

**Richard Strauss's Viennese Operas
Rosenkavalier, Arabella and Capriccio**

The Mary McNamara Memorial Lecture

Agneta D. Borgstedt

**The Guild of
Mercury Opera Rochester**

Guild Address:

P.O. Box 92245
Rochester, NY 14692

Mercury Opera Website:

www.mercuryoperarochester.org

Guild Website:

<http://www.mercuryoperarochester.org/guild.htm>

Guild Contacts:

Dr. Agneta Borgstedt, President – (585) 334-2323
Art Axelrod, Vice President – (585) 377-6133
Helga Strasser, Trip Coordinator – (585) 586-2274

Richard Strauss's Viennese Operas

Rosenkavalier, Arabella and Capriccio

- **These three operas are a legacy to Richard Strauss's love for Vienna and his admiration for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.**
- **They present the influence Mozart's music has had on Richard Strauss's music and his operas.**
- **Two of these operas: Rosenkavalier and Capriccio are set in the 18th Century and the plot of Arabella is set in the 2nd half of the 19th Century.**
- **The Viennese spirit and the Viennese Waltzes are swirling through these three operas which are Richard Strauss's most popular and frequently performed ones.**

Rosenkavalier 1911

Premiere Dresden 26th January

- **Second of Richard Strauss's operas with a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal.**
- **What Da Ponte had been to Mozart as a librettist, von Hofmannsthal was to Richard Strauss.**
- **The opera can probably be called justifiably a drama giocoso. It is not a typical opera buffa but contains the serious contemplation of one's aging process and how to accept this.**
- **One of the central figures is the character of Ochs auf Lerchenau, who presents the last Opera Buffo Bass in the German Opera repertoire, which started with Mozart's Osmin in the Abduction from the Seraglio.**

Rosenkavalier 1911

- **The score is considered possibly the richest and most subtle of Strauss's scores, containing a stylistic balance between Mozart and some of Wagner's elements that formed the focus of Strauss's rebellion against his father's influence.**

Rosenkavalier The Plot

- **The Marschallin, a married beautiful woman in her early thirties, has fallen in love with 18 year old Count Octavian**
- **She warns him that one day he will leave her for a younger beautiful woman, but he doesn't want to believe her.**

Chapter 2, Love duet Marschallin and Octavian

- **During the morning toilette, the Marschallin receives many people (including an Italian singer), who want her favors, as well as her servants and even relatives, while Octavian has to hide behind a curtain when their tete a tete is disturbed.**

Rosenkavalier

The Plot

- **The Marschallin's crude middle aged relative Ochs auf Lerchenau, our buffo character, bursts into her apartments and demands her help to wed the beautiful young Sophie, daughter of the rich merchant Faninal.**
- **Octavian has to disguise himself as Mariandel, so he is not discovered and Ochs auf Lerchenau has nothing better to do than to chase after Mariandel.**
- **The Marschallin sends Octavian with the silver rose to Sophie to woo her for her relative and wistfully muses at her image in the mirror about her fading beauty.**

Chapter 13, the Marchallin muses about time and beauty

Rosenkavalier

The Plot

- **Sophie is shocked by the crudeness of her prospective bridegroom.**
- **Octavian and Sophie fall in love and Octavian promises to protect her.**

Chapter 19, Octavian presents the silver rose to Sophie

- **Von Hoffmannthal wove a plot inspired by Beaumarchais's 3rd play which follows Figaro's Wedding, in which the married countess has an affair with the page boy Cherubino. This formed the model for the relationship between Octavian and the married Marschallin who is older and wiser.**

Rosenkavalier

The Plot

- **The plot also has allusions to Wagner's Meistersinger and Tristan. Like Hans Sachs, the Marschallin must watch a younger beloved to turn to some one else and like Tristan, Octavian is a proxy wooer.**
- **In the finale, after Ochs auf Lerchenau made a fool of himself, Sophie's father gives his blessing to the young couple and the Marchallin gives them her approval and sadly withdraws, accepting her "middle" age.**

Chapter 41 and 42, Finale.

