ARIADNE AUF NAXOS

CAN A HAUGHTY PRIMA DONNA SHARE THE STAGE WITH A FLIRTY comedienne? Can a serious composer expand his worldview and music's role within it? Can a heartbroken lover relinquish her noble devotion and love someone new, and can everyday figures communicate with gods and goddesses? When musical entertainments from two vastly different worlds appear onstage simultaneously, anything can happen. And in the comic opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Richard Strauss takes the audience back in time—first to the world of 18th-century Vienna and then to the realm of ancient Greek mythology—to explore questions that remain essential to how we think about musical genres today.

Structured as an opera-within-an-opera, Strauss's work shows how aesthetics and assumptions collide when the popular entertainment of comedy is forced onto the same stage as tragic drama. The score features musical juxtapositions between the dramatic richness of Romantic opera, florid melodies of bel canto singing, and light accompaniment and spoken dialogue of Classical opera, while the narrative juxtapositions of the libretto help communicate the enduring nature of the opera's themes. The characters, in their real lives as performers of different musical traditions in the Prologue and as characters from opposing worlds in the Opera, bring the everyday into dialogue with moralistic storytelling. Zerbinetta's simple cure for heartbreak meets its match in Ariadne's stoicism, while the clumsy advances of the burlesque troupe stand in stark contrast to Bacchus's transformational love for Ariadne. Yet the choice to embrace the past offers far more than just comic possibility. By couching his aesthetic experiment in earlier time periods, Strauss asks us to ponder important—and longstanding—questions about music. At the end of the opera, we are left with a nagging question: Are the fates of these different characters (and the genres they represent) so different after all?

This guide takes the enduring tension between "elite" and "popular" art forms as its jumping-off point, inviting teachers and students into a world of myth, backstage hijinks, vocal pyrotechnics, and theatrical history. As this guide delves into music, drama, and design of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, students will learn to appreciate the outrageous comedy and insightful social critique of Strauss's work while broadening their thinking about performance and music at large.


DAVIDSEN


RAE


LEONARD


JOVANOVICH

THE WORK

An opera in a prologue and one act, sung in German

Music by Richard Strauss

Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Based on *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière and the story of Ariadne from Greek mythology

First performed October 25, 1912, at the Hoftheater, Stuttgart, Germany (original version); and October 4, 1916, at the Hofoper, Vienna, Austria (revised version)

PRODUCTION

Elijah Moshinsky Production

Michael Yeargan Set and Costume Designer

Gil Wechsler Lighting Designer

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD
March 12, 2022

Lise Davidsen
The Prima Donna / Ariadne

Brenda Rae
Zerbinetta

Isabel Leonard
The Composer

Brandon Jovanovich
The Tenor / Bacchus

Johannes Martin Kränzle
The Music Master

Marek Janowski
Conductor

Production a gift of the Lila Acheson and DeWitt Wallace Endowment Fund, established by the founders of The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.

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The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera regardless of their prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with the opera. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *Ariadne auf Naxos* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that they will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

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To access this guide online, including any audio selections and handouts, visit **metopera.org/ariadneguide**. Unless otherwise noted, all Met Opera on Demand (MOoD) clips referenced in this guide come from the performance on March 12, 2022.

WHO'S WHO IN *ARIADNE AUF NAXOS*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
The Prima Donna / Ariadne The haughty lead singer of the Composer's opera / a princess abandoned by her lover	ah-ree-YAHD-neh	soprano	The star of the Composer's opera, the Prima Donna balks at the idea of sharing the stage with burlesque performers. Ariadne, the opera's title role sung by the Prima Donna, prays for death after being abandoned on Naxos by her lover Theseus.
The Tenor / Bacchus The male lead of the Composer's opera / the Greek god of wine	BAH-kus	tenor	The male lead of the Composer's opera, much of his material must be cut when the two performances are combined. Bacchus, sung by the Tenor in the opera, finds the abandoned Ariadne on Naxos and marries her.
Zerbinetta Comedienne and leader of a burlesque troupe	tser-bee-NET-ah	soprano	A coquettish entertainer who performs with four male members of her troupe, Zerbinetta inspires the Composer to revise his opera and, in the show itself, counsels the abandoned princess Ariadne.
Harlekin, Scaramuccio, Truffaldin, Brighella The four male performers in Zerbinetta's troupe	HAR-leh-kin, scah-rah-MOO-choh, troo-fahl-DEEN, bri-GELL-ah	tenor, tenor, baritone, bass	The members of the burlesque troupe, stock figures in the Italian commedia dell'arte, do their best to entertain heartbroken Ariadne when they are suddenly inserted into the Composer's opera.
The Composer The writer of the opera within the opera		mezzo-soprano	A serious artist outraged that his opera will appear alongside a comedy, let alone be combined with one, the Composer is ultimately swayed by Zerbinetta's charms to put the performance ahead of his ego.
The Music Master The Composer's teacher		baritone	A mediator of sorts who tries to reason first with the Major-Domo and then with the Composer and his singers, the Music Master insists that the show must go on despite the program changes.
The Dancing Master The choreographer for Zerbinetta and her troupe		tenor	An advocate for Zerbinetta and her troupe, the Dancing Master is convinced that they can not only successfully join the opera but improve it.
The Major-Domo The head servant of the Viennese aristocrat hosting the performance		spoken	The head of the household to the wealthiest man in Vienna, the Major-Domo brings news that the two performances will be combined and must end promptly on time, reminding the performers that his boss's financial support allows him to make any request he wishes.
Najade, Dryade, and Echo Nymphs who reside on the island of Naxos	NYE-ahd-eh, DRY-ahd-eh, EH-koh	soprano, contralto, soprano	The three Nymphs residing on the island of Naxos reflect upon Ariadne's predicament when she is abandoned by Theseus and then betrothed to Bacchus.

Synopsis

PROLOGUE: *Vienna, 18th Century.* At the home of the richest man in Vienna, preparations for a lavish evening are underway. The Music Master has just learned that the tragic opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*—which has been prepared for the festivities by his protégé, the Composer—will be followed by a comic performance by a burlesque troupe. The Music Master begs the nobleman's head servant, the Major-Domo, to reorganize the musical lineup, since both the Composer and the opera's singers will object to having their work followed by a ridiculous comedy. The Major-Domo

During the Prologue, the Major-Domo announces that the tragic opera and vaudeville comedy must be performed simultaneously.

STAGE PHOTOGRAPHY THROUGHOUT BY MARTY SOHL/MET OPERA

reminds him, however, that only the nobleman can decide the evening's entertainment. The Composer enters, hoping for a final rehearsal with his musicians before the performance, but a servant informs him that the musicians are busy providing dinner music for the nobleman and his guests. Torn between frustration and excitement, the Composer thinks of last-minute changes to his score and instructions for his singers.

Backstage, the Tenor argues with the wigmaker, and the Prima Donna complains about the comedy troupe. Zerbinetta, the comedy troupe's leader, has her own objections to being paired with the "boring" opera. The Major-Domo enters with an announcement: For the fireworks to begin on time, the two performances must be done simultaneously.

The Composer is outraged by this new development, even as the Music Master tries to convince him to find a way to combine the two musical performances. The Music Master and Dance Master try to brainstorm a solution while the Tenor and Prima Donna each lobby for the other's part to be cut. Zerbinetta sees a solution, and explains her plan to her troupe: The opera tells the story of the heartbroken princess Ariadne, who has been abandoned by her lover Theseus on the island of Naxos, where she waits for death to end her suffering. The burlesque troupe's comedy can also take place on the desert island, and the comic performers will show the princess that she simply needs to find a new lover. When the Composer dismisses such a tawdry solution for his noble heroine, Zerbinetta begins to flirt with him, inspiring him to accept her compromise. The Music Master enters and announces the start of the performance, and the Composer, blinded by his new love for Zerbinetta, looks forward to the new show—until he realizes what he has done.

Zerbinetta and the Composer

THE OPERA:

The Ariadne myth tells how Prince Theseus of Athens set out for Crete to kill the Minotaur, a creature half man, half bull, who was concealed in a labyrinth. Princess Ariadne of Crete fell in love with Theseus and gave him a ball of thread that enabled him to find his way out of the labyrinth after he had killed the Minotaur. When Theseus left Crete, he took Ariadne with him as his bride. During their voyage home, they stopped at the island of Naxos. While Ariadne was asleep, Theseus slipped away and continued his journey to Athens without her. The opera Ariadne auf Naxos *begins at this point.*

Abandoned on the island of Naxos, Ariadne longs for death while three Nymphs look on.

