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Richard Strauss's

## *Salome*



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*with Music Highlight examples*



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Richard Strauss's

# *Salome*

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Edited by Burton D. Fisher

Principal lecturer, *Opera Journeys Lecture Series*

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*a prelude.....*  
to **OPERA CLASSICS LIBRARY's**  
*Salome*

Richard Strauss's *Salome* is a masterpiece of the lyric theater, a work of exceptional orchestral power and brilliance, that is integrated with audacious harmonic adventurism; and in 1905, its premiere year, its daring musical eroticism was considered obscene.

*OPERA CLASSICS LIBRARY* explores Strauss's masterful one-act opera. There is a *Commentary and Analysis* that provides insightful drama and character analysis, together with the *Principal Characters*, *Brief Synopsis*, and *Story Narrative with Music Highlight Examples*.

The *Libretto* for *Salome* has been newly translated by the Opera Journeys staff with specific emphasis on retaining a literal translation, but also with the objective to provide a faithful translation in modern and contemporary English; in this way, the substance of the opera becomes more intelligible. To enhance educational and study objectives, the *Libretto* contains musical highlight examples interspersed within the drama's exposition. In addition, the text includes a selected *Discography*, *Videography*, and a *Dictionary of Opera and Musical Terms*.

The opera art form is the sum of many artistic expressions: theatrical drama, music, scenery, poetry, dance, acting and gesture. In opera, it is the composer who is the dramatist, using the emotive power of music to express intense, human conflicts. Words evoke thought, but music provokes feelings; opera's sublime fusion of words, music, and all the theatrical arts provides powerful theater, an impact on one's sensibilities that can reach into the very depths of the human soul.

Strauss's *Salome* is certainly a magnificent operatic invention, a towering tribute to the art form as well as to its ingenious composer.

Burton D. Fisher  
Editor  
OPERA CLASSICS LIBRARY



# *Salome*

Opera in German in one act

**Music**

**by**

**Richard Strauss**

**Libretto based on Hedwig Lachmann's abridged German  
translation of Oscar Wilde's play, *Salome***

**Premiere: Königliches Opernhaus  
Dresden, 1905**



***Principal Characters in Salome***

Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Judaea	Tenor
Herodias, Herod's wife	Mezzo-soprano
Salome, daughter of Herodias	Soprano
Jokanaan, the Prophet (John the Baptist)	Baritone
Narraboth, a young Syrian Captain of the Royal Guard	Tenor
A Page of Herodias	Contralto
Five Jews	four tenors, one bass
Two Nazarenes	Tenor, Bass
Two Soldiers	Basses
A Cappadocian	Tenor
Herod's Page	Tenor (or Soprano)

TIME: Beginning of the 1st century, during the lifetime of Christ

PLACE: Herod's palace in ancient Palestine

***Brief Story Synopsis***

Herod Antipas, Tetrarch, or Governor of Judaea, is celebrating his birthday at a banquet at his palace. From a terrace outside, Narraboth, the Captain of the Guard, observes Salome, Herod's beautiful stepdaughter, who is inside the hall: he expresses his uncontrollable yearning and passion for her. Irritated by Herod and the guests, Salome leaves the banquet and appears on the terrace. She hears the voice of Jokanaan, the Hebrew Prophet (John the Baptist), announcing the Messianic Deliverance; the Prophet has been imprisoned in a cistern because Herod fears he will propagate unrest.

Salome becomes fascinated by the Prophet's voice and requests that she see him, but the Soldiers advise her that Herod's orders forbid it. Salome becomes obsessed. She succeeds in getting her wish fulfilled by promising favors to the lovesick Narraboth. Jokanaan emerges from the cistern: he denounces not only Herod, but also Herodias, Salome's mother, for the sin of marrying her dead husband's brother.

Salome becomes infatuated with the Prophet and pleads for a kiss: he contemptuously refuses her, cursing her when he learns that she is the daughter of the iniquitous Herodias. Narraboth, finding their interchange unbearable, kills himself.

Herod and Herodias quarrel: she is jealous of Herod's lust for her daughter Salome, and demands that Jokanaan be killed because he insulted her. Herod is in awe of the Prophet and fears a religious uprising if he harms him.

Herod, lusting for Salome, offers her any wish if she dances for him. Salome agrees to dance, afterwards demanding that Herod fulfill his promise by giving her the head of Jokanaan as her reward.

The executioner delivers the decapitated head of the Prophet to Salome, who erupts into ecstatic rapture and uncontrollable passion as she kisses it. The shocked and disgusted Herod orders his guards to crush Salome to death.



