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Oscar Wilde Scrapbook

Vol. 12

BY ALICE ROHE.

WHY should I feel revulsion in kissing the severed head of John the Baptist? To me, as Salome, the head is real, the mouth I kiss is that of Jokanaan, whom I loved. Salome felt no revulsion. To me as Olive Fremstad the head is not real, it is merely papier-mache. There is no occasion for revulsion in either case."

Mme. Olive Fremstad, in whom more interest centres to-day than in any artist who has given a new interpretation to a New York audience, settled with direct psychological analysis a much discussed question. There is no one so insignificant as not to have taken a hand in the great "Salome" agitation. There is no one whose opinions on the subject of Richard Strauss and his "music-made" "Salome" are of more interest than Mme. Fremstad.

To every woman and perhaps to every man who sat in the audience at the Metropolitan Opera-House when the Strauss music-drama was produced there was an overpowering sensation of horror when this splendid prima donna prostrated herself upon the stage and, embracing the head of John the Baptist, kissed the dead lips long, while the music of Strauss revealed the emotions of the daughter of Herodias.

To hear Mme. Fremstad herself explain her own feelings while enacting the role of Salome was an interesting experience. In a way it was almost like making a psychological study of dual personality. Mme. Fremstad herself was the analyst, for she dissected herself as Salome as analytically as the most exacting psychologist could wish. Only she did it all with a directness and a common-sense point of view that left no doubt as to her overpowering dislike for anything erotic.

"In the first place," asked Mme. Fremstad, "why do you want to accentuate this kissing episode? There is so much else in the wonderful music of Strauss worthy of discussion."

"But that is the very point over which so much trouble has been made, and you can't help accentuating it," was suggested. "One critic, you may remember, referred to 'the disgusting sight of a great prima donna grovelling on the floor over the head of a dead man.' You know that people wonder how you do this without a feeling of revulsion."

"To the artist all things are necessary and possible," said Mme. Fremstad. "The greatest trouble in this misjudging of 'Salome' is the fact that judgment has been passed by incompetent persons. People have seen only the physical part of my kissing the lips of John the Baptist. They are deaf to the Strauss music. Personally I have explained that I feel no revulsion. I am Salome. I am completely dominated by the Strauss music. I see nothing but the head of Jokanaan when I am kissing it. The music of Richard Strauss makes me Salome. As for the critic you mention, he lost sight of the fact that it was Salome, not Fremstad, who was kissing the dead head. His artistic appreciation did not go that far. He mixed personalities."

Kissing a "Property" Head.

"But doesn't a little of yourself creep into your interpretation and make you feel that you are actually kissing a severed head?"

"Not at all. I am not myself; I have explained that at that moment I am Salome," replied Mme. Fremstad.

"Did you ever feel any revulsion for the head?"

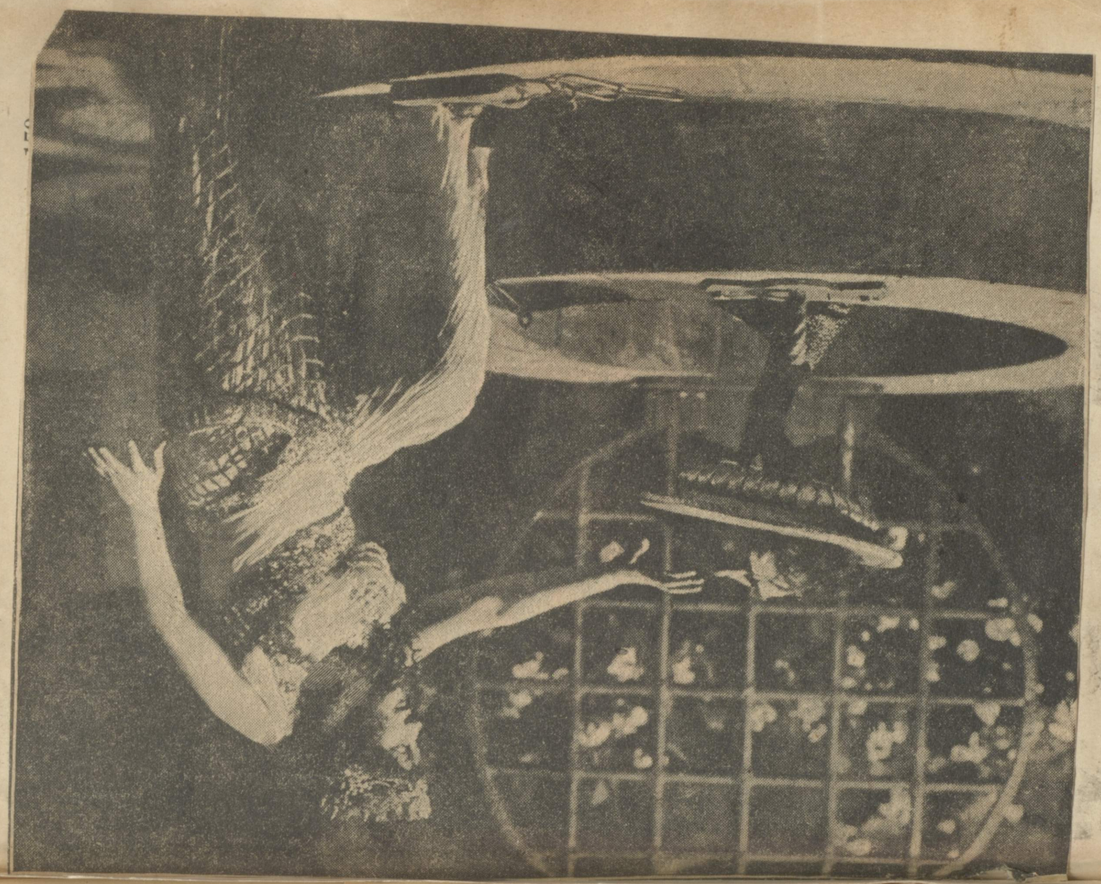
"Oh, at first when I saw it I naturally thought it was gruesome; but that was when I was not acting and singing. I knew that the head was made in the likeness of Van Rooy, and I had been warned that I might be shocked at it. We have to get used to a great many things in the way of stage properties, so I brought common sense into play and realized that it was only papier-mache after all.

"On the stage, when the music is playing, the head is no longer a papier-mache likeness of Van Rooy, and there is no revulsion whatever. I should not be an artist if I allowed such things to affect me."

"But you will admit there is something revolting in the very thought of Salome kissing the dead lips of Jokanaan?"

"In the Wilde play—yes," replied Mme. Fremstad. "But the music of Strauss ennobles the libretto. It is a Strauss Salome, not a Wilde Salome, I interpret. It would be impossible for any of us—for any wholesome, healthy woman—even to understand the innermost thoughts of a degenerate creature, half child, half woman, of the court of Herod.

"My only understanding of Salome is through the music of Richard Strauss. His music made me Salome. There is more in the Strauss music of that kissing scene than lay mind, which seeks only sensations, grasps."



MME. FREMSTAD in "SALOME"

Princess ! Princess ! thou who art like a bouquet of myrrh.

For the hundreds who witnessed the sensuous, seductive Salome in her joy at receiving her heart's desire upon that silver charger, and who saw only the daughter of Herodias throw herself prostrate upon the floor and cover with her hair the head of Jokanaan while she embraced it with her bare arms, kissing at the same time the dead lips, Mme. Fremstad says the music of Strauss was lost.

"The kiss of Salome upon the lips of Jokanaan marks her redemption. She is a new Salome when she realizes her love for that dead head, severed forever from the body which she so plainly said she loved. Salome was a degenerate, but she was redeemed at last. How could we expect her to be anything else in her environment? The music of Strauss tells us plainly the awakening of her soul, her real love and regret for the thing she had done.

"Whatever realism I give to the character of Salome is not my own conception; it is the music of Richard Strauss impelling me. Her desires and her final regrets are all plainly told in this music which created Salome in me."

Looking at this handsome prima donna, whose most vital charm is the very wholesomeness of her views, and whose personality tells as clearly as her direct, unaffected statements of absolutely refreshing common sense, the marvel seemed to be the power of Richard Strauss's music which could create in this artist the sensuous, passionate, daringly seductive product of the degenerate era of the Tetrarch Herod, seen but a short time before on the Metropolitan Opera-House stage.

"How many of the critics of Salome heard the redemption of this strange creature in the music?" continued Mme. Fremstad. "How many saw anything but the physical suggestions of the libretto? 'Salome' is a work which appeals to the intellect. That may explain why so many have wrongfully criticised it."

Music with a Personality.

Mme. Fremstad smiled, but the sarcasm of her remark was not lost.

"When I first heard 'Salome' in Cologne I must confess that I was disgusted. Of course, it was badly acted, but the main reason was that I did not fully 'sense' the Strauss music. It takes more than one hearing really to appreciate this work which appeals to the intellect."

"But, Mme. Fremstad," was asked, "if your 'Salome' is purely a creation of Strauss's music through you, and the music appeals to you only intellectually, how do you account for the overpoweringly sensuous impression your interpretation makes upon the audience?"

"That is art," was her reply.

"But you must know that critics have pronounced your interpretation of Salome to be a dramatic creation which could stand without the Strauss musical setting."

"Well," replied Mme. Fremstad, "I cannot quite divide my personality to the extent of getting off and looking at my dramatic interpretation separated from the music. I only know that whatever dramatic force I put into Salome is actuated by the Strauss music. Every note is responsible for my interpretation. I am merely the music of Strauss speaking."

"Could you have given an interpretation of Wilde's 'Salome' without the Strauss music?"

"Never! Never!" exclaimed Mme. Fremstad. "It is the music which has created my Salome. Strauss's Salome is a most difficult creature to portray. It requires the blending of a capricious child with an Isolde. As for the music, to sing it is the most difficult task that any prima donna could undertake."

"Do you think that there is anything in the Strauss music which could be described as 'bad' in its moral effect?"

"Nothing," exclaimed Mme. Fremstad, emphatically. "It is, as I have said, a purely intellectual work. To those who can appreciate it, it is a wonderfully artistic achievement. You must remember that there are some minds which cannot soar to poetic and artistic heights. They have to grasp at such clods as are within their intellectual scope. They judge a great work by the things they can comprehend.

"That, unfortunately, may explain the prominence given to the kissing of the lips of Jokanaan, when the music of Strauss, with all its intellectual appeal, is lost in mere sordid interpretation. 'Salome' stands for the music of the intellect, as "Parsifal' does for the music of the heart."

"Then you do not believe that music is largely a matter of the senses?"

"Not Strauss music. If you knew the hard work I put in endeavoring to interpret the Strauss music you would realize that it is a question of intellect, whatever sensuous impression you say my interpretation may give.

The Influence of Salome.