Zerbinetta, the leader of the comedy troupe, tries to cheer up Ariadne.

The opera opens with Ariadne alone and abandoned on a desert island. Three nymphs look on and lament Ariadne's fate. Ariadne sings of her longing for the realm of death. The members of the burlesque troupe arrive with a plan to cheer up the heartbroken princess. First, Harlekin tries to entertain her with a song, but the princess, stoically awaiting Hermes—the messenger of death—refuses to enjoy his music. Next, Zerbinetta addresses the princess. She tries to convince Ariadne that the only way to get over a broken heart is to find someone new. Disgusted, Ariadne leaves the stage while Zerbinetta considers her own fickle love interests.

The nymphs reappear and announce the arrival of a ship. Ariadne believes that it must be Hermes, and she prepares for death. It is Bacchus the god of wine, however, who has arrived on the island. At first glance, Ariadne mistakes him for her beloved Theseus, but Bacchus explains that he is a god who has recently fled the clutches of the sorceress Circe. Enchanted by Ariadne's beauty, he refuses to leave her on the island, and she finds herself transformed by this new love. The two prepare to depart the island together and ascend to the heavens. Before the curtain closes, Zerbinetta appears once more to remind us that her cure for heartbreak was the correct solution all along.

LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME BY MOLIÈRE AND THE STORY OF ARIADNE FROM GREEK MYTHOLOGY


LE BOURGEOIS

GENTILHOMME.

COMÉDIE-BALLET.

ACTE PREMIER.

SCENE PREMIERE.

Strauss's opera was originally conceived as a short opera-within-a-play for Hugo von Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Molière's comedy *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (*The Bourgeois Gentleman*). The five-act comédie-ballet combining theater, music, and dance takes place at the home of the wealthy Mr. Jourdain in Paris. Mr. Jourdain, who is considered "bourgeois" because of his father's success as a cloth merchant, is determined to rise in social rank and become recognized as an aristocrat. Despite his wife's pleading that he be content with his current status, he spends lots of money to be educated in aristocratic practices of fencing, dancing, music, and philosophy and orders lavish new tailor-made clothing. As Mr. Jourdain rises in social standing, he becomes increasingly aspirational: He dreams of marrying a marchioness and forces his daughter Lucille's engagement to a nobleman, even though she is already in love with the middle-class Cléonte. With the assistance of Jourdain's wife and valet, Cléonte pretends to be the son of the Sultan of Turkey, winning Jourdain's permission to wed Lucille. The play ends with Lucille's wedding to the "Turkish sultan" and a special ceremony in which Jourdain is "ennobled" as father of the bride.

While the first section (the Prologue) is based on Hofmannsthal's adaption of Molière's play, the second section of the work (the Opera) is inspired by the classical myth of Ariadne. Ariadne was a princess from the island of Crete, daughter of the Cretan king Minos. She appears in many different myths but is perhaps best known for using a thread to help the Athenian hero Theseus escape the labyrinth in her father's palace after he kills the Minotaur, a beast that is half man, half bull and that has long terrorized the Cretan populace. Following the escape from the labyrinth, Ariadne and Theseus sail to the island of Naxos. Ariadne expects to live a long and happy life with Theseus—and when she wakes one day to find that he has abandoned her, she is distraught. Her story has a happy ending, however, when Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, discovers her on Naxos and marries her.

The original version of Hofmannsthal's play lasted more than six hours and premiered in 1912. Four years later, the opera-within-the-play was extracted and performed as a standalone work with a lengthy prologue; this is the version that opera audiences know and love today.

The Creation of *Ariadne auf Naxos*

1864 Richard Strauss is born in Munich in the Kingdom of Bavaria on June 11. He is the older of two children born to the principal horn player at the Court Opera in Munich and the daughter of a wealthy brewer. Strauss's father Franz oversees his early musical training.

1874 Hugo von Hofmannsthal is born in Vienna to an upper-class family. His great-grandfather was a tobacco farmer ennobled by the Austrian emperor, giving the family the title "von Hofmannsthal."

1882 Strauss enrolls at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

1883 After studying only one semester in Munich, Strauss heads first to Dresden and then to Berlin, two of Germany's major musical centers. His exposure to Berlin's rich concert and theater life will have a lasting impact on his work.

1885 Strauss is appointed assistant to the great conductor Hans von Bülow in Meiningen.

While in Meiningen, Strauss also makes the acquaintance of Alexander Ritter. An important aesthetic mentor, Ritter introduces Strauss to "music of the future," a musical movement headed by Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt that prioritizes new musical forms (such as tone poems) and the story-telling potential of music. Ritter also encourages Strauss's interest in the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, who argued for a mystical view of the world and the power of music.

1886 Strauss returns to Munich to take up a post as the third conductor of the Bavarian State Opera. During his time in Munich, he composes a number of important early works, including several tone poems. A year later, after befriending composer Gustav Mahler, Strauss meets soprano Pauline de Ahna, his future wife.

1889 Strauss is appointed Kapellmeister to the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. In the summer, he serves as the assistant conductor at the Bayreuth Festival, a music festival devoted entirely to the performance of Wagner's works, where he meets Cosima Wagner.

1892 Hofmannsthal begins a course of study in law and French philology at the University of Vienna. The works of the Roman poet Ovid are a significant influence on Hofmannsthal, who started writing poetry at a young age.

1894 The premiere of Strauss's first opera, *Guntram*, takes place in Weimar in May. The libretto, also by Strauss, is a story of love and redemption set in medieval Germany and reveals Wagner's influence on Strauss's work. The critical reception is lukewarm at best, and the work is only staged a few times during Strauss's life.

In the summer, Strauss makes his conducting debut at Bayreuth. Strauss conducts Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, whose title character, a medieval German singer and poet, finds redemption through the love of Princess Elisabeth. Strauss's wife Pauline sings the role of Elisabeth.

1898 The Strausses move to Berlin, where Richard has secured one of the most prestigious jobs in Germany: principal conductor of the Staatskapelle Berlin at the Berlin State Opera.

1900 Strauss and Hofmannsthal meet in Berlin. A year later, Hofmannsthal graduates from the University of Vienna.

1905 Strauss sees a production of Hofmannsthal's drama *Elektra*, based on the ancient Greek tragedy by Sophocles about a young woman whose single-minded determination to avenge her father's death leads her to murder her mother.

In December, Strauss's scandalous opera *Salome* premieres in Dresden. It is hugely successful, providing the composer additional income in the form of royalties that significantly augment his salary as a conductor.

1906 Strauss and Hofmannsthal begin their first collaboration on the opera *Elektra*, setting the story of Hofmannsthal's play to highly modernist and atonal music, like that of *Salome*. It premieres in Dresden in 1909. Their second collaboration, the comedy *Der Rosenkavalier*, premieres in Dresden two years later to rapturous acclaim.

1912 Hofmannsthal writes an adaptation of Molière's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Strauss provides the play's incidental music as well as the music for an opera within the play.

1914 The First World War breaks out. During the war, Strauss works on the music for his next opera with Hofmannsthal, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, but the librettist's military service delays the opera's progress.

1916 Strauss and Hofmannsthal replace the play in the original version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* with a prologue, creating the opera that is known today. This version premieres at the Hofoper in Vienna on October 4.

1918 The First World War ends with the defeat of Germany and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Following the war, Strauss moves to Vienna to become principal conductor of the Vienna State Opera.