### Story Narrative and Music Highlight Examples

There is no overture to *Salome*. The curtain rises immediately to a three-bar theme associated with Salome.

#### *Salome motive:*



It is night, and the moon shines very brightly on a broad terrace of Herod's palace. Inside, a banquet celebrates Herod's birthday, the Tetrarch entertaining Roman envoys with whom he is anxious to ingratiate himself, Egyptian ambassadors, and Jewish zealots, who from time-to-time quarrel violently about biblical doctrine.

Narraboth, a young Syrian recently appointed by Herod as captain of the guard, stands on the terrace and stares fixedly into the banquet hall. He expresses his infatuation, yearning, and love for Princess Salome: "Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Abend!" ("How beautiful Princess Salome is tonight!")

#### *Narraboth's infatuation with Salome:*



The Page senses foreboding and premonitions of danger when he notices the moon turning dark and shadowy: "See how strange the moon looks! She looks like a woman rising from a tomb."

The Page tries in vain to distract Narraboth's attention from Princess Salome: "You're always looking at her. You look at her too much. It's dangerous to look at people in such a way. Something terrible will happen."

But Narraboth is intransigent, infatuated and lovesick: he praises Salome's beauty, but is perturbed that she seems so pale in the bright moonlight.

Two Soldiers guard the cistern where Jokanaan is imprisoned. Herod fears that the Prophet's religious fervor will foment unrest, and he has forbidden anyone to see him.

An uproar is heard from the banquet hall. The rival Jewish sects are arguing, their disagreements erupting into temper tantrums: the Pharisees staunchly claim that angels exist; and the Sadducees declare that angels are nonexistent. The Soldiers on the terrace comment about their arguments with cynical detachment: "The Jews. They never change; they're always arguing about their religion."

Narraboth, oblivious to the tumult inside, remains infatuated with Salome and continues to praise her beauty: he rhapsodizes again that he has never seen her look so pale, and that her face is like the shadow of a rose reflected in a silver mirror.

*“Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Abend!”*

**NARRABOTH**



Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Sa - lo - me heu - te Abend!  
How beautiful Princess Salome is tonight!

Again, the apprehensive Page expresses his anxiety, warning Narraboth to restrain his fatal infatuation with Salome: that it is hazardous for him to continue staring lustfully at the Princess. The Soldiers, observing the banquet inside, comment that Herod appears gloomy, his eyes fixed on someone, but they cannot see whom: it is Salome.

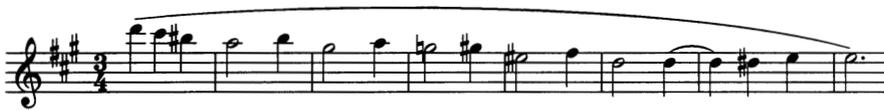
Jokanaan’s voice is heard from the depths of the cistern, solemnly and majestically declaring his impassioned prophecy of the Messianic Deliverance: “Nach mir wird Einer kommen, der ist stärker als ich.” (“After me shall come another who is stronger than I. I am not worth to undo the laces of His shoes. When He comes, all the desolate places shall rejoice. When He comes, the eyes of the blind shall see the day. When He comes, the ears of the deaf shall be opened.”)

One of the Soldiers, weary of the Prophet’s fanatic wailing, suggests that they silence him forcibly. But another Soldier speaks tenderly about the holy man, commenting that he is a gentle being who thanks him each day after he brings him his food. Then he responds to the inquiries of a Cappadocian, explaining that the Prophet comes from the desert where crowds of people flocked to him. He was clothed in camel’s hair, fed on locusts, and preached to his young disciples: fearing unrest, the Tetrarch imprisoned him in the cistern, isolated so that no one may see him.

Narraboth, whose eyes have remained fixed on the banquet hall, erupts into excitement when he notices Salome rising from her seat and exiting the hall: he comments that she appears agitated, like a straying dove. The Page again implores Narraboth not to look at her.

Salome appears on the terrace in a state of excitement and agitation.

*Salome emerges from the banquet:*



Salome is distraught and angry, bewildered by her stepfather, Herod, because he stares at her with such lust in his eyes: “with his mole’s eyes under his shaking eyelids.” The banquet became unbearable for Salome: she became irritated by the uncouth and barbaric Romans, the foolish squabbling among the Jews, and the crafty quietness of the Egyptians.

Having escaped from the banquet, Salome welcomes the fresh air outside, and delights in the brightness of the moon: “She is like a silver flower, cold and chaste. Yes, there is a youthful beauty about the moon, a virgin’s beauty.”