Arabella 1933

Premiere 1. July Dresden

- **The Libretto is by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, completed just before his death 1929. Score completed by Richard Strauss 1932. The last two acts were unrevised at Hofmannsthal's death. Strauss refused to alter its basic line and composed them as a tribute to his librettist.**
- **Arabella is a terminal work saying farewell to an era, but looking forward to the "conservative revolution" of which Hofmannsthal dreamed.**
- **Strauss's music captures the libretto's mood. Carnival dances, waltzes and polka's flicker in and out of the score.**
- **Slavonic folk song musically link the two protagonists Arabella and Mandryka together.**

Arabella The Plot

- **The opera is set in the 1860 ties during the Carnival season.**
- **The fortunes of the Austrian Aristocracy were in decline.**
- **The aristocratic Waldners, Arabella's family, can not pay their bills and hope their beautiful daughter Arabella would make a good match with a rich suitor.**
- **The Waldners reared their younger daughter Zdenka as a boy to safe money.**
- **Zdenka is in love with Matteo, one of the many of Arabella's suitors.**

Arabella The Plot

- **Arabella is waiting for the "right" man to marry, as she says "Der Richtige". She wants to marry for love.**
- Chapter 6, duet Arabella and Zdenka**
- **The Carnival is the last day of Arabella's "girlhood". It symbolizes the approach of the adult responsibility to bail out her family of its difficulty.**
 - **Count Waldner had sent Arabella's picture to his old rich friend Mandryka in Slavonia.**
 - **Mandryka's nephew by the same name and heir of his deceased uncle's estate, opens the letter and falls in love with Arabella's picture.**

Arabella The Plot

- **Count Waldner is delighted when the young man approaches him with his intentions.**
 - **In the 2nd act Arabella is introduced to the young Mandryka, who tells her about his quiet life in the country and the Slavonic custom to exchange a glass of well water as sign of betrothal and his love.**
 - **Arabella is touched and sings a lovely duet with him and recognizes, she found “Der Richtige”- the right one.**
- Chapter 15, duet Arabella and Mandrika “Der Richtige”**
- **She ask him to have one more night of her girlhood, which he grants.**

Arabella The Plot

- **Meanwhile Matteo presses Zdenka for help in his pursuit of Arabella.**
- **Zdenka gives him the key to her room, telling him it is Arabella’s room.**
- **Unfortunately this is overheard by Mandryka, who feels cheated**
- **In his rage he flirts with everybody at the cabmen’s ball, of which Arabella was crowned Queen and drinks heavily.**
- **Count Waldner finally gets him back to the hotel.**

Arabella The Plot

- **Meanwhile Matteo has a rendezvous with Zdenka, thinking it was Arabella in the darkness of the room.**
- **When Mandryka angrily accuses Arabella, who is returning from the ball, Zdenka admits it was she, who Matteo courted.**
- **Matteo finally found his real love.**
- **Arabella brings Mandryka a glass of well water to renew their betrothal and love.**
- **The family honor has been saved.**

Chapter 24, Finale: duet Arabella and Mandrika

Capriccio 1942 Premiere 19th October Munich

- **This is Richard Strauss's last completed stage work with a libretto by conductor Clemens Krauss.**
- **The libretto is based on a work by Abbe Casti: *Prima La Musica e poi le Parole*, which had been originally suggested by Stefan Zweig in 1934, who had discovered the original text (a libretto for Mozart's rival Salieri) in the British Library.**
- **It is an opera about an opera regarding the question: first the words, then the music: are the music or the words more important?**

Capriccio

The Plot

- **The setting of the plot is in France in the middle of the 18th Century when Gluck's reforms were leading the discussion of the relative importance of words and music within an opera.**
- **The composer Flamand and the writer Oliver are both in love with the young widowed Countess Madeleine.**
- **In the finale Countess Madeleine in one of the greatest soprano monologues in Strauss's output, contemplates how to choose between her two admirers and consequently to decide the ending of the opera they have written about her. She finds herself emotionally torn in two.**

Capriccio

The Plot

- **Word and Music are indivisibly linked forever into a unity.**
- **The question of their relative values is unanswerable.**
- **At the end of the Opera, Madeleine still cannot decide.**

Chapter 19, Finale: Madeleine's dilemma

Final Comments

- **Opera as Music Drama has been Art Axelrod's first lecture in our Guild lecture series.**
- **We discussed the following premises and you yourself can make up your mind:**
 - 1. If the libretto is great but the music is not, you do not have a good opera.**
 - 2. If the libretto and the music are great you have an Operatic Master Piece like**
 - Mozart's Don Giovanni*
 - Verdi's Rigoletto and Otello*
 - Wagner's Meistersinger and Walkuere*

Final Comments

- Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier***
- 3. If the libretto is silly but the music is great you still have a good opera like:**
 - Verdi's Il Trovatore*
 - Bellini's La Somnambula*
 - 4. Now you have to make up your mind.**