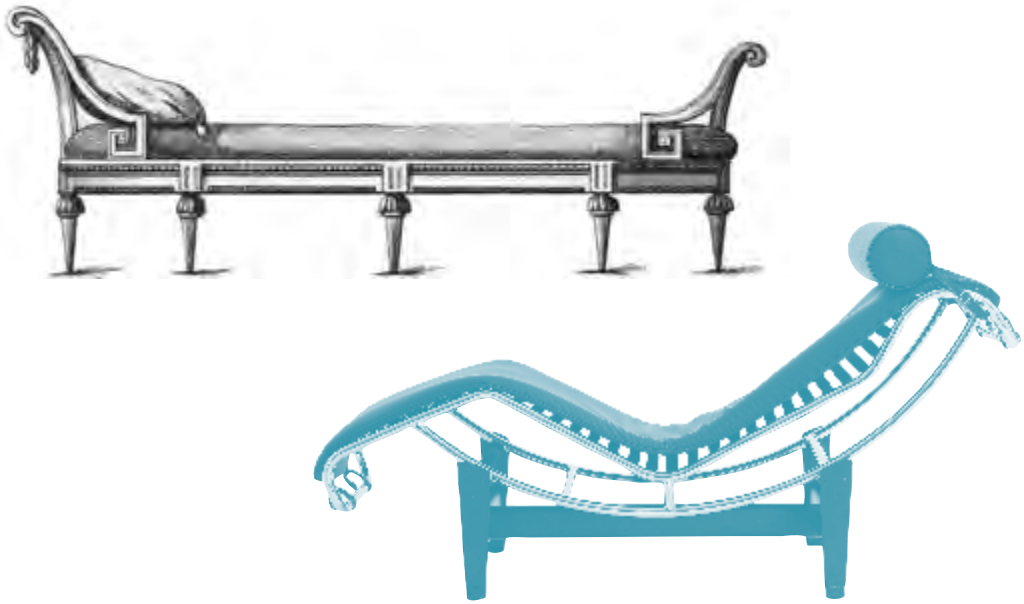
1919 Strauss and Hofmannsthal's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* premieres at the Vienna State Opera, marking the composer's new appointment. Its reception is unenthusiastic. Strauss and Hofmannsthal will go on to collaborate on two further operas, *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928) and *Arabella* (1933).

1929 While working on the libretto for *Arabella*, Hofmannsthal suffers a fatal stroke. The death of his friend and colleague has a profound effect on Strauss.

1949 Strauss suffers a heart attack on August 15 and dies of kidney failure on September 8.

1962 The Metropolitan Opera performs *Ariadne auf Naxos* for the first time.

Looking Backward: Neoclassicism in the Early 20th Century



CRITICAL INQUIRY

Combining low comedy and high tragedy, *Ariadne auf Naxos* might at first seem to represent the unhappy union of artistic opposites—at least this much is suggested by the backstage drama of the Prologue. How could we better understand Strauss and Hofmannsthal's work by emphasizing the similarities and differences of the work's two contrasting sections? What unites vaudeville and tragic opera? Which plot elements of the Prologue return, perhaps in a different form, in the Opera?

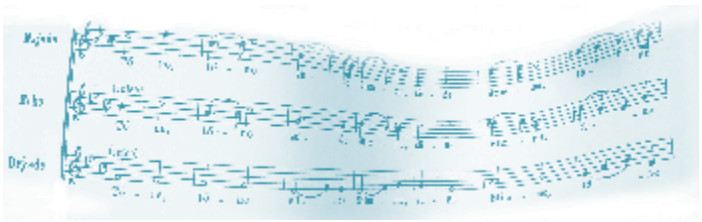
The early 20th century is often thought of as a time of musical modernism, when composers drew on harsh sounds and strange forms to express new ideas. Yet another important musical trend from the first decades of the century involved looking backward, specifically reconsidering genres and styles from earlier time periods, from medieval chant to Baroque cantatas to Classical concertos. *Ariadne auf Naxos* participates in this trend in several ways, revealing Richard Strauss as a composer consciously engaged in, and even predicting, changing musical tastes. *Ariadne* is not the first of Strauss's operas to look backward both in its musical style and story—the composer's *Der Rosenkavalier* also experiments with a story and musical style from the Classical era—but its satire forces us to consider the historical era it depicts in a new light.

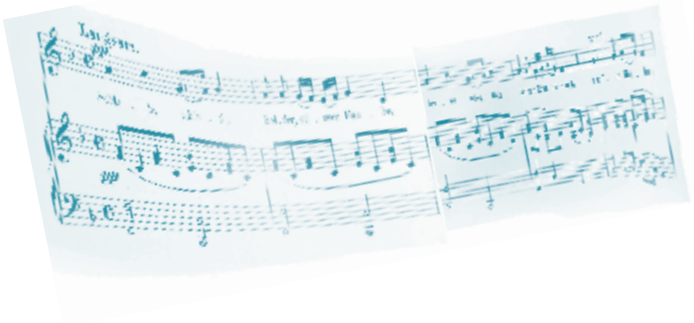
The story of the opera combines two performances of very different types into a single evening. As we learn from the Prologue, there is to be both a burlesque troupe who have prepared a commedia dell'arte–style comic performance—an early form of Italian theater popular in the 16th and 17th centuries—and an opera based on the ancient Greek love story of Ariadne and Bacchus. Although the music is firmly in the late Romantic tradition, the subject matter of the opera recalls composing trends of the pre-Classical period when ancient myths often served as the source material for serious operas.

The music of *Ariadne* draws its inspiration—and even sometimes its melodies!—from earlier periods. Harlekin's song at the beginning of the Opera (*"Lieben, Hassen, Hoffen, Zagen"*) **(Track 1** or **MOoD clip 22)** is inspired by Mozart (the opening theme of the A-Major Piano Sonata, K. 331), and the nymphs' trio *"Töne, töne, süße Stimme"*

(Track 2 or **MOoD clip 30)** takes its melody from Schubert (*"Schlafe, schlafe, holder, süßer Knabe,"* from *Wiegenlied*, D. 498). The general bel canto style of the operas of Donizetti and Bellini serves as inspiration for Zerbinetta's coloratura recitative and aria, *"Großmächtige Prinzessin"* **(Track 3** or **MOod clip 25)**. And the mixture of singing with spoken dialogue accompanied by piano and small orchestra in the Prologue alludes to the Singspiel tradition of early German comic operas.

The setting of the opera itself—the house of a wealthy aristocrat who is able to employ two different ensembles to perform for his guests (and change what is required of these performers at the last minute)—also recalls a means of musical patronage that far preceded Strauss. The 18th century was an era of noble classes and private patronage. Composers and musicians were treated like hired household staff, subject to the entertainment needs and whims of their employers. Franz Joseph Haydn, for instance, spent his entire career in the employment of a single wealthy patron.





The 20th century brought dramatic change to people's lives: Political upheaval, rapid urban growth, technological development, and an increase in the study and understanding of human psychology all changed daily life in unimaginable ways. Especially following the devastation of the First World War, artists looked back to a "simpler" time for inspiration and as a means of escape; they also used references to the past as a way to make comments about societal issues in their own day. Indeed, Neoclassicism implies much more than a mere re-creation of earlier styles of music. Parody and recontextualization were often part of this movement, and references to the past were not necessarily positive or nostalgic. The backstage chaos and turmoil wreaked by the fickle aristocrat's last-minute changes, for instance, are a good reminder of how unpleasant the patronage system could be. The basis of Strauss's opera, the simultaneous combination of two distinct styles of performance, could itself only exist in a 20th-century context.

Just the Two of Us

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, above, and Richard Strauss, below

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte, Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito, perhaps John Adams and Peter Sellars—these are some of the major composer-librettist duos in the history of opera. But perhaps none reaches the duration, variety, and intensity of the collaboration between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whose *Ariadne auf Naxos* was both a triumph and a failure and nearly cost them their artistic partnership.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal are a study in contrast. The former was good-natured, lighthearted, interested in exploring human dilemmas, and eager to compromise; the latter was gloomy, tortured, obsessed with philosophical and abstract questions, and severely stubborn. Strauss was adamant that audiences understand the work they saw. Hofmannsthal maintained that real art could never be understood by the public. It is perhaps this union of opposites that made for such enduring and fruitful collaboration. The two first began working together shortly after Strauss had seen Hofmannsthal's play *Elektra* in 1906, which so impressed the composer that he wrote the playwright asking him "urgently to give me first refusal with anything composable that you write. Your manner has so much in common with mine; we were born for one another and are certain to do fine things together if you remain faithful to me."