Narraboth's infatuation with Salome remains undaunted. The Page expresses his apprehension: "Something terrible will happen. Why do you look at her like that?"

For the first time, Salome hears the Prophet's voice resounding from the cistern: "Behold, the Lord has come: the Son of Man has come."

*Jokanaan's theme:*

**Solemnly**



Salome questions the Soldiers about the voice she hears. A Soldier tells her that it is the Prophet, and Salome immediately deduces that it is "he of whom the Tetrarch is so frightened." And, she realizes that he is the holy man who has condemned her mother as a depraved and incestuous adulteress.

Salome's curiosity about the Prophet becomes aroused: Narraboth pleads with her to return to the banquet, but she is heedless to his pleas and disregards him.

A slave announces that Herod has commanded Salome to return to the banquet. Salome brushes him aside and bluntly refuses, immediately directing her attention to the Prophet. She asks the Soldier: "Is this Prophet an old man?", and he replies that he is quite young.

Once more, the Prophet's solemn voice is heard from the cistern: "Do not rejoice, land of Palestine, just because the rod that beat him is broken. For a basilisk shall come from the seed of the serpent; its offspring shall devour the birds."

The strangeness of the Prophet's voice and the enigma of his message inflame Salome with curiosity. Salome announces that she wants to speak with the Prophet. The second Soldier, agitated and apprehensive, tells her that the Tetrarch has commanded that no one, not even the High Priest, may see the Prophet. But Salome does not fear Herod, and her relentless obsession intensifies. She commands the Soldier: "I want to speak to him. Have this Prophet brought out!"

Both Soldiers try to reason with Salome, fearful of disobeying Herod's orders that no one be allowed to speak to the Prophet. Salome approaches the cistern, peers down into its recesses, and becomes horrified: "How dark it is down there! It must be terrible to live in such a black pit. It's just like a tomb!" Salome becomes insistent. She turns to the Soldiers, her anger intensifying, and again commands them to bring the Prophet to her so that she may look at him. The Soldiers, shuddering in fear, again refuse.

Salome, overcome with desire, is dismayed that her will is being frustrated. With devious artfulness, she exploits Narraboth's weakness and hopeless devotion to her and proceeds to weave her spell on him: she wields her erotic power, cajoles him, and promises him that if he lets her see the Prophet, when she passes him tomorrow at the city gates she will throw him a flower, glance at him through her veil, and smile upon him.

Narraboth finds himself in conflict: his emotions are overpowering his reason. At first he protests to Salome, invoking the Tetrarch's orders that no one raise the cover of the cistern; it is forbidden to see the Prophet, and he dare not disobey. But Narraboth's resolution falters, and he surrenders to his lust for Salome. Finally, unable to conquer his emotions, he issues the order: "Let the Prophet out. Princess Salome wishes to see him."

As the face of the moon suddenly becomes obscured, Jokanaan emerges from the cistern: all remain immobilized and in tense expectancy, the music exploding with a collision of themes representing Jokanaan's piety and Salome's passion.

*Jokanaan emerges from the cistern:*



Jokanaan ferociously launches a tirade against the evil acts of Herod: his lust, iniquities, sins, depravity, and incest; “Wo ist er, dessen Sündenbecher jetzt voll ist?” (“Where is he whose cup of sin overflows? Where is he, who, wearing a silver robe, will one day die before all people?”) He commands everyone to heed the call of the Messianic Deliverance, seek salvation, and redeem themselves through repentance.

Salome and Jokanaan confront each other for the first time, a collision of the sacred with the profane. She is breathless at the first sight of the Prophet, repelled yet overcome with fascination, desire, and lust. She immediately surrenders to an incomprehensible fatal attraction for the Prophet, a combination of physical longing and compulsive desire.

*Salome's desire and lust:*



Jokanaan denounces Herodias, Salome's mother: “Wo ist sie die sich hingab der Lust ihrer Augen” (“Where is she, who surrendered to the lust in her eyes.”) The Prophet continues: “Where is she who gave herself to the leaders of Assyria? Where is she who gave herself to the young men of Egypt, with their fine linens and precious jewels, their golden shields and bodies like giants?” The Prophet urges Herodias to “rise from her bed of incest, the bed of her abominations, so that she may hear the words of the One who prepares the way of the Lord, and that she may repent for her sins.”

