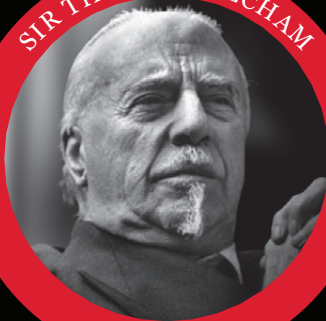


Richard
STRAUSS
Elektra • Ariadne auf Naxos
(Final Scenes)

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM



1947 Recordings

Erna Schlüter • Ljuba Welitsch • Paul Schöffler
Maria Cebotari • Karl Friedrich • Walter Widdop
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus
Sir Thomas Beecham



GREAT OPERA RECORDINGS

Richard STRAUSS

(1864-1949)

Elektra, Op. 58

Tragedy in One Act – Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Elektra	Erna Schlüter (soprano)
Orest	Paul Schöffler (baritone)
Chrysothemis	Ljuba Welitsch (soprano)
Aegisth	Walter Widdop (tenor)
The Tutor	Ernst Erbach (bass)
Maids	Monica Warner (soprano)
	Gwladys Garside (mezzo-soprano)
	Maud Heaton (contralto)
	Sylvia Patris (contralto)

Royal Philharmonic Chorus • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham

Recorded in EMI Studio No. 1, Abbey Road, London, 27th-29th October, 1947

Matrix nos.: 2EA 12456-2, 12457-2, 12458-1, 12459-2, 12460-2, 12461-1, 12462-2 and 12463-3

First issued on HMV DB 9393 through 9396

Richard
STRAUSS

(1864-1949)

Ariadne auf Naxos, Op. 60

Opera in One Act with Prologue – Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Ariadne	Maria Cebotari (soprano)
Bacchus	Karl Friedrich (tenor)
Najade	Margaret Field-Hyde (soprano)
Dryade	Gwladys Garside (contralto)
Echo	Edith Furmedge (soprano)
Zerbinetta	Margaret Field-Hyde (soprano)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham

Recorded in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London, 13th-15th October, 1947

Matrix nos.: 2EA 12440-1, 12420-1, 12419-1, 12421-1, 12422-1, 12423-1, 12424-1 and 12425-1

Unpublished on 78 rpm

Elektra

Final Scene

1 <i>Was willst du, fremder Mensch?</i> (Elektra, Orest)	8:03	4 <i>Ich habe ihm das Beil nicht geben können!</i> (Elektra, Chrysothemis, Maids, Aegisth, Chrysothemis, Voices)	2:12
2 <i>Elektra! Elektra!</i> (Orest, Elektra)	2:36	5 <i>He! Lichter! Lichter!</i> (Aegisth, Elektra)	4:26
3 <i>Orest! Orest! Orest!</i> (Elektra, Orest, Tutor)	10:16	6 <i>Elektra! Schwester!</i> (Chrysothemis, Voices, Elektra)	6:01
		7 <i>Schweig, und tanze</i> (Elektra, Chrysothemis)	1:53

Ariadne auf Naxos

8 <i>Opera Overture</i>	4:58	11 <i>Du schönes Wesen!</i> (Bacchus, Ariadne)	6:34
Final Scene		12 <i>Bin ich ein Gott!</i> (Bacchus, Ariadne)	4:10
9 <i>Ein schönes Wunder!</i> (Najade, Dryade, Echo)	3:41	13 <i>Gibt es kein Hinüber?</i> (Ariadne, Bacchus)	2:29
10 <i>Circe, Circe, kannst du mich hören?</i> (Bacchus, Ariadne, Najade, Dryade, Echo)	5:52	14 <i>Töne, töne, süße Stimme</i> (Najade, Dryade, Echo, Ariadne, Zerbinetta, Bacchus)	4:51

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Special thanks to Richard A. Kaplan for providing source material

Producer's Note

The sources for the present transfers were American RCA Victor shellac pressings for *Elektra*, and a set of white label shellac HMV test pressings for the unpublished-on-78 *Ariadne* album.

