

## **Telling Tales: *External Narratives in Opera***



***Art Axelrod***



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## External Narrative Scenes

- ◆ Ordinarily, each scene in an opera depicts the flow of the drama within the opera.
- ◆ But sometimes the scene may show a character relating events that occur outside the plot of the opera.
  - We'll call those "External Narratives".
- ◆ Examples of those are our subject for this evening.

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## Why External Narratives?

- ◆ Tell a part of the story that occurs offstage or before the curtain rises.
- ◆ Provide a character's point of view.
- ◆ Illustrate the character's nature or personality.
- ◆ Foreshadow an event within the plot.
- ◆ Provide local color (as if part of the scenery.)
- ◆ It's good theater.

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## Our Examples This Evening

1. Song of the Indian Guest from *Sadko*
2. Senta's Aria from *The Flying Dutchman*
3. Princess Eboli's "Veil Song" from *Don Carlo*
4. Ferrando's Aria from *Il Trovatore*
5. Azucena's Aria from *Il Trovatore*
6. Lucia's Ghost Story from *Lucia di Lammermoor*

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## Examples, continued

7. Turandot's "In questia regia" from *Turandot*
8. Lisa's Party Scene from *The Queen of Spades*
9. Desdemona's Willow Song from *Otello*
10. "The Siege of Kazan" from *Boris Godunov*

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## The Magic Bird of India

### **The Song of the Indian Merchant from *Sadko***

Gegam Grigorian, The Indian Merchant (t);  
Vladimir Galusin, Sadko (t) – 2002

Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet of the Kirov  
Opera, Valery Gergiev, cond.

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## Sadko

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844 - 1908

Libretto by the composer and Vladimir  
Ivanovich Bel'sky based on an 11<sup>th</sup>  
century Russian folk epic, the *Novgorod  
Cycle*.

First Performance, 1898, Moscow

Set in ancient, mythic Russia

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## The Song of the Indian Guest

Sadko is a minstrel who aspires to be a merchant. He has obtained magic gold and has outfitted ships and obtained merchandise, but must decide where to sail.

At the inn, there are three foreign guests. Sadko asks each to sing of his country so he can decide which to sail to.

This is the Song of the Indian Guest, who sings of a magic bird that lives on a rock in the sea.

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## The Legend of the Flying Dutchman

**"Traft ihr das Schiff in Meere an!"**  
from *The Flying Dutchman*

Hildegard Behrens, Senta (s) – 2002

Orchestra and Chorus of the Savonlinna  
Opera Festival, Finland, Leif  
Segerstam, cond.

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## The Flying Dutchman

Richard Wagner, 1813 - 1883

Libretto by the composer, based on an ancient European legend.

First Performance, 1843, Dresden

Set in a fishing village in Norway

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## Senta's Aria, "Traft ihr das Schiff in Meere an!"

Senta, the teenage daughter of a Norwegian sea captain. She is obsessed with the legend of the cursed captain of The Flying Dutchman.

Senta and the other girls are spinning.  
She sings the legend to the others.

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## The Veil Song

**"Nei giardin del bello"**  
**from *Don Carlo***

Grace Bumbry (ms), Princess Eboli;  
Betsy Norden (s), Tebaldo  
1983

Orchestra and Chorus of the Metropolitan Opera,  
James Levine, cond.

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## Don Carlo

Giuseppe Verdi, 1813 - 1901

Italian libretto by Angelo Zanardini, based on  
French libretto by Joseph Méry and Camille  
du Locle, based on a play by Johan Friedrich  
von Schiller.

First Performance, French version, 1867, Paris;  
Italian version, 1884, Milan

Set in Spain, c. 1560

The Infante, Don Carlos, rebels against his  
father, King Philip II.

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## The Veil Song

The ladies of the Royal Court of Spain gather in the garden for relaxing leisure.

Princess Eboli, a high-ranking and beautiful Lady, sings a song, accompanied by the Page, Tebaldo (a trouser role).

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## He Said . . . She Said . . .

### **1. Ferrando's Aria, "Di due figlia vivea padre beato"**

Jose van Dam (b), Ferrando

### **2. Azucena's Aria, "Stride la vampa"**

Fiorenza Cosotto (ms), Azucena

**from *Il Trovatore***

1978

Orchestra and Chorus of the Vienna State Opera, Herbert von Karajan, cond.

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## Il Trovatore

Giuseppe Verdi, 1814 – 1901

Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano, based on the play *El Trovador* (1836) by Antonio García Gutiérrez.

First Performance, 1853, Rome

Set in Spain, 15<sup>th</sup> Century

The troubadour, Manrico, son of the Gypsy woman, Azucena, struggles against the evil Count di Luna.