Although the Prophet has been condemning her mother, Salome erupts into childish excitement, intoxicated by unconscious desires and a pathologic sensuality. Ironically, she recoils from the Prophet: “He is terrifying. He is really terrifying.”

*Salome's infatuation:*



The despairing Narraboth urges Salome to leave the terrace, but she heeds him not, captivated by the Prophet, and desiring that he speak again.

Salome studies the body of the Prophet, discovering that he is neither young nor fervent, but a gaunt and dreadful man. Nevertheless, she has become subconsciously captivated by him: "He's like an ivory statue. I'm sure he's as chaste as the moon. His flesh must be as cool as ivory. I must look closer at him!"

Jokanaan fixes his attention on Salome and inquires: "Wer ist dies Weib, das mich ansieht?" ("Who is this woman looking at me?") The Prophet forbids her to look at him. Then Salome proudly identifies herself: "I am Salome, the daughter of Herodias, the Princess of Judaea." Jokanaan realizes that he is in the presence of evil and promptly condemns the daughter of the dissolute Herodias: "Your mother has filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and God has heard the cry of her sins."

Salome remains calm, oblivious to the Prophet's denunciation of her mother; the Prophet's words merely inspire the unconscious perversity in Salome's mind. She replies casually and childishly to the Prophet: "Speak again, Jokanaan, your voice is like music to my ears." Salome has become completely obsessed by the Prophet's tirades and asks him what she must do?

Jokanaan denounces Salome as the "daughter of Sodom," commanding her away from him, and urging her to seek salvation: she must cover her face with a veil, scatter ashes on her head, and "go into the wilderness and seek the Son of Man." Salome inquires: "Who is He, the Son of Man? Is He as beautiful as you, Jokanaan?" Salome's erotic determination inflames the Prophet: he tells her that doom awaits Herod and Herodias; he can hear the "beating of the wings of the angel of death in the palace."

Narraboth again pleads with Salome to return to the banquet, but she is undeterred and ignores him: her monomania explodes as she confesses her lust and love for the Prophet: "Jokanaan! I am in love with your body." The more violent Jokanaan's denunciations, the more infatuated and fascinated Salome becomes, her unconscious cravings, compulsions, and amorous obsessions for him exploding into ecstatic rapture.

Salome is now completely dominated by her perverse passion for the Prophet: she praises Jokanaan by conjuring up sensual images of his body: "Your body is as white as the lilies of a field that have not been mowed. Your body is as white as the snows on the mountains of Judaea. The roses in the gardens of the Queen of Arabia are not as white as your body, nor the roses in the garden of Arabia's Queen, when the leaves fall at dawn, nor the moon when she lies on the sea. There is nothing in this world as white as your body."

Salome's obsession for Jokanaan reaches an impassioned climax: "Let me touch your body."

Jokanaan rejects Salome. He further condemns her, exhorting the "daughter of Babylon" that "evil came into the world by woman." The Prophet is appalled and refuses to hear her voice: "I listen only to the voice of the Lord God."

The Prophet's rejection of Salome further inflames her relentless desire for him, but now his denunciations incite her to revenge: in an instant, Salome's fascination with the Prophet turns to revulsion. Salome's will has been defeated and she condemns the prophet: "Your body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where snakes have crawled, where scorpions have made their nest! It is like a whitened sepulcher full of loathsome things. It is horrible, your body is horrible."

But just as suddenly, Salome resumes her lust and yearning for the Prophet. She again expresses her compulsive desire for him, this time, evoking the beauty of his hair: "It is your hair that I love, Jokanaan. Your hair is like bunches of grapes, like bunches of black grapes that hang from the

vine trees of Edom. Your hair is like the mighty cedars of Lebanon, which give shade to lions and robbers. The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, and the stars are afraid, are not as black as your hair. The silence of forests. Nothing in the world is as black as your hair. Let me touch your hair!”

Jokanaan thunders a new wave of revulsions and harsh rebuffs at Salome, bidding this daughter of Sodom to stand back, to leave him and not profane “the temple of the Lord.” But his rejection merely provokes Salome to renew her frenzied attack on him: “Your hair is horrible! It is thick with dirt and dust. It is just like a crown of thorns on your head. It is like a knot of black serpents writhing around your neck. I do not like your hair.”

Salome’s irreversible and obsessive craving intensifies, expressed by her in frenzied imagery: “It is your mouth I desire, Jokanaan. Your mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut with an ivory knife. The pomegranates that bloom in the garden of Tyre, redder than roses, are not so red. The red fanfares that herald the approach of Kings in wartime and place fear in the enemy, are not as red as your mouth. Your mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine, stamping in the wine presses. It is redder than the feet of the doves that haunt the holy. Your mouth is like a branch of coral found in the twilight sea; it is like vermilion that Kings take from the mines of Moab. There is nothing in the world as red as your mouth.”