Mark Obert-Thorn

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Elektra and Ariadne auf Naxos: Final Scenes

In October 1947 at the age of 83, a very sprightly Richard Strauss made his first-ever flight to Britain to take part in a festival of the composer's music organized by the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham and Ernst Roth, his publisher at Boosey and Hawkes. Incidentally, the conductor and composer had known each other since 1910 and had not met since 1936. An additional purpose of the visit was to collect some of the royalties that had accrued to the composer during the Second World War. It would also be the last time he would conduct in public. At the end of the month at the final concert the composer conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra in an auditory programme that contained the *Sinfonia domestica*. Strauss was delighted with the whole affair and certainly returned home a contented and wealthier man.

For the record, Beecham had introduced *Elektra* to London in February 1910 and gave the British première of *Salome* in December the same year. He later directed the third performance of *Der Rosenkavalier* in London in February 1913 and presented the first version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* to London in May of that year. The latter work was the last Strauss opera Sir Thomas gave in Britain at the 1950 Edinburgh Festival.

Beecham conducted two concert performances of *Elektra* at the BBC's Maida Vale No. 1 Studio before an invited audience on 24th and 26th October. Regarding the choice of soloists the conductor was fortunate that the Vienna State Opera Company were appearing at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and was thus able to make use of their artists in his performances and subsequent recordings. The composer attended *Elektra* and at the end of the first declaimed a loud 'Bravo'. He later embraced the conductor and was extremely satisfied with the performance. Sadly when it came to the recording on 27th-29th October just the Final Scene was chosen as the costs and potential sales of a complete Strauss opera on 78 rpm shellac discs could not be justified on commercial grounds.

In the case of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which was given

in a staged performance on Sunday 12th October 1947 in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Beecham played the *Overture*, followed by an abridged *Final Scene*. Strauss was once again in the audience and the subsequent recording was planned on 13th-14th October as a souvenir of the occasion. The results, however, proved unsatisfactory and were rejected by the conductor on musical grounds, and release was delayed until 1979, the year of the anniversary of Beecham's birth.

Elektra, Strauss's fourth opera, interested the composer from the time he saw a production of the tragedy at the end of 1905 by the young Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The composer had originally wanted to compose a score for a comedy, but he was suitably impressed by the musical opportunities the play offered. Correspondence between composer and librettist began two years later and the première took place in Dresden on 25th January 1909. The score is the composer's most dissonant and brutal, conveying intense psychological tension throughout. Little wonder this one-act work should have caused such a huge divergence of opinion with the musical press; so much so that even a century on its stark realism remains very powerful.

The opera is set in the courtyard of the palace in Mycenae. A bedraggled Elektra laments the death of her father King Agamemnon, who has been murdered by Klytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Elektra dreams of the return of her brother Orestes, but her thoughts are rudely shattered when news is brought of his death. The heroine then begs her sister Chrysothemis to aid her vengeance, but to no avail. Elektra then digs up the hatchet that killed her father, buried in the courtyard. A stranger interrupts her but slowly she begins to realise that this is her disguised brother bent on vengeance. On entering the palace Orestes kills Klytemnestra and Aegisthus. Elektra dances triumphantly in satisfaction, but collapses and dies. As the opera ends Chrysothemis is heard calling for Orestes.

The background to the writing of *Ariadne auf*

Naxos was to repay a debt of gratitude to the producer Max Reinhardt for his rescue of *Der Rosenkavalier* at a crucial moment when a firm director was required. The first version of the opera was in a single act to be played after Hofmannsthal's German translation of Molière's comédie-ballet *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, for which Strauss had composed incidental music. The work was given its première in Stuttgart in October 1912. This version proved impractical in that it required both a theatrical company and an operatic ensemble on the same evening. Furthermore, an audience for the play was not necessarily interested in the ensuing opera and vice versa. Strauss and Hofmannsthal soon realised that their original concept was impractical and revised the score into a version with a sung prologue and a single act. This was given in Vienna in October 1916 and is the version normally given today.