And faithful he was: Hofmannsthal went on to complete librettos for six Strauss operas over the next two decades, including *Elektra* (1909), *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912–16), *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919), *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928), and *Arabella* (1933). The writer himself acknowledged his unusual dedication to the craft of the libretto, which has often been seen as subliterary. "I know that for many generations past no distinguished poet of the rank with which I may credit myself amongst the living, has dedicated himself willingly and devotedly to the task of working for a musician," he wrote to Strauss in 1911 while the two worked on *Ariadne*.

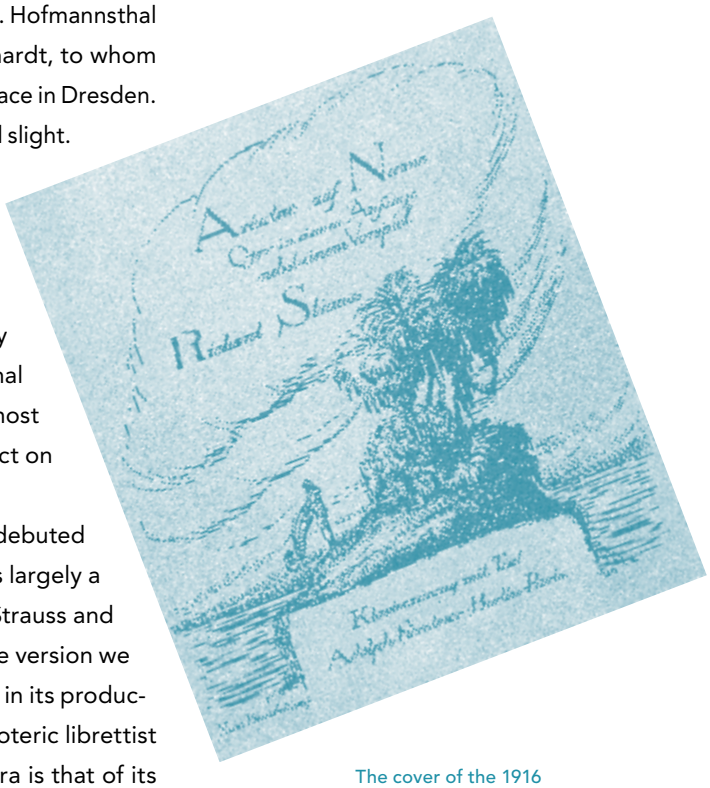
The idea for *Ariadne auf Naxos* originated with Hofmannsthal, who proposed to Strauss that they assemble a two-part work adapted from a German translation of Molière's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. In his initial scheme, the first half of the production would be his reworking of the play with some incidental music (but no singing), and the second half would be a divertissement or operetta by the composer. During the early days of the project, both artists seemed to put responsibility for the work's success on the other's shoulders. When Strauss wrote his librettist that, "as the dramatic framework is rather thin, everything will depend on the poetic execution," Hofmannsthal countered by insisting that, "on the contrary, the whole thing is to be simply a framework on which to hang the music, well and prettily."

This miscommunication between the artists could have spelled disaster for the outcome of *Ariadne*, until Hofmannsthal came up with a novel idea—that the head of household asks for the comedy and tragedy to be performed simultaneously. Strauss, who had previously indicated that "he was not particularly interested by the

whole thing," was pleased: "In your letter you moot the brilliant idea of preparing the ground for *Ariadne* by a big scene which would explain and motivate the whole action. That's excellent."

With this dramatic structure in place, the two could better complement each other's visions for the work, at least until they broached the topic of its premiere. Hofmannsthal refused to entertain the possibility that anyone other than Max Reinhardt, to whom *Ariadne* is dedicated, would produce it and further insisted that it take place in Dresden. When Strauss suggested other options, the librettist took it as a personal slight. "But in this case you should find it possible to disregard everything that matters to me, to disregard all that the realization of this work of my imagination means to me, to force me into a theater where I could not appear without a sense of debasement, this does touch me; the mere idea that you on your part should entertain such a possibility does hurt me, and hurts me more than just momentarily," Hofmannsthal pleaded. "Here I find myself misunderstood and injured by you at the most vulnerable point in our relationship as artists. I beg of you, do not inflict on me this injury; do not injure us both, do not injure our relationship!"

Ultimately, the playwright ceded his ground, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* debuted in Stuttgart (though still directed by Reinhardt). The performance was largely a failure due to its excessive length, coming in at more than six hours. Strauss and Hofmannsthal undertook a revision of the work in 1916, resulting in the version we hear today. It is the genius of *Ariadne* that it expresses, in its form and in its production, the resolution of such conflicting perspectives: the brooding, esoteric librettist and the comic, populist composer. Perhaps the real story of this opera is that of its creators' profound and unlikely union.



The cover of the 1916 piano-vocal score

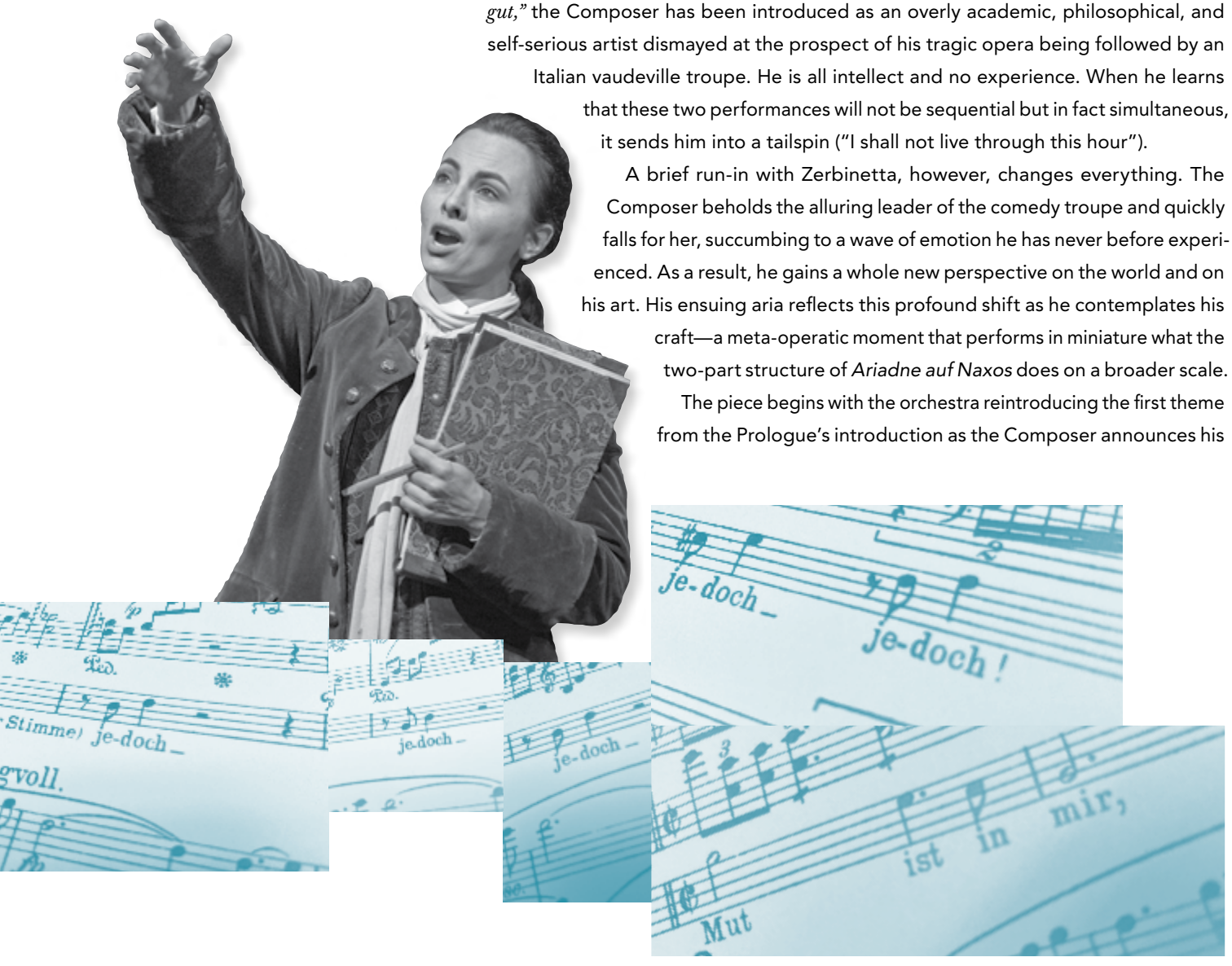
The Art of Compromise

Brief yet powerful, *"Sein wir wieder gut"* **(Track 4** or **MOoD clip 14)** is perhaps the musical highlight of the Prologue. Sung by the Composer, this aria encapsulates many of the broader themes elaborated throughout *Ariadne auf Naxos*—namely, the function of art and the transformative power of love. The role of the Composer is considered a "trouser role" or "breeches role," traditionally a man played by a woman actor or singer in men's clothing. While these roles are typically sung by mezzo-sopranos, as in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), the score for *Ariadne auf Naxos* indicates that the Composer is a soprano part. Still, the role continues to be sung by both voice types.