Salome’s infatuation and obsession with the Prophet reaches a climactic tempest of exploding passions as she expresses her yearning to kiss Jokanaan: “Let me kiss your mouth!” Jokanaan again vehemently rejects her: “Never, daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom! Never!”

Over and over again, Salome repeats her monomania: “Ich will deinen Mund küssen, Jokanaan!” (“I will kiss your mouth, Jokanaan.”)

*“Ich will deinen Mund küssen”*

**Molto animato ed appassionato**  
SALOME



*Ich will deinen Mund küssen, Jo - ka - na - an,*  
I want to kiss your mouth Jokanaan,

Salome, consumed by her desire for the Prophet, is blind and oblivious to what is happening around her. Narraboth, watching her in horror, tries repeatedly to deter her and compel her to reason, but she ignores him. The Captain, possessed and desperately in love with the unattainable Princess, can no longer endure listening to Salome’s craving for the Prophet: in despair and jealousy, he stabs himself, his body falling between Salome and the Prophet.

Oblivious to Narraboth’s suicide, the morbid passion of a depraved teenager collide with the pious exhortations of the Prophet. Jokanaan denounces Salome as an accursed daughter of adultery who must seek salvation and redemption by finding Him: “Go, seek Him! He is in a boat on the Sea of Galilee talking with His disciples. Kneel down on the shore of the sea, and call Him by name. When He comes to you, and He comes to all who call Him, bow down before Him, and ask for remission of your sins.”

But Salome, sensually intoxicated and obsessed with lust for the Prophet, is oblivious to salvation. She is possessed by her *idée fixe* and continues her plea to Jokanaan, repeating it over and over again: “Let me kiss your mouth, Jokanaan!” And Jokanaan continues to reject her: “Sei verflucht, Tochter der blutschänderischen Mutter. Sei verflucht.” (“You are accursed, daughter of an incestuous mother. You are accursed.”)

As Jokanaan descends back into the cistern, the orchestra collides with Salome's theme of desire and Jokanaan's themes of the Messianic Deliverance, a musical tension between the sacred and the profane, and the spirit and the flesh. As Jokanaan disappears into the darkness, Salome stands before the cistern, frustrated, yearning, and longing.

Herod arrives, lustfully pursuing Salome: "Wo ist Salome? Wo ist die Prinzessin?" ("Where is Salome? Where is the Princess?") He is a neurasthenic beset by fears and insecurities, and now under the influence of too much wine. Herodias accompanies him, enraged with jealousy at her husband's overt lust for her daughter; she urges him to return to the banquet and to cease pursuing Salome with such obsessive lust.

Herod immediately becomes apprehensive and paranoid by omens, the dark night sky arousing a neurotic consciousness of something sinister: "The moon looks so strange tonight! Doesn't she have a strange look? She is like a mad woman, looking everywhere for lovers. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman." Herodias replies to her besotted husband contemptuously: "No, the moon is like the moon, that's all. Let's go inside."

But Herod is dauntless in his pursuit of Salome. He orders torches and tables brought to the terrace: he will drink again to honor Caesar's ambassadors, but with Salome at his side. Herod stumbles after slipping on blood. He inquires about the blood, and then sees a corpse. A Soldier advises him that it is Narraboth, the captain of the guard. But Herod becomes confused because he gave no order for anyone to be killed. The Soldiers inform him that Narraboth committed suicide.

Narraboth's death causes Herod to suddenly become possessed by fear and overcome by foreboding: he feels cold and believes that a chill wind blows; and he imagines that there are sudden gusts, the beating of the huge wings of the angel of death. He concludes that Narraboth's death was Divine justice because the Captain, like Herod, looked lustfully at Salome. Nervous, apprehensive, and perturbed, Herod orders Narraboth's body removed from the terrace.

Herodias again pleads with Herod to return to the banquet, explaining that he seems ill. But Herod rejects his wife, his entire thoughts focused on Salome. He comments that he finds Salome pale, perhaps sick. He orders his wine cup replenished and tries to persuade Salome to share wine with him, longing to watch her "dip her little red lips into it."