The *Prologue* in the revised version is more in the nature of a conversation between the characters and contains few arias and duets. Set in the house of a 'bourgeois gentilhomme', the scene finds a troupe of *commedia dell'arte* players and an opera company, both engaged by the owner to provide simultaneous performances before a grand fireworks display. In the lively preparations that ensue the performers are all at one with another over the entertainment, with the distraught Composer concerned with the abridgement of his opera. Eventually the opera proceeds. Set on a desert island in ancient times, it tells of Ariadne lamenting her abandonment by Theseus. She is subsequently unmoved by entertainments of the comedians or by the suggestion of Zerbinetta that there are many suitable men available. Bacchus then arrives, believed by Ariadne to be the god of death, but he persuades her to a life with him. Joyfully they depart with Zerbinetta offering a whispered approval.

The German soprano **Erna Schlüter** (1904-1969) made her début in her native Oldenburg as the Third Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* in 1922. Originally a contralto she also sang the title-rôle of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Azucena in *Il trovatore*. She moved to Mannheim in 1925 and changed to a soprano, singing Santuzza, the Marschallin and Tosca. Five years later she sang her first Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*. During the decade starting

1930 she was a member of the Stuttgart State Opera where her rôles included Elena in *I vespri siciliani*, Tosca, Leonora in *Il trovatore* and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. She also appeared in the première of Winfried Zilling's *Der Rosknecht*. In 1934 she sang the title part in Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* under the composer's direction. In 1940 she became a member of the Hamburg State Opera where she remained until her retirement in 1956. Schlüter appeared as Elektra at Covent Garden in 1953-54. Her United States début was to have taken place in 1947 but she was refused a visa to sing at the Metropolitan. In 1947 she sang Ellen Orford in the German première of Britten's *Peter Grimes*.

The red-headed Bulgarian soprano **Ljuba Welitsch** (1913-1996) studied singing in Sofia and following further tuition in Vienna, made her début in Sofia in 1936. Engagements followed in Graz (1937-40), Hamburg (1941-43), Munich (1943-46) and the Vienna State Opera (1946-58). She first appeared in London with the visiting Vienna State Opera Company in 1947 and returned to the house between 1948 and 1952. Welitsch also appeared with Glyndebourne Festival Opera at the Edinburgh Festival in 1948-49. Her American career was confined to the Metropolitan Opera, where she appeared between 1948 and 1952. As a performer she was a somewhat temperamental but dramatic singer whose most memorable interpretation was as the heroine in Richard Strauss's *Salome*, which she sang under the conductor in 1944.

The Yorkshire-born tenor **Walter Widdop** (1892-1949) studied with a local teacher and later served in the British Army during the Great War. His stage début was as Radames in *Aida* with the British National Opera Company in 1922. The following year he sang Siegfried, followed by Siegmund in *Die Walküre* (1932) and Tristan (1933 and 1937-38). He appeared in Gluck's *Armide* opposite Frida Leider in 1928. He also sang in Barcelona, Amsterdam, Germany and Australia, but never appeared in the United States. Widdop was a much admired oratorio singer who recorded extensively. The night before he died he had sung *Lohengrin's Farewell* at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert.

Paul Schöffler (1897-1977) was born in Dresden,

where he first studied before moving to Milan to work with Marco Sammarco. His début was as the Herald in *Lohengrin* in Dresden in 1925, the following year becoming a member of that company and remaining until 1938. From there he moved to the Vienna State Opera until he retired in 1970. His London début was as Donner in 1934 at Covent Garden, where he would sing until 1953; he first appeared in 1938 at Salzburg, where he sang regularly until 1965. Schöffler made his first American appearance at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1950 after which he continued for nine seasons until 1964. In addition to creating the title-rôle in Gottfried von Einem's *Dantons Tod* in 1947 and Jupiter in Strauss's *Die Liebe der Danae* in 1952, both at Salzburg, his repertoire included Don Giovanni, Scarpia, Amfortas, Kurwenal, Pizarro, Iago, Orest, Wotan and the Grand Inquisitor. He also sang in the 1950s in San Francisco. After retiring he moved to Britain, where his sister was married to the English conductor Mark Lubbock. He died in Amersham, Buckinghamshire.

