008)

Starring Nadja Michael, Thomas Moser and Michael Volle; Philippe Jordan conducting



Even though Strauss’ operatic setting of the tale of Salome is over a century old, it still has the power to shock as well as to enthrall. On stage the story has provoked scandal — violence and nudity are inevitably part of its nature.

Nadja Michael is ideally suited for the role of Salome. A former competitive swimmer, Michael’s body is incredible by any standard, moving with the lithe moves of a dancer, she adds a liquid sensuality from start to bloody finish, seamlessly stringing the evening along with shock, horror and beauty. At times Michael sings off-pitch, especially toward the end when she is already exhausted — she performs better as an actress than as a singer. Volle performs a wonderful Jochanaan.

David McVicar’s stage design moves the set to a debauched palace in Nazi Germany. An incredibly theatrical and innovative production of *Salome*, it is one of the most disturbing, brilliant and perfect blending of music and staging.

“The Dance of the Seven Veils” is a true theater triumph — not your usual sensual strip-tease. The set disappears and a series of rooms — one for each veil — moves across the stage, as both Herod and Salome perform a grotesque pas de deux that turns into one of the most gripping pieces of theater conceivable.