*"Salome, komm, trink Wein mit mir"*

**Molto animato**  
**HEROD**



Sa - lo - me, komm, trink Wein mit mir,  
Salome, come drink wine with me,

But Salome's inner thoughts are concerned with her unconscious passions for the Prophet. She coldly refuses him: "I am not thirsty, Tetrarch." Herod turns to Herodias, reproaching her for her daughter's refusal. But Herodias defends her daughter and again rebukes Herod for lustfully gazing at her daughter.

Herod attempts to lure Salome by offering to share fruit with her: "I love to see your little bite marks in a sweet fruit." Again, Salome refuses, telling him quietly, "I am not hungry, Tetrarch." And again, Herod blames Herodias for rearing Salome so poorly. But this time Herodias confronts Herod acrimoniously, reminding him that she and her daughter are descendants of a royal race; his father was a camel driver, and a thief and robber.

Herod renews his entreaties, this time offering to place Salome on her mother's throne beside him. Salome grimly replies, "I am not tired, Tetrarch."

From the depths of the cistern, Jokanaan's voice resounds again with his annunciation: "The time has come; the day of which I spoke is here." Herodias erupts in anger, ordering Herod to silence the fanatic man who continues to insult her. But Herod refuses, defending the man as a great Prophet; besides, he admonishes Herodias, "He has said nothing against you." Herodias accuses Herod of being afraid of the Prophet, but Herod defends himself as fearless of any man. If he is not afraid of the Prophet, Herodias suggests, "why don't you give him to the Jews, who have been screaming for him for months?" But Herod refuses, defending the Prophet: "He is a holy man. He is a man who has seen God."

The Jews erupt into furious arguments over religious dogma, the first Jew arguing that the Messiah is yet to come; he condemns Jokanaan as a false Prophet, not the incarnation of the Prophet Elijah who was the last prophet to see God. The second argues that perhaps Elijah never saw God but only His shadow. The third asserts that God shows Himself at all times and in everything: in what is good as well as evil. The fourth concludes that the others speak very dangerous dogma that emanates from Alexandria, from the Greeks and Gentiles. And the fifth admonishes that God operates in mysterious ways. The cacophony upsets Herodias, who pleads that Herod quiet the Jews.

Tempers and temperatures rise when Jokanaan's voice again announces the Messianic Deliverance: "So the day is come, the day of the Lord, and I can hear in the mountains the feet of Him, who will be the Savior of the world." Herod inquires the meaning of "Savior of the world," causing a Nazarene to announce that the Messiah has come, which is emphatically denied by the First Jew. The Nazarene defends his proclamation, describing how "He works miracles everywhere. He changed water into wine at a wedding in Galilee. He healed two lepers at Capernaum. He also healed blind people. And he was seen on a mountain talking with angels!"

Herodias denounces the miracles as nonsense, but Herod turns to fear when the other Nazarene reveals that the Messiah raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. Herod praises the miracles but expresses dread at the idea of the dead coming to life again: "I forbid him to do that. It would be dreadful if the dead came to life again!" Nevertheless, Herod is both inquisitive and doubtful, deciding that this Messiah of whom they speak must be found.

The commotion becomes dominated by the voice of Jokanaan — heard from the cistern — heaping fresh curses on Herodias, denouncing her, and predicting her imminent death: "The harlot, that daughter of Babylon, thus speaks the Lord, our God. A multitude will rise against her and take stones and stone to death. Their captains will pierce her with their sharp swords and crush her beneath their heavy shields. And thus I will wipe out all wickedness from the earth, and all women shall learn not to imitate her abominations."

Herodias, who was initially coldly aloof from the tumult, becomes infuriated by Jokanaan's abuse and loses her self control: she screams that the Prophet is outrageous, that Herod has allowed him to speak scandalously against her, and that Herod must silence him. Casually, Herod replies that the Prophet did not mention her by name.

Jokanaan continues, forecasting the horrible punishment of sinners: "On that day the sun shall turn black as sackcloth, and the moon shall become like blood, and the stars shall fall to the earth like ripe figs from the fig tree. On that day, the kings of the earth shall be afraid."

Herodias condemns the Prophet, and again urges Herod to silence him. But Herod is consumed with but one obsession and desire; he insists that Salome dance for him. And he is oblivious to Herodias, who states emphatically: "I will not have her dancing." To the delight of her mother, Salome refuses to dance.

While Salome broods over the cistern, Jokanaan's voice thunders again with his prediction of the Messianic Deliverance. Herod, desperate and impassioned, again begs Salome to dance for him, but this time he promises her anything she desires: "If you dance for me you may ask of me what ever you want. I'll give you what you ask for." Salome suddenly becomes aroused: "Will you really give me whatever I ask, Tetrarch?" Herodias commands her daughter not to dance, but Salome is heedless. Obsessed and determined, Herod makes a bold promise to Salome if she dances for him: "Everything, everything, that you ask for, even half my kingdom."