"Salome appeals to me here," said Mme. Fremstad, putting her hand to her forehead beneath her blond pompadour. "To me and to every musician who can understand, the work is purely intellectual. As for the degrading theme, as some have been pleased to speak of the story which Strauss has made great with his music, it seems to me that the critical conscience is awakening rather arbitrarily. While the sensitive searchlight is looking for unpleasant themes it is strange that it should have overlooked a few incidents in Wagnerian opera. If there is nothing elevating about the subject on which Strauss has lavished his genius, there is certainly nothing particularly uplifting about some evident facts in Wagnerian opera, where the parentage of Siegfried and other incidents might long ago have raised a hue and cry."

"It is the kiss, though, Mme. Fremstad, that has aroused this personal discussion," reiterated the writer. "To be still more analytical, the act of kissing dead lips to a healthy woman savors"—

"You forget," put in Mme. Fremstad, "as a healthy, wholesome woman I could not do it. When I kiss the mouth of Jokanaan I am Salome."

For the hundreds who witnessed the sensuous, seductive Salome in her joy at receiving her heart's desire upon that silver charger, and who saw only the daughter of Herodias throw herself prostrate upon the floor and cover with her hair the head of Jokanaan while she embraced it with her bare arms, kissing at the same time the dead lips, Mme. Fremstad says the music of Strauss was lost.

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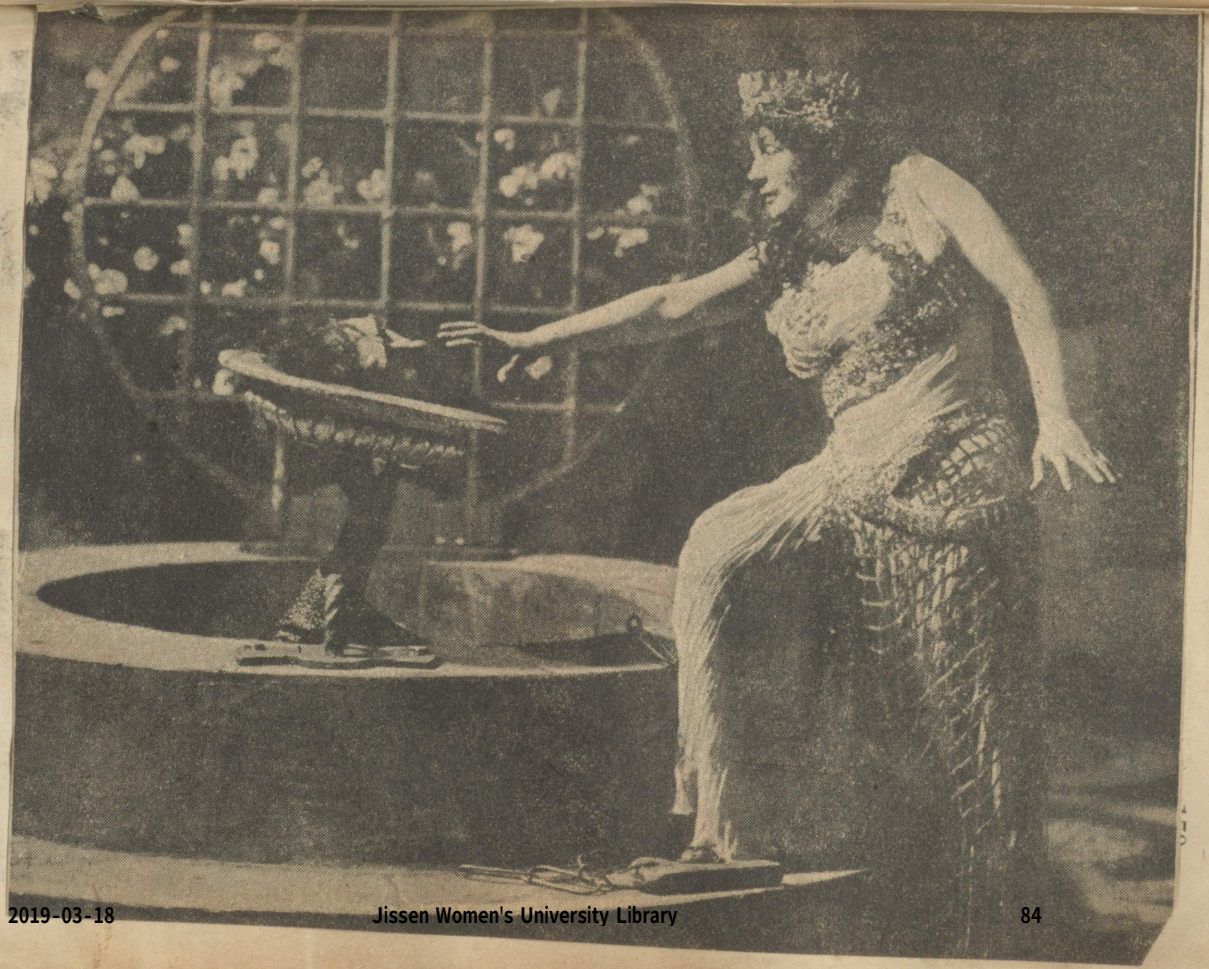

MME. FREMSTAD in "SALOME"

This Picture Shows the Famous Religious Painter, Titian,s Idea of Salome.

Princess ! Princess ! thou who art like a bouquet of myrrh,

The Evening Post.

New York, Wednesday, Jan. 23, 1907.

Richard Strauss's "Salome."

Doubtless many of the four thousand persons who last night witnessed the first performance in America of Richard Strauss's "Salome" at the Metropolitan Opera House asked themselves what could have persuaded that composer to choose so repulsive a subject for an opera. The answer is easily found. In all probability the keen mercenary instincts of Strauss had much to do with it. No industrious farmer in the field of music has known better than he how to make hay while the sun shone on some particular fad or play. When the Nietzsche craze was at its height, he wrote a metaphysical tone poem, "Thus Spake Zarathustra." When the "Ueberbrettl" was in vogue, he wrote his "Feuersnot," and when Oscar Wilde's plays, temporarily ostracized in England, became a fad in Germany, he was promptly on hand to link his fortune with that of the worst of them. The Kaiser did the rest. By forbidding the opera resulting from this unholy union he did more for it than a thousand press agents could have done in a hundred years. Dresden promptly produced it, and within a year two dozen cities had followed suit. Richard Strauss is a good business man, and he is growing rich rapidly.

But he is more than a business man. He has a "musical" mission, and that is to spread the gospel of hideousness. He has a mania for writing ugly music; a modern harpy, he cannot touch anything without besmearing it with dissonance. He has often been reproached for incessantly pelting audiences with cacophony where none such is called for by his subject. What more natural than that he should therefore cast about for a subject which imperatively demands hideous din to correspond with and justify his concatenated discords? And what more natural than that the noisome Salome should seem an ideal companion for his noisy music?

Compared with Salome, such characters as Manon Lescaut and Violetta are angels of purity. One does not have to go to the psychopathological treatises of a Kraff-Ebing to fully comprehend the loathsomeness of their actions. To dwell on the details of this loathsomeness in a newspaper would be to abet the crime of producing on a public stage such a scene as that which closes the Wilde-Strauss opera; a scene so repulsive that even that king of degenerates, Herod, is horrified and commands his soldiers to "Kill that woman!"

If the presentation of such a story is ethically a crime, Richard Strauss's music is æsthetically criminal—or, at least, extremely coarse and ill-mannered. His music often suggests a man who comes to a social reception unkempt, with hands unwashed, cigar in mouth, hat on, and who sits down and puts his feet on the table. No boor ever violated all the laws of etiquette as Strauss violates all the laws of musical composition. And yet, that is not what one need object to primarily in his score. Let him have all the dissonances he wants; especially in such a scene as the quarrel of the five Jews, where the cackling noises are as effective as in the quarrel of Mime and Alberich in "Siegfried," besides having a humorous aspect. Let him have them, too, *ad libitum*, for contrast in a passage like that where Salome compares Jokanaan's body to that of a leper, to a whited sepulchre, full of loathsome things, and then suddenly declares herself enamored of his hair, which is "like clusters of grapes," etc.; this affords the composer opportunity for contrasts of cacophony and euphony which are very effective.

What one must object to is the intrusion of cacophony, where the dramatic situation does not call for it. But a truce to cacophony. It is not by any means Strauss's most vulnerable point. His fatal shortcoming is the weakness of his themes, the utter lack of melody. In the whole opera, which lasts an hour and a half, there is not a page of sustained melody either in the vocal parts or in the orchestra. With the exception of the majestic but commonplace motive of the prophet, and a few bars borrowed from Tchaikovsky, there is nothing to arrest the attention and delight the lover of melody. The persons on the stage are little more than declaiming actors and actresses, who have to display superhuman ingenuity in making their words fit into the polyphonic web spread by the orchestra. There is one consolation. Thanks to the prevailing dissonance, nobody knows—or cares—whether they sing the right notes—that is, the notes assigned to them—or not. Who can fail to see the stupendous originality of Richard Strauss? What composer before him has been so clever as to be able to write music in which it makes no difference whether or not you sing or play correctly?

The admirers of Strauss have emphasized the great ingenuity displayed by him in this score in the commingling of leading motives. No doubt, he has shown almost ultra-Wagnerian subtlety in their combinations and suggestiveness, but, unfortunately, all this is for the eye of the student only who reads the score, and not for the auditor in the opera house. After several hearings of "Salome" it is difficult to recognize, as they come along, more than three or four of the themes. The others

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are so insignificant—mere themelets—that they make no appeal, and pass by unnoticed.

It is this insignificance of the themes that prevents the much-vaunted orchestration from producing such an impression as one might expect from an aggregation of 106 players. What this means can be illustrated best by an anecdote. A certain German prince who had written a piece of music once asked Liszt to arrange it for orchestra and bring in the trombones with the same splendid effect as in the "Tannhäuser" overture. Liszt, with all his diplomacy, found it difficult to make it clear to him that *the trombones had less to do with it than what they played.*

It would be unjust to deny that Strauss has succeeded, nevertheless, in gratifying the ear with some fascinating sounds, in the producing of which the new or unusual instruments used by him, such as the heckelphone and the celeste, have a share. Those much-talked-of uncanny sounds produced by the double-basses, while Salome listens as the prophet is being executed in the cistern, somehow missed their effect; they sounded so much like the honk, honk, of an automobile as to make many of the hearers smile. As a matter of fact, there are not a few other things in this music which might be treated from a humorous point of view, were it not for the horrible subject. Much is grotesque, and there is a glamour of artificiality over the whole opera, which somewhat mitigates its detestable realism. The beautiful scenic setting, with its picturesque Orientalism, also acts as a compensation.