And just like Octavian in *Rosenkavalier*, the Composer in the Prologue of *Ariadne* is a youthful, naïve adolescent on the verge of manhood. Before singing *"Sein wir wieder gut,"* the Composer has been introduced as an overly academic, philosophical, and self-serious artist dismayed at the prospect of his tragic opera being followed by an Italian vaudeville troupe. He is all intellect and no experience. When he learns that these two performances will not be sequential but in fact simultaneous, it sends him into a tailspin ("I shall not live through this hour").

A brief run-in with Zerbinetta, however, changes everything. The Composer beholds the alluring leader of the comedy troupe and quickly falls for her, succumbing to a wave of emotion he has never before experienced. As a result, he gains a whole new perspective on the world and on his art. His ensuing aria reflects this profound shift as he contemplates his craft—a meta-operatic moment that performs in miniature what the two-part structure of *Ariadne auf Naxos* does on a broader scale.

The piece begins with the orchestra reintroducing the first theme from the Prologue's introduction as the Composer announces his



newfound willingness to compromise with the commedia dell'arte performers led by Zerbinetta ("Let's be friends again! / I see everything differently now"). Throughout the aria, and especially in these first few phrases, the vocal line extends across bar lines (*"anderen," "Tiefen," "Freund," "manches"*), suggesting an expansion of possibility that can no longer be so easily contained.

This effusive outburst soon gives way to open questioning, marked by a shift in meter. The time signature in the orchestra changes from 4/4 to 6/4 while the vocal part remains in 4/4. The Composer repeats the word *"jedoch"* ("And yet") five times in increasingly quick succession. Combined with the syncopated rhythm, this short section shows the young composer groping, searching for an answer to his implicit query: If the complexity of human existence cannot be adequately described in language, what kind of art is up to the task?

That answer, he decides, is music. As he resolves to face this challenge with courage (*"Mut"*), the vocal parts and orchestra fall back into metrical alignment in cut time (4/4 or 2/2). It is in this reestablished sense of stability that the literal highpoint of the aria arrives. When the Composer declares "The world is delightful," he sings a high B-flat for the first time—the highest note sung in the piece that only returns once more on the final word, *"Musik!"*

As if to enact the spiritual transformation undergone by the Composer, *"Sein wir wieder gut"* concludes with a key change from C major to E-flat major in the middle of the phrase "Music is a sacred art." Now convinced of his duty to "[bring] together men of courage" through his art, the newly wise Composer sings a steady ascending line—reaching a high B-flat once again—in proclaiming once and for all his dedication to "Sacred music!"

Though just more than two pages long, the Composer's aria performs several important functions in Strauss's opera. It marks a dramatic turning point where something previously deemed impossible, the combination of tragic opera and vaudeville comedy, proves viable and perhaps even worthwhile. It also anticipates the later transformation in the opera, when the abandoned Ariadne foregoes grief and finds new love with Bacchus—which she does, not coincidentally, with Zerbinetta's encouragement.

And finally, it gestures to the artistic collaboration that sparked the work itself. Just as the Composer reflects that "poets may write … quite beautiful words" that cannot express the human condition as well as music, the entire project of *Ariadne auf Naxos* was first proposed to Strauss by librettist and longtime collaborator Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who wrote to the composer in 1911, "purely for you, purely for your music!" Perhaps the Composer's aria is not just the naïve outburst of an enamored adolescent but in fact a tribute from one artist (and friend) to another.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

In the substantially revised version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* that premiered in 1916, it was Richard Strauss's suggestion that the role of the Composer, sung by a soprano, be a so-called "trouser role." This idea apparently infuriated Hugo von Hofmannsthal, because he felt it would diminish and render comic a role that was meant to be taken seriously. Do you think questions of gender shape how we approach the relationship between comedy and tragedy? Do you think we understand the role of the Composer differently knowing that it is sung by a woman? If the role were sung by a man, do you think it would alter the narrative and dramatic impact of the opera?

Death Becomes Her

A textile mourning picture painted on cotton velvet by Hannah Walbridge Converse (1828)
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

At the opening of the second part of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (the Opera), Zerbinetta and her troupe of vaudeville comedians are trying unsuccessfully to make Ariadne feel better. The Cretan princess has just been abandoned on the island of Naxos by her lover Theseus, whom she helped escape from the maze of the Minotaur. Finally left alone by the singing and dancing jokesters, Ariadne has the time and space to contemplate her fate—and even to hasten its arrival.

"Es gibt ein Reich" **(Track 5** or **MOod clip 23)** is thus the central tragic aria for Ariadne, portrayed by the Prima Donna from the Prologue, in which she fantasizes about transcending earthly existence to the realm of death, "where all is pure." This piece, however, like much of the opera, enacts a profound transformation of perspective as the grief-stricken princess's mood shifts from morbid lament to eager anticipation. The alternation between despair and hope reflects the broader contrast of high tragedy and low comedy in Strauss's work, a dynamic embodied by the presence of both opera singers and commedia dell'arte performers on the deserted island.

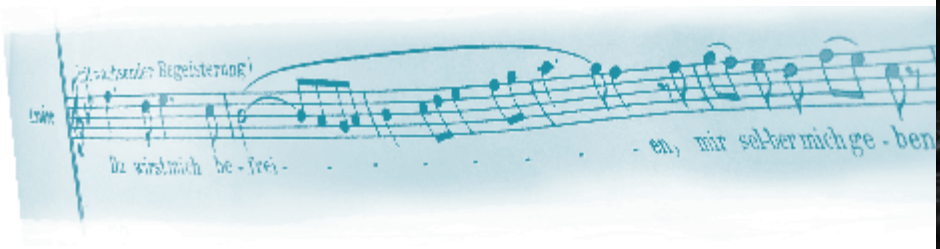
The aria begins solemnly as Ariadne evokes the "realm of death," singing the same notes repeatedly with a gradual stepwise descent. When she finally intones the name of this pure realm, *"Totenreich,"* the vocal line leaps an octave downwards as if itself falling into the depths of the underworld. In the following section, however, Ariadne's stoic resolve takes on an altogether different character as she sings of the impending arrival of Hermes, the messenger of death.

FUN FACT

This production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* by director Elijah Moshinsky and set and costume designer Michael Yeargan premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1993, with legendary soprano Jessye Norman starring in the title role. Norman previously appeared as Ariadne in the Met's 1987–88 season, in a production by Bodo Igesz, Oliver Messel, and Jane Greenwood. *Ariadne auf Naxos* premiered on the Met stage in 1962 and has been performed nearly 100 times since.

Here, the composer reintroduces a four-note motif in the oboe reminiscent of a horn call. This motif first appears in the cellos and basses as Ariadne begins the aria and returns later in the opera to represent Bacchus. In this section, the rhythm in both the vocal line and orchestral accompaniment quickens as Ariadne sustains a high B-flat on the name *"Hermes"*—both expressing her excitement and signaling the messenger's divinity. As she continues to imagine Hermes's arrival, the music becomes more upbeat. On certain phrases, the vocal line also roughly approximates the four-note motif, even harmonizing perfectly with the English horn's iteration on *"Wird dein Schritt vor meiner Höhle"* ("you approach my cave").

In the third section of *"Es gibt ein Reich,"* Ariadne sings of the ceremonial shawl given her by her mother, representing the world of the past, and the solemn singing style of the opening returns. Ariadne's melody is static, comprising E-flats for four full measures before slowly descending stepwise across the next four bars. All the while, the motif returns to the cellos and basses as in the aria's introduction.