Salome makes Herod confirm his promise by an oath: by his life, crown and gods. Suddenly Herod becomes overwhelmed with portents and senses a chill wind and the beating of unseen wings: "Ah! It is as though there's a huge black bird: is it hovering over the terrace?" He shivers and erupts into a fever, and to cool himself, calls for water, snow to eat, and the loosening of his cloak. But he realizes that it his crown, decorated with festive garlands of roses, that is suffocating him; he removes it, recovers from his seizure, and immediately resumes his relentless request that Salome dance for him.

Herodias makes one last attempt to prevent Salome from dancing. She protests with fury and outrage, maddened and confounded by the voice of Jokanaan accusing Herod's court of gross immorality. In vain, she again demands that Herod accompany her inside. But Herod will remain because he has triumphed. Salome will dance for him: "Ich bin bereit, Tetrarch" ("I am ready, Tetrarch.")

The *Dance of the Seven Veils* represents Salome's exotic and sinuous evocations of her teenage erotic fantasies and desires that she will use to inflame the lascivious Herod.

At first, the music is a lulling and insinuating oriental theme.

*Dance of the Seven Veils - First theme:*



Then the mood changes to luxurious melodiousness.

*Dance of the Seven Veils - Second theme:*



At one point, Salome seems tired and faint from the wild rhythms of the dance, but she collects herself and resumes with renewed strength; as she dances, she pauses by the cistern like a visionary, her thoughts concentrating on Jokanaan. Then, the music of the dance erupts into a semi-barbaric wildness, Salome making convulsive gestures, and concluding by throwing herself at Herod's feet.

After Salome's dance, Herod is exhilarated and excited. He turns triumphantly to Herodias: "You see, your daughter has danced for me!" Herod quickly invites Salome to come near to him so that he can grant her the promised reward: "Tell me what you want? Speak!" Salome kneels before him humbly, but responds coldly: "I want someone to bring me on a silver platter.... the head of Jokanaan." ("Den Kopf des Jochanaan.") The revenge-lusting Herodias becomes delighted and commends her daughter's request: for Herodias, the prophet who condemned her will now be destroyed and she will avenge his condemnation of her.

But Herod is appalled, urging Salome to refute her mother, the woman who has always given her bad advice. Salome replies firmly, stating that she does not listen to her mother and has asked for the Prophet's head for her own pleasure. Herod tries to dissuade Salome, imploring her to choose something else. Herodias defends Salome and urges her to remain firm; death to the man who has scandalized her.

Herod pleads with Salome, expressing his horror at the idea of a decapitated head as her reward. He tries to reason with Salome, offering her fabulous jewels, or anything in his kingdom: the finest emerald in the world, his beautiful white peacocks. Herodias reminds him that he must abide by his oath; Herod immediately silences her.

Herod tries to reason with Salome, but she remains intransigent, adamant and steadfast, making her request with increasing fury: "Gib mir den Kopf des Jochanaan!" ("Give me the head of Jokanaan!") Herodias again praises her daughter's determination. Herod turns to Salome and again tries to reason with her, terrified because he believes that the Prophet is a holy man sent by God and he fears God's anger; if Herod has him killed something terrible would happen to him. But he fears even more the misfortune that will overcome him if he does not honor his oath.

Salome remains undaunted. Herod continues to try to dissuade her with more offers: pearls, topazes, opals, and other priceless treasures. He will give Salome all, even the cloak of the High Priest, but not the life of the Prophet. But Herod has become helpless, frustrated in his hopeless attempt to dissuade Salome from her desires. In despair, he accedes to Salome and issues the order: "Man soll ihr geben, was sie verlangt! Sie ist in Wahrheit ihrer Mutter Kind!" ("Let her be given what she wants! She is indeed her mother's child!")

While Herod remains spellbound and in shock, Herodias takes advantage of his collapse and removes the Ring of Death from his finger. She gives it to a soldier, who immediately gives it to Naaman, the executioner, who, upon receiving it, descends into the cistern. Herod notices that his Ring is gone, and inquires who has taken it. Herodias replies savagely that it is being used to satisfy her daughter's request: "My daughter has done well!" Herod remains dumbfounded, certain that misfortune will overcome them.

