

On this week's WCPE Opera House we're going to hear Richard Strauss's *Arabella*, an opera about sex, love, money, and one of the most horrendous families ever put on stage. Originally intended as a comedy, *Arabella* was the sixth, and last, collaboration between Strauss and librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and was first performed on July 1, 1933 at the Saxon State Theater in Dresden.

The opera opens in a Vienna hotel, where Adelaide (soprano **Helga Dernesch**) consults a fortune teller about how to repair the Waldner family fortunes. The only hope is for daughter Arabella (soprano **Kiri Te Kanawa**) to marry well. There's another daughter, Zdenka (soprano **Gabriele Fontana**), but she's forced to disguise herself as a boy because the family can't afford to bring up two young ladies. The disguise hasn't stopped Zdenka from falling in love with the young officer Matteo (tenor **Peter Seiffert**). But it does put her in an awkward position when Matteo confesses to her that he loves her older sister. Zdenka dutifully tries to plead Matteo's case with Arabella. Meanwhile, their father, Count Waldner (bass **Ernst Gutstein**), continues to lose at gambling. To salvage his position, Waldner hits on the expedient of fixing Arabella up with Mandryka, a rich old army comrade. Mandryka's nephew, also named Mandryka (baritone **Franz Grundheber**), who's charmed by a picture of Arabella, comes in his dead uncle's place for a visit. He lends Waldner money; in return, he's promised Arabella's hand in marriage.

Arabella's introduced to Mandryka at a ball and they fall in love. Matteo is heartbroken but Zdenka cheers him up by giving him a key, ostensibly to Arabella's bedroom. Mandryka overhears and, when Arabella leaves the ball, he follows her. The key is really to Zdenka's bedroom and it's she to whom Matteo unwittingly makes love. He runs into Arabella on the stairs and is maddened by her inexplicable aloofness. Arabella's parents and Mandryka demand explanations. Zdenka finally confesses the truth. Matteo admits he suspected Zdenka's disguise all along, and the two pairs of lovers forgive one another.

**Jeffrey Tate** conducts the Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in this 1990 Decca recording.

**Julia Varady** and **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau** sing Arabella and Mandryka's second act duet "Sie wollen mich heiraten": <https://youtu.be/fPi4RbMtQXc>.

As a bonus, we'll hear **Kiri Te Kanawa** sing the third of Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder* (*Four Last Songs*): "Beim Schlafengehen" ("While going to sleep"). Sir **Georg Solti** conducts the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

Please join us next Thursday evening, November 15<sup>th</sup>, for an encore broadcast of Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, with **Sherrill Milnes** as the hunchbacked court jester, Joan **Sutherland** as his daughter Gilda, and **Luciano Pavarotti** as the playboy Duke of Mantua. **Richard Bonyne** conducts the London Symphony Orchestra and the Ambrosian Opera Chorus in this 1971 Decca recording, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio**.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed "live" online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

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*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House**