"Disgusted but fascinated," "disgusted but amused," "disgusted and bored"—these seemed to be the predominant feelings in the audience as expressed after the performance. The opera received very little applause, while the performance aroused much enthusiasm. How distinguish between the two? Very easily; when the curtain went down only a few hundred persons clapped their hands, in a perfunctory way; but when the curtain went up again there was much applause for the singers, intensified when they brought out Mr. Hertz, too, who accomplished a memorable deed in producing such a stupendously difficult work with the utmost smoothness. The eminent Cologne critic and "Salome" lecturer, Dr. Neitzel, is said to have declared it the finest performance of the opera he has heard, which one can easily believe, for no foreign opera house could have provided a cast including a group of singers equalling Mmes. Fremstad and Weed, and Burrian, Dippel, Van Rooy, Reiss, Mühlmann, not to mention the interpreters of the minor rôles, all of which were well done. Details must be reserved.

It would have been well, perhaps, if the operatic concert by all the remaining members of the Conried company (except those indisposed), instead of preceding "Salome" had followed it, to take the bitter taste out of the mouth. That the singers were applauded to the echo, need not be said. The performance was for the benefit of the manager, and the receipts exceeded $22,000.

Richard Strauss

In deciding to make a clean end of "Salome" in this city, submitting to the money loss, the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company have deserved well of all who are working for better public morals. Especially commendable is the resolve to permit the unsavory opera to be presented in no other theatre, and in no expurgated or diluted form whatever. The thing is best buried and done with. The whole incident shows what a sure response public opinion will make when appealed to on a clear issue of decency. People in New York have not yet reached the point where they demand foulness in their recreative amusements. If sound taste and moral judgment were permitted gradually to be broken down by such public shows as "Salome," we should be in danger of coming to the standard of the fabled Neapolitan lady who said, when sipping a sorbet: "What a pity that there is nothing sinful about this!"

Princess ! Princess ! thou who art like a bouquet of myrrh,

DANCER WHOSE SALOME IS DENOUNCED AS FRENZIED.

MAUD ALLAN AS SALOME.

SALOME'S NAKED ART SAVED BY HER NECKLACE.

Maud Allan's Shrouding Beads and Clout Her Only Protection from the Winds of Heaven in Classical Dance Sublime in Its Audacity of Nudity.

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It would have been well, perhaps, if the operatic concert by all the remaining members of the Conried company (except those indisposed), instead of preceding "Salome" had followed it, to take the bitter taste out of the mouth. That the singers were applauded to the echo, need not be said. The performance was for the benefit of the manager, and the receipts exceeded $22,000.

Richard Strauss

In deciding to make a clean end of "Salome" in this city, submitting to the money loss, the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company have deserved well of all who are working for better public morals. Especially commendable is the resolve to permit the unsavory opera to be presented in no other theatre, and in no expurgated or diluted form whatever. The thing is best buried and done with. The whole incident shows what a sure response public opinion will make when appealed to on a clear issue of decency. People in New York have not yet reached the point where they demand foulness in their recreative amusements. If sound taste and moral judgment were permitted gradually to be broken down by such public shows as "Salome," we should be in danger of coming to the standard of the fabled Neapolitan lady who said, when sipping a sorbet: "What a pity that there is nothing sinful about this!"

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DANCER WHOSE SALOME IS DENOUNCED AS FRENZIED.

MAUD ALLAN AS SALOME.

SALOME'S NAKED ART SAVED BY HER NECKLACE.

Maud Allan's Shrouding Beads and Clout Her Only Protection from the Winds of Heaven in Classical Dance Sublime in Its Audacity of Nudity.

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Dancer Disdains Fleshings, and Loathsome Spectacle of "Salome's Vision" Is Replete with Sensation and Disgust—Variety House Crowded Nightly, but Encores Never Demanded.

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Setting aside for the moment the question whether the causation of nausea should be regarded as a laudable purpose for dramatic and musical art, it may be conceded that "Salome" is a creation of striking originality, of tremendous dramatic power, of irresistible musical expressiveness and of marvellous technical construction. It demonstrates conclusively that in so far as technic and mastership in the treatment of operatic materials go Strauss is entitled to a place among the leaders and that his true field is not the concert hall but the theatre.

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The writing for the voices contains not a single point of vocal display. For the singer, using that term in its strict sense as it is used in reference to the voice parts of Mozart, Glück or Wagner, there is extremely little. The text is treated conversationally throughout, and the declamation goes further away from anything which we have hitherto recognized as singing than even the wildest passages in this same composer's songs. In some speeches it produces the illusion of spoken text. One has to listen keenly to perceive that the tones are sung. Yet these passages are among the most wonderfully expressive in the drama.

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humanity never created a more amazing character study than this *Herod*. Strauss's music has done wonders for the Wilde original. The recitative style is the very speech of the man. The orchestral illustrations of his blasted and putrid soul are marvellous in their scarifying truthfulness. When he is haunted by fancies of great winds, of alternate heat and cold, the orchestra paints in tone pictures of wonderful fidelity. A nerve shattered, dream haunted wreck, vainly seeking forgetfulness in drink, is the master creation of Mr. Strauss, realist.

On the other hand the orchestra sweats and stews and quivers madly with the abandon of *Salome's* physical passion for the prophet. Mere words and cold type cannot convey to the reader any realization of the manner in which this man Strauss rips the covering off a soul beside which that of Swinburne's Faustine is as a lily beside a poppy. In his musical delineation of *Herod* and *Salome* the composer has made music publish the monstrosities of minds and bodies diseased, and he has done it with a power little short of diabolical. As an expression of the horrible fancies of Oscar Wilde this score is a masterpiece. As a demonstration of the suitability of ultra modern composition to the purposes of the music drama it is complete and convincing.

The most considerable problem presented by this drama—and there are several—is whether the picture of *Salome* coddling and kissing a severed head is not an outrage on the possibilities of the theatre and whether the musical investiture of the scene, with its return of the lascivious love themes of the duet between *Salome* and *Jokanaan*, is quite sincere. The public alone can decide whether the spectacle of the sensual creature grovelling and puling over the ghastly head is one to be tolerated. No commentator who believes in the ennobling and uplifting misson of art can approve of such a disgusting scene. But the return of the love music is perfectly logical. *Salome* recalls his averted looks, his rocky coldness. If he had looked upon her he had loved her. That is the meaning of the love music.

Moreover it affords a melodic climax, without which not even Strauss has yet ventured to compose a work.

There are some striking minor portions in this score, none more so than the treatment of the disputing Jews. This is a masterpiece of humor, in which the hand of the composer of "Til Eulenspiegel" is at work. The orchestral writing at the point where *Salome* listens at the cistern while the executioner is slaying *Jokanaan* is another stupendous piece of tone painting. Nothing in all music creates a greater atmosphere of horror and suspense. The orchestral postlude following the duet in which *Jokanaan* repulses *Salome* is a grewsome exposition of her spent and futile passion. There are phrases which are positively indecent in the frank eloquence of their meaning.

The dance of *Salome* before *Herod* introduces some of the love music in order that the dancer may do some delineative posing over the mouth of the cistern. But there is room for doubt as to whether even Oscar Wilde contemplated such a dance as that seen last evening. He directs that *Salome* shall dance the dance of the seven veils, which requires her to strip off seven successive coverings of her body.

The dance of last night was a more than colorable imitation of the danse du ventre which stirred up such a commotion when it was witnessed at the World's Fair. As *Herod* had already promised to give *Salome* anything she would ask it hardly seemed necessary to treat him to such a spectacle of impropriety. Miss Froelich, the dancer who for this episode represented *Salome*, spared the audience nothing in the matter of active and suggestive detail.

The stage pictures were admirably arranged. The entrance of *Herod* was not dramatic. The movement of the personages of the court, the action of the minor characters such as the Jews and all similar matters of detail had been carefully prepared. The playing of the orchestra was superb, and Mr. Hertz's conducting was a triumph of musicianship, artistry and enthusiasm.

Of the impersonations of the leading characters little can be said at this time. They are entitled to further study. The record of the moment is that Miss Fremstad's *Salome* places her in the front rank of great dramatic singers, and Mr. Burrian's *Herod* must be accorded a place beside Van Dyck's *Loge* as one of the most subtle, consistent, intellectual and complete character studies ever seen on the operatic stage.

In his anxiety to depict the aloofness of *Jokanaan* Mr. Van Rooy was perhaps a trifle too strained in style, but he was not out of the picture. Miss Weed's *Herodias* was excellent, and Mr. Dippel lent his ripe experience and intelligence to the minor rôle of *Narraboth*. Mr. Reiss was most admirable as the first Jew, and his associates were competent. Messrs. Mühlmann, Blass, Journet and Steiner filled small parts which required skill and thus aided the general effect of the performance. Nothing but the warmest praise can be bestowed on this production. It was one of the very best in the history of the Metropolitan Opera House.

The Evening Post.

New York, Tuesday, January 22, 1907.

"John the Baptist."

It is only fair to assume that Miss Julia Marlowe and Mr. E. H. Sothern, players who have deserved well of the community, were actuated by an artistic motive when they undertook to produce the English extract of Sudermann's "Johannes," which was presented by them in the Lyric Theatre, last evening, under the title of "John the Baptist." Nevertheless, it is difficult to perceive any worthy or profitable end to be achieved by such a representation. Of real stirring dramatic quality it has very little, while of literary grace or power there are not many examples in the text of Mary Harned, some of whose lines are so inapt and feeble as to excite irreverent titters. Considered in the light of history, it is to a large extent either pure invention or wilful perversion; as a reflection of ancient Eastern life and manners it is valueless; as a study of the Baptist it is lacking in imagination, consistency, and vigor; as theological speculation it is

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often dull without being deep, while any good moral effect which it may have been expected to exercise, is completely neutralized by an admixture of the sensual with the spiritual, which has no shadow of foundation in fact, and could only have been prompted originally by a polluted fancy.

Without the impression of this sensual element—which is actually more tiresome on account of its plain unnaturalness than it is alluring, but nevertheless is a bait for the foolish or the vicious—it is exceedingly unlikely that there would have been any eagerness to put the play upon the stage. Professedly the story follows the Biblical lines—all present reference, of course, is only to the acting version—and it does so far as there are lines to follow, but nine-tenths of it, necessarily, are the product of obviously uninspired invention. John is shown first in the wilderness proclaiming to his disciples the imminence of the Messiah, whom he invests with all the attributes of celestial and earthly glory. He relates the scene of the baptism in the Jordan, and then, hearing of the proposed marriage of Herod with Herodias, starts off to Jerusalem to protest against it. In a public place he has a controversy with certain Pharisees, whom he duly denounces as a generation of vipers, but he can scarcely be said to have the best of the uninspired argument which follows. Then one Simon, a Galilean (plainly typical of Christ himself) tells him that the key to the new dispensation is the might of love, and thereafter he devotes himself to a search for Galileans who may give him further instructions on this point from the Master whom he is seeking. Meanwhile he boldly denounces Herod and Herodias, who (after the fashion of Oriental potentates) are walking on foot through the streets to the palace, and this attracts the attention of Salome, who is greatly impressed by his hirsute adornments. The ensuing act takes place in a chamber of the palace, whither John has been bidden by Herodias. Salome seizes the opportunity to make advances to the prophet, who, however, scarcely deigns to look at her, reserving his energies for a fierce attack upon her mother, which is delivered in due course. Herodias orders his arrest, but finally contents herself with having him turned into the street.