Salome leans over the cistern, listening intently in tense expectation to hear Jokanaan's cries and struggles; she is confounded that she does not hear screams or a struggle from a man about to be killed. She calls for the executioner to strike, but there is only a terrible silence. She hears what she believes is the executioner's sword falling and concludes that he is a coward, afraid to behead the Prophet. Salome turns hysterically to Herodias's Page and threatens him if he does not command the soldiers to descend into the cistern and bring her what she desires, what was promised to her by the Tetrarch, what is hers. The Page recoils in horror. Salome herself turns to the soldiers and orders them into the cistern, calling to Herod to command them to bring her the head of Jokanaan.

As Salome eagerly awaits her prize, amid almost unbearable orchestral tension, the executioner's huge black arm rises from the cistern bearing the head of Jokanaan on a silver shield. In her moment of triumph and ecstasy Salome seizes the head: Herod hides his face in his cloak; Herodias smiles as she delivers a platter for the head; the Nazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray. Salome has avenged Jokanaan's humiliation and rejection of her: she is victorious and has overpowered the Prophet. Herod is repelled and fearful, but Herodias gloats in victory. Salome's passions intensify and explode, the fulfillment of her neurotic and erotic obsession for the Prophet."

Salome explodes in triumph as she addresses the Prophet's severed head: "Ah, You wouldn't let me kiss your mouth, Jokanaan! Well, I will kiss it now! I will sink my teeth into it, as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes. I will kiss your mouth, Jokanaan. I said I would, didn't I say it?"

Salome rhapsodizes to the Jokanaan's decapitated head: "But why don't you look at me, Jokanaan? Your eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Why are they closed? Open your eyes! Lift up your eyelids Jokanaan. Why don't you look at me? Are you afraid of me, Jokanaan, that you won't look at me?"

"And your tongue says nothing now, Jokanaan, your tongue that was like a red snake spitting poison at me? That's strange, isn't it? How is it that the red viper moves no more? You spoke evil words against me, Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea."

"Well then! I am still alive, but you are dead, and your head belongs to me! I'm free to do with it what I will. I can do what I want with it; I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. The birds of the air will devour what the dogs leave behind."

"Ah! Ah! Jokanaan, Jokanaan, you were beautiful. Your body was a column of ivory set on silver feet. It was a garden full of doves and silver lilies. Nothing in the world was so white as your body. Nothing in the world was as black as your hair. And in the whole world nothing was a red as your mouth."

"Your voice was like a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked at you I heard strange music. Ah! Why didn't you look at me, Jokanaan? You covered your eyes in order to see your God. Well, you saw your God, Jokanaan, but me, me, you never saw. If you had seen me, you would have loved me!"

"I am thirsting for your beauty. I am hungry for your body. Neither wine nor apples can ease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither floods nor great waters can ever quench the heat of my strong passion. Oh why didn't you look at me? If you had looked at me you would have loved me. I know well that you would have loved me. I know well that you would have loved me. And the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death."

Salome remains intoxicated and enraptured, exhausted and brooding as she contemplates the decapitated head of the Prophet. Herod mutters to Herodias: "She is a monster, your daughter." Herodias acknowledges Herod's accusation with pride, sharing her daughter's victory. Now she insists that they remain on the terrace: "I approve of what she did. I'll stay here now." But Herod wants to leave the horrible scene, afraid and fearful, and wanting to hide in the palace because he fears that something terrible will happen.

Herod becomes seized with terror. He commands his slaves: "Put out the torches! Hide the moon, hide the stars!" Suddenly, the moon and stars disappear behind the clouds and it becomes eerily dark. In the dimness of the night, Salome, gripped by her unconscious erotic delirium, continues to lustfully kiss the severed head of Jokanaan.

"Ah! I have kissed your mouth, Jokanaan. There was a bitter taste on your lips. Was it the taste of blood? No, perhaps it is the taste of love. They say that love has a bitter taste. But so what? I have kissed your mouth, Jokanaan. I have now kissed you mouth."

In her final ecstasy of perversity, Salome passes into a strangely mystical sphere of insanity, the climactic fulfillment of her erotic yearnings and desires.



A moonbeam falls on Salome, covering her with light. Before departing, Herod turns to witness Salome, illuminated by the beam of moonlight, intoxicated in her orgasmic and passionate ritual, her insane lust as she kisses the severed head of the prophet.

Disgusted, fearful, and terrified by the horror, Herod commands his Soldiers: "Man töte dieses Weib!" ("Kill that woman!")

The Soldiers crush Princess Salome between their shields.

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