When Ariadne again beckons Hermes's arrival on the phrase *"Aber lautlos meine Seele/ Folget ihrem neuen Herrn"* ("In silence, my soul will follow my new lord"), the melody ascends once more in leaping arpeggios. It is this perspective that remains intact for the remainder of the aria. A beautiful, florid melody accompanies the line, "Hermes, you will set me free!" On the final word of that phrase, Ariadne sings an extended, ascending melisma across three bars. From here, the melody begins a gradual, intensifying climb as if repeating the promise of Hermes's arrival—culminating in a high B-flat on the word "me" (the same high note as the Composer's aria!). And finally, an upward, modulating melody on the repetition of the name "Ariadne" illustrates the promising transformation she imagines Hermes will bring.

Ariadne fantasizes about transcending earthly existence to the realm of death.

Philosophical Chairs

MATERIALS

Handout

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6–11-12.1
Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C
Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D
Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their point of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussions.

Each topic statement is deliberately open ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *Ariadne auf Naxos*—including the role of fate in our lives, the grief and excitement of romantic love, and the difficulty of overcoming adversity. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or hard—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *Ariadne auf Naxos*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Between statements, provide some clarity as to why that particular statement was chosen. Explain to students where and how each particular theme shows up in the opera, or invite students to offer their own explanations.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

Distribute the included handout with guidelines and statements, making sure to review the rules of engagement as a group. Next, invite students to read one of the statements—out loud as a class, to themselves, or in small groups. As they read, they should ask themselves:

- Do I understand the statement?
  - If not, what questions might clarify it for me?
- What immediately comes to mind when I read the statement?
  - What is my initial reaction: Do I agree or disagree?
- What led me to that decision?
  - What opinions do I hold about this statement?
  - What life experiences may have led me to think this way?

STEP 2. RESPOND

Read the statements again out loud and ask students to commit to one side. They can agree or disagree, but there is no middle ground. (Many will not be completely comfortable committing to one side over the other—that's part of the game. It will help foster conversation and debate.)

The burlesque performers arrive on Naxos and try to lift Ariadne's spirits—much to her dismay.

STEP 3. DISCUSS

Start a conversation! Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- Does anyone feel very strongly either way? Why or why not?
- Does anyone feel conflicted? Why or why not?
- Give voice to what you thought about in the first step:
  - What led me to make my decision?
  - What opinions do I hold about this statement?
  - What life experience may have led me to think this way?
- What might you have not considered that others are now bringing up in the discussion?
- Did any new questions arise during the discussion?

As the conversation continues, students are free to change their minds or develop more nuanced perspectives.

Repeat steps 1 through 3 for each statement.

Ariadne in the Sky with Diamonds

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Astronomy, mythology, classics, visual arts

MATERIALS

Handouts

Dark construction paper or velvet/felt sheet

Acrylic "gems"

Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

Glue

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2
Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9
Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

CORE ARTS

A:Cr2.1.1.a
Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.

VA:Cr1.2.2.a
Make art or design with various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity.

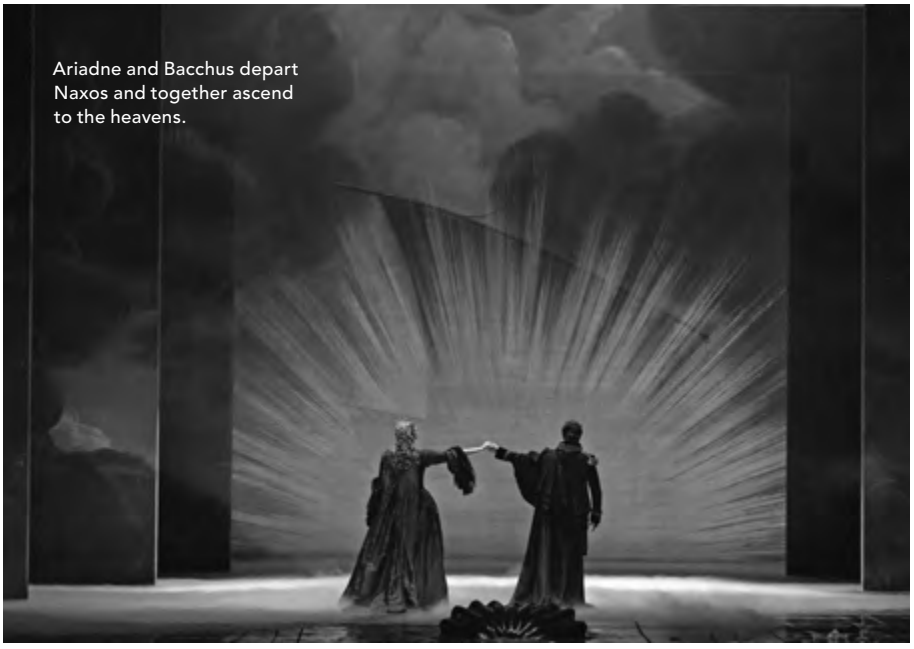
VA:Cr1.1.3.a
Elaborate on an imaginative idea.

Ariadne auf Naxos is perhaps most remarkable for its idiosyncratic structure. Rather than dividing the plot into separate acts, as is convention, Strauss and his librettist Hofmannsthal split the work into a Prologue and subsequent Opera. In the first part, musicians, singers, dancers, and impresarios prepare for the performance that constitutes the second part. This opera-within-an-opera is based on the classical Greek myth of the Cretan princess Ariadne, her abandonment by the Athenian prince Theseus, and her marriage to the god Dionysus (called Bacchus in this opera).

In several versions of this myth, Dionysus is so enthralled with Ariadne's bejeweled crown that he throws it into the sky, where it remains forever as the constellation Corona Borealis ("corona" is Latin for "crown"). In Strauss's opera, however, Bacchus instead promises to transform Ariadne herself into a constellation as they together ascend into the heavens. By completing this activity, students will explore both the foundational myth of Ariadne, which forms the core of this work, and come to understand the scientific and cultural meanings of constellations through their own creations.

STEP 1. REVIEW

Begin by prompting students to consider what comes to mind when they hear the word "myth." Most will likely associate the term with something that is untrue, based on gossip, rumor, or some kind of false preconception. Use this opportunity to explain that in the ancient Greek world, myth had an altogether different meaning—it was a story or tale that expressed a fundamental truth or widely accepted belief, and many explained the foundation or origin of the universe. Ask students:



Ariadne and Bacchus depart Naxos and together ascend to the heavens.

- What is an example of a contemporary myth?
- Can you name an ancient myth?
- Can you identify a myth from another culture?

Next, remind students that the Ariadne myth forms the basis of the second part of Strauss's opera. Invite students to read the summary of the Ariadne myth below, either silently or aloud in groups. You may also wish to have students act out scenes in short improvisatory skits, or you may wish to list the major plot points on the board to ensure that students understand the story's structure and themes.

> The Ariadne myth tells how Prince Theseus of Athens set out for Crete to kill the Minotaur, a creature half man, half bull, who was concealed in a labyrinth. Princess Ariadne of Crete fell in love with Theseus and gave him a ball of thread that enabled him to find his way out of the labyrinth after he had killed the Minotaur. When Theseus left Crete, he took Ariadne with him as his bride. During their voyage home, they stopped at the island of Naxos. While Ariadne was asleep, Theseus slipped away and continued his journey to Athens without her.
>
> There are contrasting versions of what happens next. In one version, Ariadne, overcome with grief, ends her own life. In another, she is saved by the god Dionysus (called Bacchus in the opera), the god of wine, fertility, and theater. Having escaped the sorceress Circe, Dionysus arrives on Naxos and sees Ariadne sleeping. He is so taken with her beauty that he falls in love with her, and they later marry. In popular versions of this tale, Dionysus throws Ariadne's bejeweled crown into the sky, where it becomes the constellation Corona Borealis.

Once you have reviewed the myth, distribute the handout with the Ariadne constellation (Corona Borealis). Ask students:

- Do you know what a constellation is?
- Can you name any? Invite students to draw some constellations from memory on the board.
- Have you ever seen the Ariadne constellation?