Having failed to stop the marriage, John's next step is to prepare a popular revolt, with the view of stoning the guilty pair on their approach to the temple. He himself is to throw the first stone. But, while waiting at the temple steps, he has encountered several Galileans, who derisively repeat certain injunctions of the Christ, as delivered in the Sermon on the Mount. John begins to see a great light, although he is completely bewildered by it, and when Herod appears he, remembering the command, "Love your enemies," is unable to cast a stone, but falls at Herod's feet. This incident perhaps is as significant as any other of the complete departure of the piece from the traditional view of the Baptist's character. John—whose disciples begin to desert him, as they naturally would after such a manifestation of impotent indecision—is taken to prison, where he is sought by both Herod and Salome. To the former he makes such a declaration of his mission as places him in the light of a harmless fanatic, and Herod orders his release. Salome then, after a brief flirtation with her stepfather, assails the Baptist in much the same fashion as the fiend did St. Anthony, and with no better success. This is perhaps the most objectionable episode in the whole play and cannot be excused on any pretence of a symbolism signifying the triumph of virtue over vice. It is a piece of crude and essentially vulgar sensationalism which is not in any way redeemed by the undoubtedly fine outburst of vindictive passion with which Miss Marlowe, as the baffled wanton, flees from the contemptuous prophet. In the final scene Salome dances before Herod and the Roman legate, and, in accordance with the Biblical story, demands the head of the Baptist in accordance with her mother's instructions. The decapitation is effected behind the scenes and no attempt is made to traffic in the morbidities of Oscar Wilde. The curtain falls on the hysterical frenzy of Salome and the spectacle of Herod, stricken down in the act of proposing an impious toast to the "King of the Jews," whom the crowd are acclaiming beneath the palace window.

This sketch of the play, though very imperfect, will furnish some idea of its episodical, disconnected, and rambling character, and its curious mingling of religious fervor, false history, and rank sensationalism. In the various fictitious adventures of John there is, of course, an abundance of "symbolism," with regard to the meaning of love, but it is not of a very rare or precious kind, and the prophet's speculations on the subject do not smack of the profundity generally associated with divine inspiration; while they are often, respectfully be it said, not a little tedious. Five acts and a prelude are not necessary at this point of the Christian era to illustrate the meaning of the Golden Rule. And Mr. Sothern, to speak the plain truth, although he plays with much conscientious earnestness, is not an ideal Baptist. He has not the gaunt dignity, the fiery energy, the picturesque eloquence of eye and tongue and form that is associated habitually with the owner of the voice that cried in the wilderness. The rhythmical boom of his declamation became very monotonous and, although it had some effective passages, his per-

humanity never created a more amazing character study than this *Herod*. Strauss's music has done wonders for the Wilde original. The recitative style is the very speech of the man. The orchestral illustrations of his blasted and putrid soul are marvellous in their scarifying truthfulness. When he is haunted by fancies of great winds, of alternate heat and cold, the orchestra paints in tone pictures of wonderful fidelity. A nerve shattered, dream haunted wreck, vainly seeking forgetfulness in drink, is the master creation of Mr. Strauss, realist.

On the other hand the orchestra sweats and stews and quivers madly with the abandon of *Salome's* physical passion for the prophet. Mere words and cold type cannot convey to the reader any realization of the manner in which this man Strauss rips the covering off a soul beside which that of Swinburne's Faustine is as a lily beside a poppy. In his musical delineation of *Herod* and *Salome* the composer has made music publish the monstrosities of minds and bodies diseased, and he has done it with a power little short of diabolical. As an expression of the horrible fancies of Oscar Wilde this score is a masterpiece. As a demonstration of the suitability of ultra modern composition to the purposes of the music drama it is complete and convincing.

The most considerable problem presented by this drama—and there are several—is whether the picture of *Salome* coddling and kissing a severed head is not an outrage on the possibilities of the theatre and whether the musical investiture of the scene, with its return of the lascivious love themes of the duet between *Salome* and *Jokanaan*, is quite sincere. The public alone can decide whether the spectacle of the sensual creature grovelling and puling over the ghastly head is one to be tolerated. No commentator who believes in the ennobling and uplifting misson of art can approve of such a disgusting scene. But the return of the love music is perfectly logical. *Salome* recalls his averted looks, his rocky coldness. If he had looked upon her he had loved her. That is the meaning of the love music. Moreover it affords a melodic climax, without which not even Strauss has yet ventured to compose a work.

There are some striking minor portions in this score, none more so than the treatment of the disputing Jews. This is a masterpiece of humor, in which the hand of the composer of "Til Eulenspiegel" is at work. The orchestral writing at the point where *Salome* listens at the cistern while the executioner is slaying *Jokanaan* is another stupendous piece of tone painting. Nothing in all music creates a greater atmosphere of horror and suspense. The orchestral postlude following the duet in which *Jokanaan* repulses *Salome* is a grewsome exposition of her spent and futile passion. There are phrases which are positively indecent in the frank eloquence of their meaning.

The dance of *Salome* before *Herod* introduces some of the love music in order that the dancer may do some delineative posing over the mouth of the cistern. But there is room for doubt as to whether even Oscar Wilde contemplated such a dance as that seen last evening. He directs that *Salome* shall dance the "dance of the seven veils, which requires her to strip off seven successive coverings of her body.

The dance of [illegible] was a colorable imitation of the danse du ventre which stirred up such a commotion when it was witnessed at the World's Fair. As *Herod* had already promised to give *Salome* anything she would ask it hardly seemed necessary to treat him to such a spectacle of impropriety. Miss Froelich, the dancer who for this episode represented *Salome*, spared the audience nothing in the matter of active and suggestive detail.

The stage pictures were admirably arranged. The entrance of *Herod* was not dramatic. The movement of the personages of the court, the action of the minor characters such as the Jews and all similar matters of detail had been carefully prepared. The playing of the orchestra was superb, and Mr. Hertz's conducting was a triumph of musicianship, artistry and enthusiasm.

Of the impersonations of the leading characters little can be said at this time. They are entitled to further study. The record of the moment is that Miss Fremstad's *Salome* places her in the front rank of great dramatic singers, and Mr. Burrian's *Herod* must be accorded a place beside Van Dyck's *Loge* as one of the most subtle, consistent, intellectual and complete character studies ever seen on the operatic stage.

In his anxiety to depict the aloofness of *Jokanaan* Mr. Van Rooy was perhaps a trifle too strained in style, but he was not out of the picture. Miss Weed's *Herodias* was excellent, and Mr. Dippel lent his ripe experience and intelligence to the minor rôle of *Narraboth*. Mr. Reiss was most admirable as the first Jew, and his associates were competent. Messrs. Mühlmann, Blass, Journet and Steiner filled small parts which required skill and thus aided the general effect of the performance. Nothing but the warmest praise can be bestowed on this production. It was one of the very best in the history of the Metropolitan Opera House.

The Evening Post.

New York, Tuesday, January 22, 1907.

"John the Baptist."

It is only fair to assume that Miss Julia Marlowe and Mr. E. H. Sothern, players who have deserved well of the community, were actuated by an artistic motive when they undertook to produce the English extract of Sudermann's "Johannes," which was presented by them in the Lyric Theatre, last evening, under the title of "John the Baptist." Nevertheless, it is difficult to perceive any worthy or profitable end to be achieved by such a representation. Of real stirring dramatic quality it has very little, while of literary grace or power there are not many examples in the text of Mary Harned, some of whose lines are so inapt and feeble as to excite irreverent titters. Considered in the light of history, it is to a large extent either pure invention or wilful perversion; as a reflection of ancient Eastern life and manners it is valueless; as a study of the Baptist it is lacking in imagination, consistency, and vigor; as theological speculation it is

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Without the impression of this sensual element—which is actually more tiresome on account of its plain unnaturalness than it is alluring, but nevertheless is a bait for the foolish or the vicious—it is exceedingly unlikely that there would have been any eagerness to put the play upon the stage. Professedly the story follows the Biblical lines—all present reference, of course, is only to the acting version—and it does so far as there are lines to follow, but nine-tenths of it, necessarily, are the product of obviously uninspired invention. John is shown first in the wilderness proclaiming to his disciples the imminence of the Messiah, whom he invests with all the attributes of celestial and earthly glory. He relates the scene of the baptism in the Jordan, and then, hearing of the proposed marriage of Herod with Herodias, starts off to Jerusalem to protest against it. In a public place he has a controversy with certain Pharisees, whom he duly denounces as a generation of vipers, but he can scarcely be said to have the best of the uninspired argument which follows. Then one Simon, a Galilean (plainly typical of Christ himself) tells him that the key to the new dispensation is the might of love, and thereafter he devotes himself to a search for Galileans who may give him further instructions on this point from the Master whom he is seeking. Meanwhile he boldly denounces Herod and Herodias, who (after the fashion of Oriental potentates) are walking on foot through the streets to the palace, and this attracts the attention of Salome, who is greatly impressed by his hirsute adornments. The ensuing act takes place in a chamber of the palace, whither John has been bidden by Herodias. Salome seizes the opportunity to make advances to the prophet, who, however, scarcely deigns to look at her, reserving his energies for a fierce attack upon her mother, which is delivered in due course. Herodias orders his arrest, but finally contents herself with having him turned into the street.

Having failed to stop the marriage, John's next step is to prepare a popular revolt, with the view of stoning the guilty pair on their approach to the temple. He himself is to throw the first stone. But, while waiting at the temple steps, he has encountered several Galileans, who derisively repeat certain injunctions of the Christ, as delivered in the Sermon on the [illegible] great light, although he is completely bewildered by it, and when Herod appears he, remembering the command, "Love your enemies," is unable to cast a stone, but falls at Herod's feet. This incident perhaps is as significant as any other of the complete departure of the piece from the traditional view of the Baptist's character. John—whose disciples begin to desert him, as they naturally would after such a manifestation of impotent indecision—is taken to prison, where he is sought by both Herod and Salome. To the former he makes such a declaration of his mission as places him in the light of a harmless fanatic, and Herod orders his release. Salome then, after a brief flirtation with her stepfather, assails the Baptist in much the same fashion as the fiend did St. Anthony, and with no better success. This is perhaps the most objectionable episode in the whole play and cannot be excused on any pretence of a symbolism signifying the triumph of virtue over vice. It is a piece of crude and essentially vulgar sensationalism which is not in any way redeemed by the undoubtedly fine outburst of vindictive passion with which Miss Marlowe, as the baffled wanton, flees from the contemptuous prophet. In the final scene Salome dances before Herod and the Roman legate, and, in accordance with the Biblical story, demands the head of the Baptist in accordance with her mother's instructions. The decapitation is effected behind the scenes and no attempt is made to traffic in the morbidities of Oscar Wilde. The curtain falls on the hysterical frenzy of Salome and the spectacle of Herod, stricken down in the act of proposing an impious toast to the "King of the Jews," whom the crowd are acclaiming beneath the palace window.