The Russian-born soprano **Maria Cebotari** (1910-1949) appeared with a travelling company before joining the Moscow Arts Theatre. She moved to Berlin and studied with Oskar Daniel. Her début was in 1931 as Mimi in *La Bohème* at Dresden, where she sang until 1936, in addition to creating the rôle of Aminta in Richard Strauss's *Die schweigsame Frau*. She performed with the Dresden Company when they appeared at London's Royal Opera House in 1936, singing Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) and Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*). She then joined the Staatsoper in Berlin, where she appeared during the years 1936-44 before moving to Vienna in 1946. At the Salzburg Festival she created the rôles of Lucille in Gottfried von Einem's *Dantons Tod* (1947)

and Iseut in Frank Martin's *Le Vin herbé* (1948). Her attractive voice and compelling stage manner were much admired. She died in Vienna in June 1949.

The Austrian tenor **Karl Friedrich** (1905-1981) was born in Vienna and studied at that city's Musikakademie. His début took place in Karlsruhe in 1931, followed by engagements in Stralsund, Magdeburg and Düsseldorf before he sang at the Vienna State Opera. He sang regularly at the Salzburg Festival between 1937 and 1950. He also sang operetta and took part in Austrian Radio studio broadcasts of Lehár's *Giuditta* and *Paganini* under the composer's direction. In the latter part of his career he moved into *comprimario* parts.

Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) spent a huge amount of time (and money) in the opera house in the years leading up to 1924. He then, in late 1932, founded the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which played at Covent Garden from 1933 until 1939 when the conductor was in overall control of the International Seasons in that house. During the years 1941 and 1944 he conducted opera at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Returning to Britain in 1944 Sir Thomas founded the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, which he conducted until his death. His post-war operatic ventures were devoted to several studio broadcasts, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *The Bohemian Girl* at Covent Garden in 1951, Delius's *Irmelin* in Oxford in 1953, and a memorable season at the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires in the late summer of 1958. He also made commercial recordings of Gounod's *Faust* in 1948 (Naxos 8.110117-18), Puccini's *La Bohème* (1956) (Naxos 8.111249-50), Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (also 1956) and *Carmen* (1958-59).

Malcolm Walker

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MONO

Elektra – Final Scene 35:28

- 1 Was willst du, fremder Mensch!
- 2 Elektra! Elektra!
- 3 Orest! Orest! Orest!
- 4 Ich habe ihm das Beil
- 5 He! Lichter! Lichter!
- 6 Elektra! Schwester!
- 7 Schweig, und tanze

Ariadne auf Naxos – Final Scene 32:35

- 8 Opera Overture
- 9 Ein schönes Wunder!
- 10 Circe, Circe, kannst du mich hören?
- 11 Du schönes Wesen!
- 12 Bin ich ein Gott
- 13 Gibt es kein Hinüber?
- 14 Töne, töne, süße Stimme

Richard
STRAUSS
(1864–1949)

Elektra – Final Scene

Elektra Erna Schlüter
Orest Paul Schöffler
Chrysothemis Ljuba Welitsch
Aegisth Walter Widdop

Recorded in EMI Studio No. 1, Abbey Road, London
27th-29th October, 1947

Ariadne auf Naxos – Final Scene

Ariadne Maria Cebotari
Bacchus Karl Friedrich
Zerbinetta Margaret Field-Hyde

Recorded in EMI Studio No. 1, Abbey Road, London
13th-15th October, 1947

Royal Philharmonic Chorus • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Thomas Beecham

Sourced from American RCA Victor shellac pressings for *Elektra*, and HMV test pressings for *Ariadne auf Naxos* which were unpublished on 78rpm, this Naxos Historical album celebrates the enormous mutual admiration between Richard Strauss and Sir Thomas Beecham. Beecham had introduced *Elektra* to London in 1910 and presented the first version of *Ariadne* in London three years later. The recordings heard here of the final scenes from each opera were made almost three decades later following performances given in the presence of the composer. For the recording of *Elektra*, Beecham was fortunate to be able call upon the renowned interpreters of Strauss's music Erna Schlüter, Ljuba Welitsch and Paul Schöffler, who were appearing with the Vienna State Opera at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Reissue Producer and Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Special thanks to Richard A. Kaplan for providing source material
Cover photo: Thomas Beecham (Private Collection)

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