It may help to explain to students that constellations are products of our imagination. If we lived in another part of the universe, the arrangement of stars would look completely different. No matter how close they look, individual stars are incredibly far apart from each other. The constellations we see and study are simply recognizable patterns in the natural world that we interpret to have specific meanings—just as we can see shapes in the clouds or faces in cliffs.

FUN FACT

In his three operas preceding *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Richard Strauss greatly expanded the size of the orchestra. The score for *Salome* (1905) includes a celesta and offstage harmonium and organ, while *Elektra* (1909) calls for two to four harps, 24 violins, 18 violas, 12 cellos, and eight double basses. *Der Rosenkavalier* similarly requires an additional offstage ensemble with flutes, oboe, clarinets, bassoons, French horns, trumpet, drum, harmonium, piano, and strings. *Ariadne*, on the other hand, is written for a 37-piece orchestra, small by comparison but suits both the comic Prologue and atmospheric Opera.

STEP 2. WRITE

Using the included handouts, have students create a myth about a character, animal, or object with a supernatural power. They can choose one from something they know (e.g., a superhero, athlete, singer, or historical figure) or make one up from their imaginations. Have them consider:

- What is the origin story of my character/object?
- How did it end up in its situation?
- What are its powers or special abilities?
- How did it end up in the sky?
- What is its shape, and why?

STEP 3. DESIGN

Once students have finished writing their myth, they should draw a very simple stick figure of their character. You can show examples such as Orion, Gemini, Scorpius, or the Big Dipper. Next, students will darken 5–7 key points on the stick figure, emphasizing its joints or endpoints. These points should form a dot-to-dot outline of the constellation. Once the design is complete, have students transfer the design onto a piece of dark paper or cloth (e.g., velvet or felt). You can use any kind of acrylic gem or shiny pin to represent each star. Have students glue their "stars" into their proper places on the surface, then use a light-colored crayon, marker, or metallic paint pen to connect the dots forming the constellation.

STEP 4. DISPLAY

Display the constellations along with their accompanying written myths. Each constellation can be a separate entity, or they can be assembled as a group to form a new "night sky," perhaps viewed from another galaxy. The written pieces can also be grouped as a field guide to the constellations.

Backstage Drama

What happens when you stage a tragic opera at the same time as a musical farce? Richard Strauss provides one answer in his two-part work *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The first half of this opera, the Prologue, gives the audience a glimpse of what goes on backstage when it is suddenly announced that two rival groups—in one corner, opera singers; in the other, an Italian comedy troupe—must not only perform on the same night (an affront to both!) but must in fact join forces to improvise a single show.

In this activity, students will dive right into the backstage drama of the Prologue by facing the same challenge as the opera singers and comedy troupe—namely, to adapt to new circumstances by acting out incongruous, and often random, characters and settings. In so doing, they will come to appreciate the central tension at the heart of Strauss's work while honing their improvisation skills.

STEP 1. WARM-UP

Before jumping into *Ariadne auf Naxos*, have students warm up with an improvisation game called "Job Interview Hot Seat." Follow the instructions below.

- Select one student to be the person being interviewed for a new job (the "candidate"). Ask them to step out of the room so that they cannot hear the remaining students inside the classroom (the "interviewing committee").
- The interviewing committee must select a specific job for which the candidate is being considered. The wackier the job, the better! The committee will focus on this specific job when interviewing the candidate.
- Bring the candidate back into the room and seat them in a chair facing the interviewing committee. They must use the questions provided by the committee to figure out for what job they are being considered.
- The committee may begin asking the candidate questions to ascertain whether they are qualified for the position.
- After answering a few questions, the candidate may guess for what job they believe they are under consideration. When the job title is correctly guessed, the game is over. Begin again with a new candidate.

STEP 2. REVIEW

Once the warm-up is complete, use the included synopsis to review the basic plot of the Prologue. The plot summary will inform the improvisation exercises later in the lesson.

STEP 3. IMPROVISE

After reviewing the circumstances of the Prologue, students are prepared to do two *Ariadne*-inspired improvisation games. Each scene has a corresponding framework, which forms the basis for students' improvisation.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Drama, improvisation, creative writing

MATERIALS

Handouts
Paper
Pencil
Synopsis

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3
Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.6
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

CORE ARTS

TH:Cr1.1.6.c
Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Cr1.1.8.a
Imagine and explore multiple perspectives and solutions to staging problems in a drama/theatre work.

SCENE 1: Two troupes of performers—one a group of comedians, one a group of dramatic actors—have arrived at a fancy party to perform for rich guests. Just before their shows are to begin, they are informed that they must combine both shows together. Chaos ensues!

- Cut up the two sets of prompts included in this guide. The first indicates the names and intentions of individual characters, and the second indicates environments where the scene might be performed. Students will use the character slips to guide them in the scene by giving them a framework for their intentions, while the environment slips establish the scene and provide interest.
- Put the cut slips in two vessels: one for the characters, one for the environments.
- Ask each participating student to draw one character slip, which they must keep secret. Once each student has drawn a character slip, the group may then select one environment slip to set the scene.

- Once everyone knows whom they will play, they should begin improvising a scene based on the intentions written on their character slip, making sure to set the action in whichever environment has been selected by the group.
- All students not participating in the scene will serve as audience members, who must decide which actor is playing which character and where the action is occurring.

SCENE 2: The performers are guests on a talk show the day after their performance. The host asks them questions about what went wrong, and the performers try to explain themselves as they take questions from the audience.

- Each participating student will sit in a chair facing the audience. The host should sit in the middle chair.
- One student must volunteer to be the host of the talk show. Each remaining actor must select one of the character slips from the bowl used in Scene 1. This time, though, they may notify one another which character they will be playing.
- The host will enter alone and welcome the audience before providing background on the backstage drama that ensued during the Prologue.
- One by one, each actor will enter to be interviewed by the host, improvising on any details that they do not know.
- Once each character has been interviewed individually, they may all join the host in front of the audience. Let the drama begin! Students may improvise in any way that they feel their character would respond in such a scenario, and the audience may participate by clapping, cheering, or booing each of the actors as they make their case for why their version of the story is correct.

DIVING DEEPER

For a homework assignment, have students write blog posts detailing the drama that unfolded in both scenes. For the first, they can assume the perspective of a theater critic writing a review of a play they've just witnessed. For the second, they can write for a tabloid covering the actors' reunion in front of a live audience. If they wish, students can also write and produce a recap podcast episode for listeners who weren't able to attend either the performance or the talk show.

FUN FACT

The complicated and tumultuous collaboration between librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal and composer Richard Strauss resulted in not only a new version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* four years after its disastrous premiere in 1912 but also a new, standalone orchestral suite. Though they initially based *Ariadne* on Hofmannsthal's adaptation of a Molière play—with incidental music by Strauss—followed by a short divertissement, the two decided to disaggregate the halves into separate works. In 1917, Strauss transformed his incidental music into the orchestral suite *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, Op. 60. Strauss conducted the work's premiere in Berlin in 1918.

Send in the Clowns

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Drama, costume design, visual art, theater history

MATERIALS

Handouts

Glue or tape

Recycled materials (e.g., bubble wrap, toilet paper tubes, cardboard boxes)

MOod clips (optional)

COMMON CORE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2
Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3
Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CORE ARTS

TH:Cn11.2.5.b
Identify historical sources that explain drama/theatre terminology and conventions.

TH:Re9.1.7.b
Consider the aesthetics of the production elements in a drama/theatre work.

VA:Re.7.2.5.a
Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.

In the second part of Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the audience gets to experience an opera-within-an-opera starring players inspired by those found in commedia dell'arte, loosely translated from Italian as "comedy of craft." By exploring the history of this enduring theatrical form, students will come to appreciate the fundamental tension at the heart of the opera between high tragedy and low comedy, the divine and the base, the transcendent and the mundane—and what inspiration results from their serendipitous meeting.

In this activity, students will explore commedia dell'arte stock characters, become acquainted with the Opera portion of Strauss's two-part work, and use recycled items found at home or in the classroom to design their own farcical figures.