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ART AND THE THEATRE.

Good does sometimes come out of evil, and even such a flagrant offence against common decency and morality as the production of Wilde's infamous "Salome" may prove beneficial in its ultimate result. There is cause for thankfulness in the very fact that the performance has provoked a protest, even if that protest be not based upon the highest grounds. It gives assurance, at least, that there is a point beyond which, in the interest of property if not of cleanliness, theatrical cupidity will not be allowed to go. If something of this sort had not occurred to direct public attention, by a violent shock, to the logical consequences of the modern theory that art should be subject to no restrictions outside its own laws, it might have been necessary before long to suppress the theatre altogether as a common nuisance, a deadly menace to the sanctity of the home and the health of the community.

Students of the theatre have long noted the tendency of the contemporary stage to grow bolder and more reckless in its efforts to minister to the gratification of morbid appetites. During the last thirty or forty years a great revolution has been effected in the attitude of the public to the theatre, and the theatre to the public. When, in the early seventies, there was a proposal to give the Passion Play in this city, in the closest possible imitation of the Ober-Ammergau representation, the enterprise was overwhelmed, in its very inception, by a tidal wave of public opposition. A little later the daily press resounded with denunciations of the French drama, the plays of Augier, Feuillet, or Dumas *fils*. The production of the "Daniel Rochat" of Sardou was held to be an extraordinary manifestation of managerial audacity. There were many old-fashioned folk then who thought that public virtue would be imperilled by the dissemination of such radical, free-thinking ideas. Still later there was expressed anxiety over the possible effect of the performance of some highly diluted extracts of two or three specimens of the restoration comedy. What would have been thought, then, of some of the more recent specimens of the symbolistic drama, it would not be difficult to guess. But both theatre and public rose superior to their scruples long ago. Doubtless, each, to a certain extent, reacted upon the other. This is not the place to determine the exact proportions of the mutual responsibility. The fact remains that the theatre continued to grow bolder in its open transgressions of the proprieties, and to profit by its vulgarities, until what was considered to be the climax was reached a few years ago when a scene was presented in one of the most fashionable theatres of which the central incident was a rape. Yet that theatre—the significance of the statement is enormous—was crowded for months.

Since then the emancipation of theatrical art has been proceeding at a rapid rate. There are few phases of illegal passion or erotic sentiment that have not been illustrated only too copiously. Samples of exotic imagination have been imported from Russia, Italy, Belgium, France, and Germany. But, it should be noted, these all dealt with natural even when extravagant emotions. Now we have been led a

step further, and invited to refresh our souls with a spectacle so foul in its open manifestations and secret purpose that the gorge of every healthy man must rise at the thought of it. And all this has been done in the name of theatrical art! Was ever hypocrisy so gross or Phariseeism so contemptible? It is time that there should be some plain speaking on this subject. Everybody who knows anything of the world, or is not deluded by some astigmatic enthusiasm, knows that all exhibitions appealing primarily to jaded appetites are inspired mainly by but one motive, the desire to make money by means of some new and strange sensation. The talk about devotion to artistic beauty is abominable cant. But the various managers, who strive to profit by catering to prevailing vices, are not the only responsible offenders. Professional writers who distract attention from essential abominations by dilating upon the powerful imagination, subtle fancy, and stirring eloquence of the utterer of them, must take their share of the burden. They, perhaps, are the worst offenders of all, for they sin with open and instructed eyes. The public, of course, has helped to make the present condition of affairs possible, but a large proportion of it is hopelessly misled by the misrepresentations of false guides.

It is well that the question has been raised upon so clear and plain an issue. Here, at least, there is no chance of hair-splitting. Are theatre managers, dramatic or operatic, to be allowed to practise obscenity before our women and children, on any pretence whatever? So long as the mirror is really held up to nature, there is, perhaps, not much cause for complaint; but stage traffic in the abnormalities of criminal and diseased fancy should be stopped peremptorily.

In a recent interview Mr. Conried announced his determination to produce "Salome" at the Metropolitan next season, with Strauss to conduct it, but with certain modifications. Concerning this, it may be said, in the first place, that Strauss would never consent to such modifications. Secondly, why bring him over? He was far from being a success when he came here a few years ago. Mr. Conried also says he intends to give Strauss's opera "Feuersnot." That this would be a foolish proceeding may be gathered from the following paragraph from the Berlin correspondence of the *Musical Courier*:

Richard Strauss's "Salome" is a gold mine for the composer. He received 60,000 marks from the publisher, Fuerstner, and he furthermore gets 10 per cent. of the gross receipts of all performances in Berlin and 7 per cent. in other cities. The work is still a drawing card at the Berlin Royal Opera and Strauss's *tantième* often amounts to 800 or 900 marks a night for Berlin alone. For the present it is given here twice a week. I will wager 10 to 1, however, that his new opera, "Electra," will be no kind of sensation and those who think that it is the music and not the perverse text that draws the crowds to the "Salome" performances are mistaken. What has become of Strauss's earlier operas, "Guntram" and "Fuersnot?" Both of these are superior to "Salome." I heard the première of his first opera, "Guntram," at Weimar, thirteen years ago. It was written at about the same time that he composed "Tod und Verklärung." "Feuersnot" was created during the period that gave birth to "Also sprach Zarathustra," "Heldenleben," and so forth, when Strauss was in the zenith of his powers, yet these operas have forever disappeared from the boards.

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It is well that the question has been raised upon so clear and plain an issue. Here, at least, there is no chance of hair-splitting. Are theatre managers, dramatic or operatic, to be allowed to practise obscenity before our women and children, on any pretence whatever? So long as the mirror is really held up to nature, there is, perhaps, not much cause for complaint; but stage traffic in the abnormalities of criminal and diseased fancy should be stopped peremptorily.

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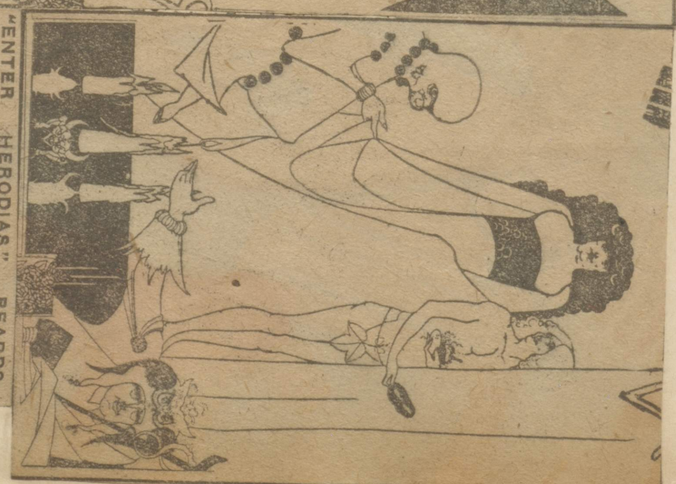
Richard Strauss's "Salome" is a gold mine for the composer. He received 60,000 marks from the publisher, Fuerstner, and he furthermore gets 10 per cent. of the gross receipts of all performances in Berlin and 7 per cent. in other cities. The work is still a drawing card at the Berlin Royal Opera and Strauss's *tantième* often amounts to 800 or 900 marks a night for Berlin alone. For the present it is given here twice a week. I will wager 10 to 1, however, that his new opera, "Electra," will be no kind of sensation and those who think that it is the music and not the perverse text that draws the crowds to the "Salome" performances are mistaken. What has become of Strauss's earlier operas, "Guntram" and "Fuersnot?" Both of these are superior to "Salome." I heard the première of his first opera, "Guntram," at Weimar, thirteen years ago. It was written at about the same time that he composed "Tod und Verklärung." "Feuersnot" was created during the period that gave birth to "Also sprach Zarathustra," "Heldenleben," and so forth, when Strauss was in the zenith of his powers, yet these operas have forever disappeared from the boards.

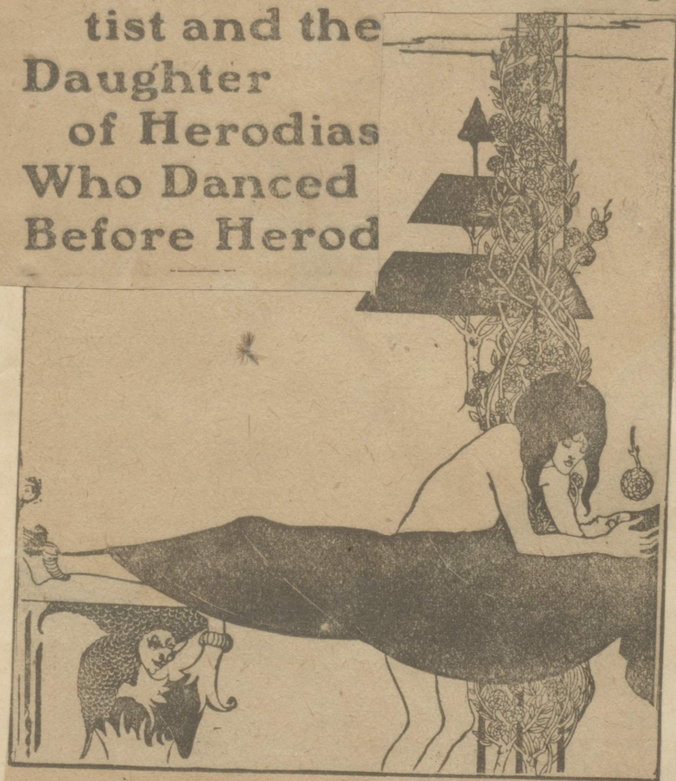
Fantastic, Artistic and Grewsome Illustrations of the Tragedy "Salome," Founded On the Biblical Story of St. John the Baptist and the Daughter of Herodias Who Danced Before Herod

SALOME AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

THE EYES OF HEROD," A SYM. BOLICAL ILLUSTRATION.



"ENTER HERODIAS," BEARDS. LEY'S IDEA OF QUEEN HEROD. IAS AND KING HEROD.