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## 1. Ferrando's Aria

Act 1, Scene 1: Captain of the Count di Luna's Guard relates how the current Duke's infant brother died, presumably after being cursed by a Gypsy woman, who was captured and burnt at the stake. The Gypsy's daughter was complicit and is being sought.

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## 2. Azucena's Aria

Act 2: Azucena is the daughter of the executed Gypsy woman, referred to by Ferrando, and the presumed mother of our hero, Manrico.

At the Gypsy camp, Azucena tells the story of her mother's execution and describes how her last words were a plea for vengeance.

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## She Saw a Ghost

**"Regnava nel silenzio"**  
**from *Lucia de Lammermor***

Anna Netrebko (s), Lucia; Michaela  
 Martens (ms), Alisa

2009

Orchestra and Chorus of the Metropolitan  
 Opera, James Levine, cond.

Mary Zimmerman, director

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## Lucia di Lammermmor

Gaetano Donizetti, 1797 - 1848

Libretto by Salvatore Cammerano, based on the novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* by Sir Walter Scott, 1819.

First Performance, 1835, Naples

Set in Scotland, 17<sup>th</sup> Century

Emotionally fragile Lucy Ashton (Lucia) is caught in a feud between her own family and that of her lover's family, the Ravenswoods. Her domineering brother, Henry (Enrico), sends her over the edge of madness.

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## Regnava nel silenzio

Lucy and her maid, Alice (Alisa) are waiting by a fountain for Lucy's outlawed lover, Edgar (Edgardo) Ravenswood.

Lucy relates to Alice how at this fountain, she encountered the ghost of a young woman murdered by a jealous ancestor.

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## Avenging Her Ancestress

### "In questa regia"

from *Turandot*

Eva Marton (s), Lucia; Placido Domingo (t), Calaf  
1988

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus,  
James Levine, cond.

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## Turandot

Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)

Completed by Franco Alfano (1875 - 1925)

Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato  
Simoni, based on a play by Carlo Gozzi  
(1762).

First Performance, 1826, Milan

Set in Peking, Mythic China

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## In questa regia

The Princess Turandot will marry only a man who can answer three riddles. Any suitor who tries and fails the test will be beheaded.

In this aria, Turandot relates how a thousand years ago, an ancestress was raped and murdered by foreign invaders – she sets this test to avenge her.

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## Russian Art Song

**Lisa's Party Scene**  
from *The Queen of Spades*

Olga Borodina (ms), Polina; Maria  
Gulagina (s), Lisa  
1992

Kirov Orchestra and Chorus, St. Petersburg,  
Valery Gergiev, cond.

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## The Queen of Spades

Pyotr Iliich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

Libretto by Modest Tchaikovsky and the composer, based on a novel by Aleksandr Pushkin (1834).

First Performance, 1890, St. Petersburg  
Set in St. Petersburg, late 18<sup>th</sup> century

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## Lisa's Party Scene

Lisa, the heroine of the opera, is to be married to Prince Yeletsky. Her friends throw a party for her. Lisa is depressed because she is infatuated with an officer named Herman.

Her friend, Polina is asked to sing. She first sings a melancholy art song, then, to cheer up Lisa, she sings a Russian folk song.

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## Desdemona's Willow Song

**"Salce, salce"  
from *Otello***

Renée Fleming (s), Desdemona;  
Jane Bunnell (ms), Emilia  
2002

Orchestra of Metropolitan Opera,  
James Levine, cond.

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## Otello

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 - 1901)

Libretto by Arrigo Boito, after  
Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604).

First Performance, 1887, La Scala, Milan  
Set in Cyprus, end of 15<sup>th</sup> century

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## Desdemona's Willow Song

Desdemona is devoted to her husband, Otello. However, due to Iago's machinations, he is convinced that she is unfaithful.

Desdemona is getting ready for bed, attended by her maid, Emilia. She has premonitions of danger and sings a sad song.

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## An Old Soldier's Story

**The Siege of Kazan**  
**from *Boris Godunov***

Arthur Eizen (b), Varlaam – 1987

Orchestra of The Bolshoi Opera, Alexander  
Lazarev, cond.

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## Boris Godunov

Modest Mussorgsky (1839 - 1881)

Libretto by the composer, based on a historical drama by Alexander Pushkin.

First Performance, 1874, St. Petersburg, Russia

Set in Tsarist Russia, turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

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## The Siege of Kazan

The novice monk, Grigori, has escaped from his monastery, intending to raise an army to overthrow Tsar Boris.

Attempting to leave Russia, he stops at an inn at the Lithuanian border. There, he encounters two other escaped monks, Vaarlam and Missail.

Vaarlam, drunk, sings a rowdy song of his military days with Tsar Ivan the Terrible, when they besieged and conquered the Tatar capital of Kazan.

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Thank You



And Good Night!

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