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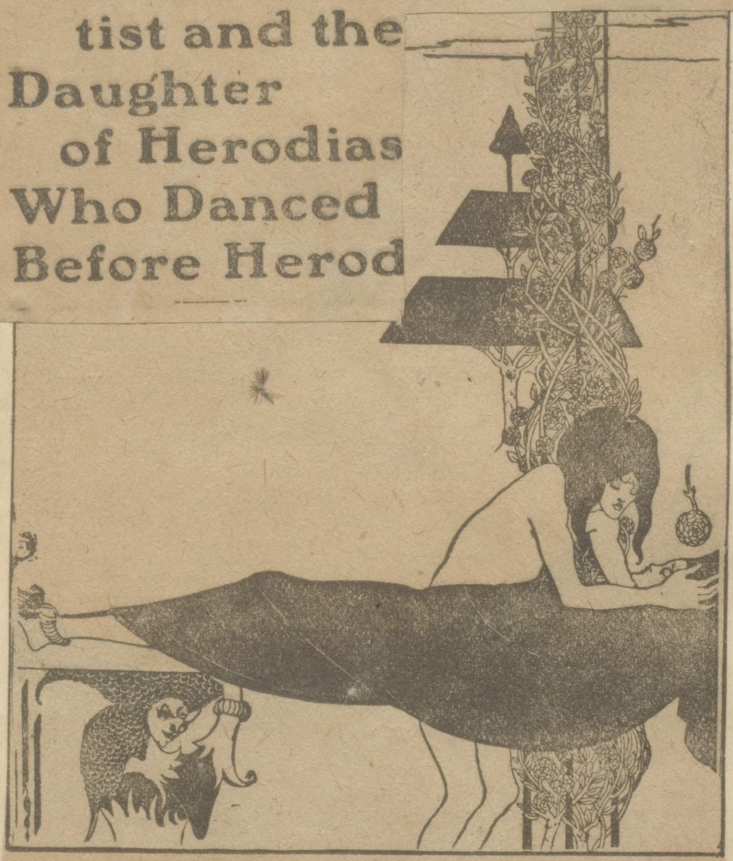

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"THE PEACOCK SKIRT," SHOWING SALOME AND THE YOUNG SYRIAN.

SALOME DANCING BEFORE KING HEROD.

PART OF THE TITLE PAGE OF SALOME.

TAILPIECE, THE END OF SALOME.

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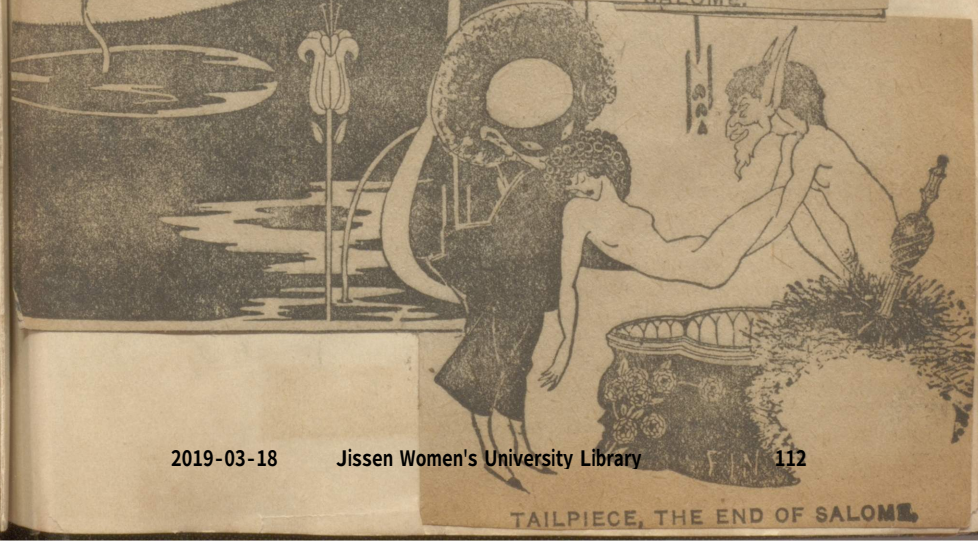

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"THE TOILETTE OF SALOME."

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"Ah! Wonderful! wonderful. You see that she has danced for me, your daughter. Come near, Salome; come near, that I may give you your reward. Ah! I pay the dancers well. I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth. What wouldst thou have? Speak."

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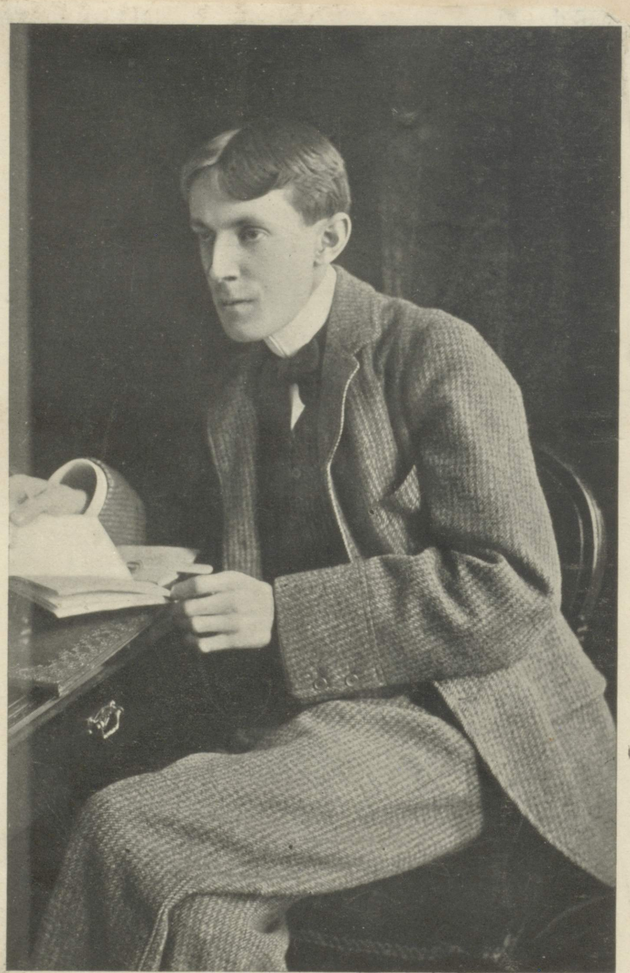
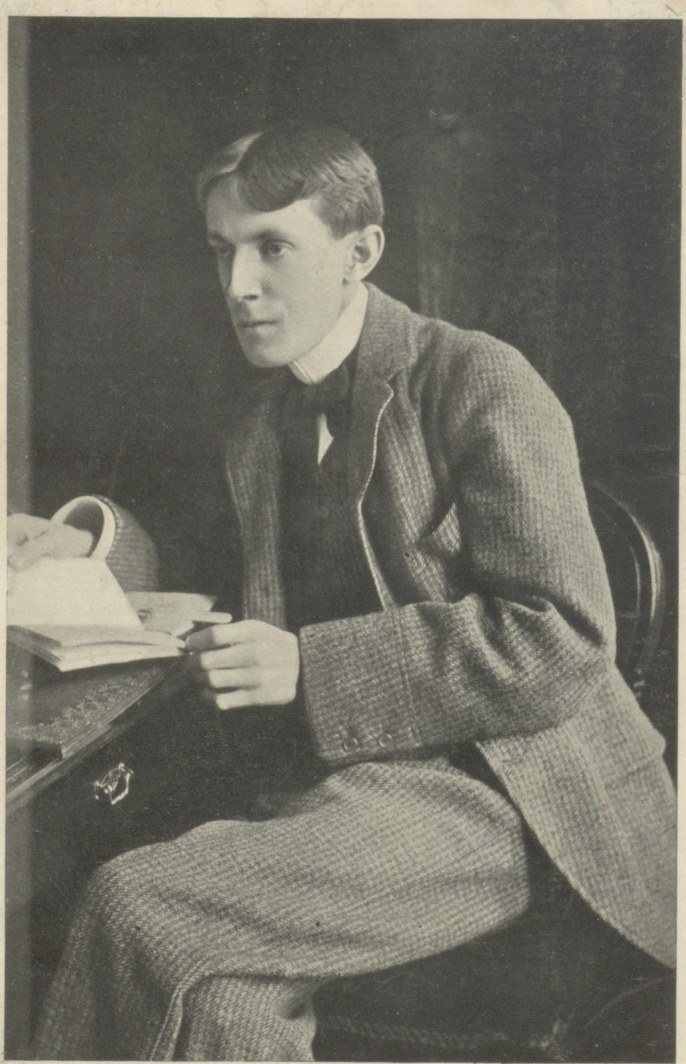


MR. AUBREY BEARDSLEY
From his last photograph. (See page 313)

Courtesy of Mr. John Lane
PORTRAIT OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY BY HIMSELF



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Mary Garden as She Appeared in "Salome" at the Manhattan

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BIG CROWD SEES "SALOME" WITH MARY GARDEN

One of the largest audiences that ever filled the Manhattan Opera House gathered last night to see and to hear Mary Garden in "Salome."

Owing to the great crush of carriages and automobiles the performance was delayed until 9:30. The long line of vehicles extended through Thirty-fourth street and up Eighth avenue to Thirty-eighth street. Though they unloaded rapidly it was nearly an hour before the procession ended.

The prices had been doubled, but that did not keep the crowd away. Seats were $10 and boxes were $50 and $100 each. More than $20,000 was paid to see the opera.

It was the second time in two years that Richard Strauss's "Salome" was sung in New York. It was heard in German two years ago at a single performance in the Metropolitan Opera House. The audience that heard it last night was made up of the fashion of New York.

The audience paid the closest attention from the moment Mary Garden appeared on the stage, and everybody remained seated until the last note died away at the close of the performance.

A New "Salome."

In costume Miss Garden showed a new "Salome." The jeweled bodice, headdress and waists supported skirt gave way to a one-piece spangled and diaphanous garment, draped from the bust and hanging sheer almost to the ankles.

Her hair, of a light red shade and cut square off at the neck, was unadorned. Her dress resembled that of the pictured costume of the Egyptians or Assyrians of the period of the opera.

Salome, sinuous, appealing and insistent, wooed the immovable and tragic figure of the prophet. For more than ten minutes, while the audience wondered, she played about this sturdy figure like a snake wooing an oak, and finally fell to the ground, squirming under the curses of the unmoved object of her incomprehensible passions.

Her body lay close to that of Narraboth, captain of the guard, who had fallen upon his sword and killed himself for love of her when he witnessed her vain attempt to win the love of the prophet. In her overwhelming passion she had not noticed the suicide of the man who had stood close to her, and had even spurned his body with her foot while making her appeals to Jokanaan.

Prepares for the Dance.

Unnoticed, she continued to torture her mind and body, seated in a bench, while Herod, her mother, Herodias, and the brilliant court appeared upon the terrace, the tetrarch to search for his stepdaughter, with whom he was madly in love.

Then came the dance of the Seven Veils, the second great scene of the opera. After Herod had sworn to grant any request she might make, Salome prepared for the dance.

Draped in veils, she was a strange figure as she posed during the first few bars of the whining Eastern music which Strauss wrote for the dance. Then, with startling poses, she ran about the stage.

The first veil was discarded and the poses became more daring. There was no dance in the accepted sense. The music told the story of the poses. Two more veils were thrown off, and Herod, snatching up one, kissed it passionately and thrust it into the bosom of his garment.

The Final Scene.

Faster and faster Salome moved about the stage, while the drums took up the rapid beat, and another and another veil was cast aside. Every pose of the body was as distinct as though the entire drapery had been discarded.

Herodias was sung by Mme. Doria, Herod by M. Dalmores, Jokanaan by M. Dufranne, Narraboth by M. Valles, Page of Herodias by Mlle. Severina, the five Jews by M. Venturini, M. Montanari, M. Daddi and M. Collin, the two Nazarenes by M. De Segurola and M. Malfatti, the two soldiers by M. Crabbe and M. De Grazia, a Coppadocian by M. Fossetta and a slave by Mlle. Tancredi.

Superb Display of Gowns.

"Salome" brought together probably the most brilliant audience the Manhattan has ever seen. The display of gowns and jewels was a superb one, and each box seemed to vie with the other in the gorgeousness of its occupants.

The Earl and Countess of Granard were in one with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ogden Mills, and Lloyd Warren.

Mr. and Mrs. Clarence H. Mackay had Mr. and Mrs. Paul Morton and Riccardo Martin with them.

With Captain and Mrs. Philip M. Lydig were Miss Anna Sands, Louis F. Holbrook Betts and Alfonso de Navarro.

Mrs. Otto H. Kahn entertained Mrs. James B. Eustis in her box.

Miss Dorothy Whitney's party was chaperoned by Mrs. George Bend, and included Mrs Nathalie Schenck Collins and Miss Florence Vanderbilt Twombly.

Mrs. Robert Goelet had one of the circle boxes and various friends visited her during the evening.

Mr. and Mrs. George Jay Gould had Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Lehr and Kingdon Gould in their box.

With Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., were Mrs. James A. Burden, Jr., and Colonel Harvey.

Mrs. James W. Gerard, Jr., had her mother, Mrs. Marcus Daly; her sister, Miss Harriet Daly, and Miss Sybil Douglas in her box.

With Mrs. John Clinton Gray were Mrs. I. Chauncey McKeever and Mrs. Edmund Randolph.

Other Notables There.

Mrs. J. Lee Tailer's guests were Miss Anita Stewart and Miss Natalie Knowlton.

Mrs. R. Livingston Beeckman was with Mr. and Mrs. Royal Phelps Carroll.

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THE NEW YORK EVENING JOURNAL,
JANUARY 29, 1909.

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Oscar Hammerstein looks upon the love of Salome as a primitive, honest passion—as honest as the love that might be awakened in the heart of a vestal virgin.

Following is his summary of the character of Salome:

For the enjoyment of the performance of the wonderful music drama which Richard Strauss has made of Oscar Wilde's extraordinary poem, much depends upon the mental attitude of the person who witnesses it and his proper understanding of the character of Salome. There has been too much disposition to see only the material side of the Daughter of Herodias as conceived by Wilde. That Wilde was a rare exotic genius is now unquestioned. He was a Celt into whose veins there would seem to have been transfused the blood of some unknown forgotten poet of ancient Greece.

Like a genius, he ofter did things, said things without knowing what he did, what he said, or how he did them or why he said them. His Salome, be it remembered, is a girl of fourteen, in the springtide of womanhood. She is the Daughter of Herodias who is the very Jezebel of her day. She has been reared in an atmosphere if luxurious vice, be she is still a woman, chaste as the moon she worships.

Salome is neither moral nor immoral—she is unmoral. She is governed absolutely by the most primitive passions. Her love, once awakened, as it has been by the vision of the Prophet, is as real, as honest as the love that might be awakened in the heart of a vestal virgin. It is like a tidal wave. Swept against an immovable mountain, it rebounds in a hatred overwhelming in its vengeance; the death of the beloved object alone allays this awful passion; but, once the passion of hatred is satiated, the tidal wave of love returns intensified tenfold by the dreadful consciousness that the object beloved is forever lost.

It is no mere material passion that is expressed by Salome when she seizes and apostrophizes the severed head of Jokanaan. It is the awakened soul of the superabundantly vital woman that gushes forth torrentially. From that lifeless morsel her glowing imagination recreates the whole man and her infinite anguish is voiced in the words:

"I know well that if thou hadst looked upon me thou wouldst have loved me, and that the Mystery of Love is greater than the Mystery of Death."

This, it seems to me, is the proper point of view of Salome as conceived by Oscar Wilde and painted in music by Richard Strauss. At all events, it is worth thinking over.

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night, when again the voice of the prophet comes from the deep:—"The Lord is come. He is come as the Son of Man. The centaurs have hidden in the streams, and the sirens have left the streams and are sleeping under the forest leaves." "Who is calling?" *Salomé* asks, and insists upon seeing this prophet, who is not a greybeard, but *un tout jeune homme*. She looks into the black cistern, shudders, and again demands of the soldiers, "Let him come out. I must see him." The soldiers reply that they dare not, and she turns to her lover, the young *Syrian*:—

SALOMÉ.—You will do this for me, will you not, Narraboth? You will do this for me? I have always been kind to you. Tell me, will you not do this for me? I only wish to see this strange prophet. They have talked so much about him. I have so often heard the tetrarch speak of him. I think the tetrarch is afraid of him. I am sure he is afraid of him. Are you, Narraboth—are you also afraid of him?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN.—I am not afraid of him, Princess. I am afraid of no one. But the tetrarch has given orders that the cover of the well is not to be raised.

SALOMÉ.—You will do this for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow, when I pass in my litter through the gate of the vendors of idols, I will drop a small flower for you, a small green flower?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN.—Princess, I cannot, I cannot.

SALOMÉ (smiling).—You will do this for me, Narraboth. You know very well that you will do this for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter through the gate of the vendors of idols, I will look at you through my muslin veils—I will look at you, Narraboth, and I will smile, perhaps. Look at me, Narraboth. Look at me. Oh, you know well that you will do what I ask you. You know it well, do you not? I know it well.

The prophet is let out. Salomé looks at him and draws back. 'Of whom does he talk? He is terrible! terrible!" she sighs, as *John* cries out against him "whose cup of abomination is already full," and against her "who has given herself over to the captains of the Assyrians." The *Syrian* warns: "Do not stay here, Princess; I beseech you do not stay!" but she is irresistibly attracted to the man who is "like a moonbeam, like a ray of silver." Then follows a very powerful scene:—

JOHN.—Who is this woman looking upon me? I do not want her to look upon me. Why does she look at me with her golden eyes from under gilded lids? I know not who she is. I do not wish to know. Tell her to go. It is not she to whom I wish to speak!

SALOMÉ.—I am Salomé, the daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.

JOHN.—Back! daughter of Babylon! Do not come near the Lord's elect. Thy mother has filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sins has come to the ears of God.

SALOMÉ.—Speak again, John. Thy voice intoxicates me.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN.—Princess! Princess! Princess!

SALOMÉ.—But speak again; speak again, John, and tell me what I must do.

JOHN.—Do not come near me, daughter of Sodom, but cover your face with a veil, put ashes on your head, and go into the desert to seek the Son of Man!

SALOMÉ.—Who is he, this Son of Man? Is he as beautiful as thou art, John?

JOHN.—Back!—back! I hear in the palace the beating of the wings of the Angel of Death.

It is probably the scene which is introduced by this dialogue to which the Lord Chamberlain took exception. The author's argument is, no doubt, that he has gone no further for inspiration for *Salomé's* passionate appeal than the Song of Solomon.

The *Syrian*, aghast at the plea with which *Salomé* concludes all her wild mad outbursts, "Laisse-moi baise la bouche," makes one last appeal:—

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It is no mere material passion that is expressed by Salome when she seizes and apostrophizes the severed head of Jokanaan. It is the awakened soul of the superabundantly vital woman that gushes forth torrentially. From that lifeless morsel her glowing imagination recreates the whole man and her infinite anguish is voiced in the words:.

"I know well that if thou hadst looked upon me thou wouldst have loved me, and that the Mystery of Love is greater than the Mystery of Death."

This, it seems to me, is the proper point of view of Salome as conceived by Oscar Wilde and painted in music by Richard Strauss. At all events, it is worth thinking over.

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night, when again the voice of the prophet comes from the deep :—"The Lord is come. He is come as the Son of Man. The centaurs have hidden in the streams, and the sirens have left the streams and are sleeping under the forest leaves." "Who is calling?" *Salomé* asks, and insists upon seeing this prophet, who is not a greybeard, but *un tout jeune homme*. She looks into the black cistern, shudders, and again demands of the soldiers, "Let him come out. I must see him." The soldiers reply that they dare not, and she turns to her lover, the young *Syrian* :—

SALOMÉ.—You will do this for me, will you not, Narraboth? You will do this for me? I have always been kind to you. Tell me, will you not do this for me? I only wish to see this strange prophet. They have talked so much about him. I have so often heard the tetrarch speak of him. I think the tetrarch is afraid of him. I am sure he is afraid of him. Are you, Narraboth—are you also afraid of him?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN.—I am not afraid of him, Princess. I am afraid of no one. But the tetrarch has given orders that the cover of the well is not to be raised.

SALOMÉ.—You will do this for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow, when I pass in my litter through the gate of the vendors of idols, I will drop a small flower for you, a small green flower?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN.—Princess, I cannot, I cannot.

SALOMÉ (smiling).—You will do this for me, Narraboth. You know very well that you will do this for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter through the gate of the vendors of idols, I will look at you through my muslin veils—I will look at you, Narraboth, and I will smile, perhaps. Look at me, Narraboth. Look at me. Oh, you know well that you will do what I ask you. You know it well, do you not? I know it well.

The prophet is let out. Salomé looks at him and draws back. 'Of whom does he talk? He is terrible!

terrible!" she sighs, as *John* cries out against him "whose cup of abomination is already full," and against her "who has given herself over to the captains of the Assyrians." The *Syrian* warns: "Do not stay here, Princess; I beseech you do not stay!" but she is irresistibly attracted to the man who is "like a moonbeam, like a ray of silver." Then follows a very powerful scene :—

JOHN.—Who is this woman looking upon me? I do not want her to look upon me. Why does she look at me with her golden eyes from under gilded lids? I know not who she is. I do not wish to know. Tell her to go. It is not she to whom I wish to speak!

SALOMÉ.—I am Salomé, the daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.

JOHN.—Back! daughter of Babylon! Do not come near the Lord's elect. Thy mother has filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sins has come to the ears of God.

SALOMÉ.—Speak again, John. Thy voice intoxicates me.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN.—Princess! Princess! Princess!

SALOMÉ.—But speak again; speak again, John, and tell me what I must do.

JOHN.—Do not come near me, daughter of Sodom, but cover your face with a veil, put ashes on your head, and go into the desert to seek the Son of Man!

SALOMÉ.—Who is he, this Son of Man? Is he as beautiful as thou art, John?

JOHN.—Back!—back! I hear in the palace the beating of the wings of the Angel of Death.

It is probably the scene which is introduced by this dialogue to which the Lord Chamberlain took exception. The author's argument is, no doubt, that he has gone no further for inspiration for *Salomé's* passionate appeal than the Song of Solomon.

The *Syrian*, against all the pleas of which *Salomé* concludes all her wild mad outbursts, "Laisse-moi baiser la bouche," makes one last appeal :—

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"I SHALL publish 'Salomé'! The insult in the suppression of the play is an insult to the stage as a form of art. The action of the censorship in England is odious and ridiculous." So said Mr. Oscar Wilde last June when the Lord Chamberlain refused to grant a licence for the performance of his French play.

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The scene of the play is laid on the terrace of the palace of Herod Antipas leading to the banqueting-hall. Soldiers are leaning over the balcony, and an enormous staircase leads down to an ancient cistern surrounded by a wall of green bronze. It is a moonlight night. The soldiers in their gossip, with which the play opens, foreshadow the tragic end. The young *Syrian*, lover of *Salomé*, daughter of *Herodias*, exclaims :—

How beautiful the Princess Salomé is to-night!

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She is like a little Princess with feet like small white doves. She seems to be dancing.

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From the banqueting-hall come the loud voices of the Jews, discussing their religion; the soldiers turn to listen, and to wonder; the young *Syrian* dreams on, and repeats only the words, "Comme elle est belle ce soir." Presently, with striking effect, there comes through the babbling and the laughter, from the black cistern, the voice of *John* (or Iokanaan, for Mr. Wilde prefers to call the Baptist by his Hebrew name) :—

After me cometh one that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. When he cometh, the desert shall rejoice. It shall bloom like the lily, the eyes of the blind shall see the day, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened. The new-born shall put his hand on the dragon's nest, and lead the lions by their manes.

SECOND SOLDIER.—Make him hold his peace. He is always absurd.

Next, the heroine, who is "like a narcissus shaken by the wind," comes out fair and full of disdain :—

SALOMÉ.—How pure the air is here! At last I can breathe! Inside there are the Jews from Jerusalem quarrelling about their ridiculous ceremonies; there are Barbarians who are always drinking and spilling their wine on the floor; there are Greeks from Smyrna, with painted eyes, rouged cheeks, and hair arranged in spiral curls; there are Egyptians, silent, subtle, with jade nails and brown mantles; and there are Romans, with their brutality, their clumsiness, and their coarse words. How I detest the Romans! They are common people, who give themselves grand airs.

The Princess talks on, rejoicing in the beauty of the Princess! Princess! thou who art like a bouquet of myrrh, thou who art the dove of doves—do not—do not look upon this man. Do not say these things to him. I cannot bear it. Princess, Princess, do not say these things.

SALOMÉ.—I will kiss thy mouth, John.

And the *Syrian*, with one sigh, falls down dead between *Salomé* and *John*. He has committed suicide. The girl sees nothing, but repeats her wail, "Je baiserai ta bouche Iokanaan." "I will not look at thee. Thou art cursed, Salomé, thou art cursed," the prophet replies, and descends into the cistern.

The body of the dead *Syrian* is put away, and *Herod*, with his Court, comes on the scene. The tables of ivory and jasper are brought out, and the tetrarch and his Court settle down. *Salomé*, pale and silent, is invited by *Herod* to eat and drink with him. She refuses; he quarrels with *Herodias*, and he promises the girl to give to her her mother's throne. Again the *Baptist's* voice rises from the cistern. Then follows a long discussion between members of various religious sects, which *Herod* suddenly ends by asking *Salomé* to dance to him. But she and her mother decline, till he swears, "By my life, by my crown, by my gods, all that you ask will I give you, were it the half of my kingdom, if only you dance to me. Oh, Salomé, Salomé, dance to me!" "I will dance to you, tetrarch," she replies, and dances the dance of the seven veils.

HEROD.—Oh, it is magnificent, magnificent! You see your daughter has danced to me. Come nearer, Salomé! Come nearer, that I may give you your reward. Oh, I pay my dancers well. Thee, I will pay thee well. I will give thee all thou shalt ask. What would'st thou, say?

And kneeling before him, she asks for the head of *John the Baptist*. Her mother applauds, but *Herod* despairingly cries :—

No, no, Salomé. Do not ask me this. Do not listen to your mother. She always advises you badly. You must not listen to her.

SALOMÉ.—I am not listening to my mother. It is for my own pleasure that I ask for the head of John on a silver salver. You have sworn, Herod. Do not forget that you have sworn.

He yields in the end, and from the great black arm of the henchman she receives the bleeding head. *Herodias* smiles and fans herself. *Herod* hides his face, the Nazarenes kneel down and pray, and *Salomé* cries :—

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(A moonbeam falls on *Salomé* and lights up her figure.)

HEROD (turning and seeing *Salomé*).—Kill that woman! The soldiers fall upon and crush under their shields *Salomé*, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.)

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"SALOMÉ"

A First Impression

By

John C. Freund

It is a quarter to nine. I am seated well to the front in a side aisle in the parquet of the Manhattan Opera House, which is about half filled. It is the night of the production of Strauss's "Salomé," with Mary Garden in the title rôle.

The question is being asked, "Will there be a crowd or not?" There seems to be a doubt, especially as some speculators have been heard outside the opera house offering tickets at the regular price—for you know the prices were doubled for this performance.

Gradually, however, the house fills up with fashionably dressed people, and then the rumor goes through the audience that there is such a block of carriages and automobiles outside that it is almost impossible for the people to get in. The curtain is held and does not rise till nearly a quarter past nine.

Prominent people are easily picked out—millionaires, society leaders, distinguished business men, musical critics, authors, great musicians. It is a representative audience. Its attitude is one of strain and expectancy. Conversation is not so general as is usual on the first night of an important production. That is one marked feature. It is almost as if some of the people were half afraid of being seen there.

* * *

When the curtain rises, a beautiful scene is disclosed showing a terrace on the outside of the palace of *King Herod*. On the right there is a grand staircase leading into the palace; at the back, to the left, an old cistern, surrounded by a stone wall. It is night. The moon is shining. Some soldiers are discovered on duty. They discuss the beauty of the *Princess Salomé*.

Presently the voice of *Jokanaan* (John the Baptist) is heard from the cistern in which he is imprisoned, announcing the coming of another, more worthy than he. A soldier wants to silence him. Another says: "No, he is a Holy Man—a prophet!" This soldier tells how great multitudes follow him.

Salomé comes out from the banquet hall and down the stairs. She is dressed in Eastern style, with flowing robes. Her hair of reddish hue is cut to the shoulders, and drawn low over the forehead, which is surmounted by a diadem.

Perhaps the audience did not recognize Mary Garden in her wonderful make-up. Certain it is that she got no reception, as is customary when a great artist appears in a new rôle. The audience was hushed.

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"SALOMÉ"

A First Impression

By

John C. Freund

It is a quarter to nine. I am seated well to the front in a side aisle in the parquet of the Manhattan Opera House, which is about half filled. It is the night of the production of Strauss's "Salomé," with Mary Garden in the title rôle.

The question is being asked, "Will there be a crowd or not?" There seems to be a doubt, especially as some speculators have been heard outside the opera house offering tickets at the regular price—for you know the prices were doubled for this performance.

Gradually, however, the house fills up with fashionably dressed people, and then the rumor goes through the audience that there is such a block of carriages and automobiles outside that it is almost impossible for the people to get in. The curtain is held and does not rise till nearly a quarter past nine.

Prominent people are easily picked out—millionaires, society leaders, distinguished business men, musical critics, authors, great musicians. It is a representative audience. Its attitude is one of strain and expectancy. Conversation is not so general as is usual on the first night of an important production. That is one marked feature. It is almost as if some of the people were half afraid of being seen there.

* * *

When the curtain rises, a beautiful scene is disclosed showing a terrace on the outside of the palace of *King Herod*. On the right there is a grand staircase leading into the palace; at the back, to the left, an old cistern, surrounded by a stone wall. It is night. The moon is shining. Some soldiers are discovered on duty. They discuss the beauty of the *Princess Salomé*.

Presently the voice of *Jokanaan* (John the Baptist) is heard from the cistern in which he is imprisoned, announcing the coming of another, more worthy than he. A soldier wants to silence him. Another says: "No, he is a Holy Man—a prophet!" This soldier tells how great multitudes follow him.

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Comparisons between the performance of last night and the single previous one, because of the sensational impression created by the work on both occasions, are almost unavoidable, and it may be said that, where the Metropolitan representation brought out in an objective way the brutality, the sensuality and the physical and animal passions of the drama which Strauss's music illustrates and vitalizes with such extraordinary force, aptness and pictorial fidelity, that given at the Manhattan last night was more subjective and subtly suggestive of that underlying degeneracy and moral rottenness of which the more obvious passions are merely the cloak.

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We must grant to the Wilde drama poetry of language and poetic imagery in the expression of the thought, intensity of physical passion and a force and emotion of dramatic action which reaches out in compelling fashion and takes us by the throat; while the positive nastiness, perverted and morbid degeneracy, pestiferous, unnatural, unhuman and vicious uncleanness of the motif thought make our gorge to rise in repulsion and disgust.

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But Strauss having chosen to give to the world this noxious and repellent picture of human nature in its most degraded aspect, enhanced and impressed upon our reluctant attention by a marvellously sensational score, the critic can but judge of the work as it stands. How far the work may be morally subversive is not for him to say.

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If Oscar Hammerstein isn't happy, he ought to be.

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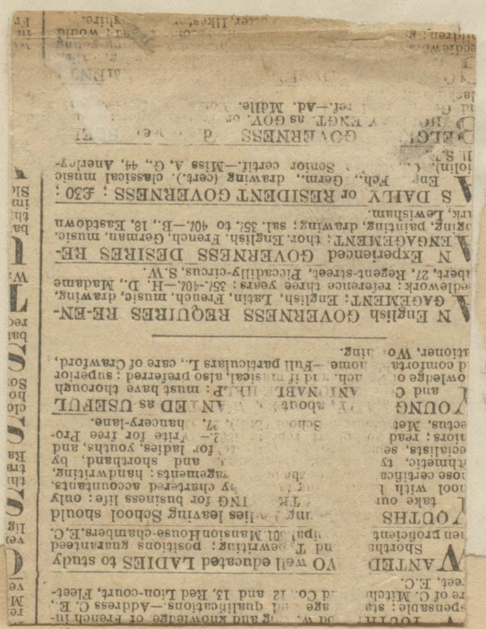

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