STEP 1. DISCOVER

Commedia dell'arte is a theatrical form featuring improvised dialogue and colorful stock characters that began in 16th-century Italy and swiftly became popular across Europe. Commedia dell'arte plays were usually performed by traveling troupes of actors on makeshift outdoor stages with minimal scenery. Their performances were based on set scenarios—a basic plot, often a familiar story, upon which the actors improvised their dialogue. Common commedia dell'arte plots frequently centered three main groups of fixed characters:

Zanni: servants, tricksters, or clowns who cleverly solve problems at hand

Innamorati: refined, sincere young lovers who face constant obstacles in their relationship

Vecchi: selfish masters or elders who often oppose the love of the innamorati

Each stock commedia dell'arte character developed a distinct set of attributes—typical speech, gestures, character traits, props, and costumes—that became standard to the portrayal of that character. Examine some of the paintings and sketches of commedia dell'arte characters included in a handout with this guide and discuss what you see.

Brighella, Scaramuccio, and Truffaldin as seen in the Met's premiere of *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1962

Harlekin, Truffaldin, Scaramuccio, and Brighella put on their song-and-dance routine.

STEP 2. EXPLORE

Now that we know some basics about commedia dell'arte, it's time to dive deeper. As a group or individually, have students read this passage about commedia characters. As they read, students should note the costume or mask for each character. Then, students should compare their observations with the images of commedia characters examined in the previous step.

> Most of the characters, except the innamorati, wore masks. The vecchi included the Doctor, a wealthy and pedantic old physician from Bologna, and Pantalone, a grumpy, rich, miserly old Venetian merchant who fancies himself a ladies' man. The bullying braggart Capitano, boasting of his prowess in battle, often appears in a military uniform and carries a sword, but usually reveals his cowardice when he is exposed to real danger. The zanni (servants) were in many ways the most important commedia dell'arte characters, as they not only delighted audiences, but usually solved the play's crises and brought about a happy ending. Perhaps the best known of these is the mischievous but lovable Harlequin, who usually wears a diamond-patterned costume meant to suggest patchwork, a sign of poverty. Though often a brilliant acrobat, Harlequin may also be gluttonous, ignorant, and gullible. His female counterpart is Colombina, a feisty, problem-solving maid who is often the smartest of the bunch. The sweet-natured and naive Pierrot, also known as Pedrolino or Pagliaccio, whose love is often

unrequited, frequently accepts blame for things he hasn't done. Both his garments and his face are white, and often a single teardrop is painted on his face. The stock figures and plots of commedia dell'arte evolved into enduring prototypes seen in European theater and opera from the 17th century onwards.

Equipped with a brief overview of commedia dell'arte stock characters, students are prepared to examine some of the characters in the Opera portion of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Below, you will find the names and descriptions of each character. You will use both the descriptors and pictures on the previous page to inspire your commedia mask.

Zerbinetta (coloratura soprano): A beautiful, humorous, and flirtatious young woman, she is a zanni.

Harlekin (bass-baritone): A likeable, lovesick clown characterized by his patchwork costume, he is a zanni.

Scaramuccio (tenor): An unscrupulous and unreliable comedic character, he is often seen in a military costume or cloak and beret.

Truffaldin (bass): A witty and creative trickster characterized by his insatiable hunger

Brighella (tenor): A lustful and greedy comedic character whose mask often features a large nose or large mustache, he is a zanni.

STEP 3. DESIGN

Next students will design their own commedia dell'arte masks. Using whatever recycled or found items you have on hand, students will create a mask that represents one of the *Ariadne* characters listed above. They may also use the template provided on the included handout to draw or paint their mask.

DIVING DEEPER

This exercise is also a good opportunity to use Met Opera on Demand in the classroom to compare costume designs across different productions of the same opera. Select one or several scenes—*"Eine Störrische zu trösten,"* for example, which features all of the commedia dell'arte performers (**MOoD clip 28** in the 2022 production, **MOoD clip 29** in the 1988 production)—and have students watch them in succession, either in class or at home. If you are watching these clips together, you can pause on each character to gather student observations and take notes. For a follow-up assignment, students can write short essays comparing the approaches to costume design in both productions and suggesting how these differences (and similarities) informed their own mask design.

Philosophical Chairs

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue (even when we disagree about something) are learned skills. Everyone can learn them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about the opera.

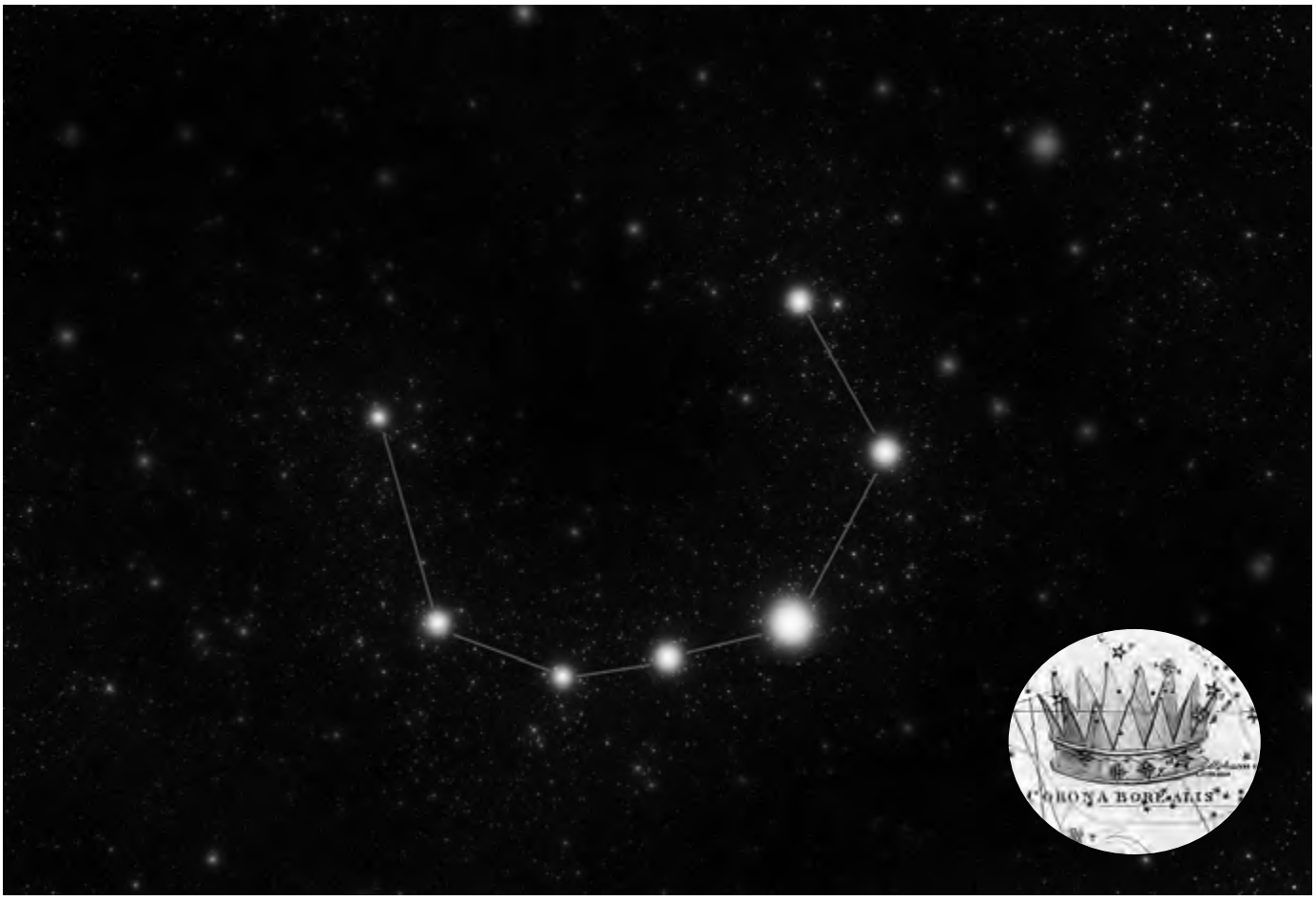
You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone who has a different answer from your own. That's okay! Take your time with each statement, embrace uncertainty, and know that changing your mind when you learn new information is a sign of strength, not weakness. Before you begin your discussion, take some time to review the rules of engagement:

Be sure you understand the statement. If something is unclear, ask!
Face each other. Body language helps show that you're listening carefully and respectfully.
Only one speaker at a time. Everyone will get their turn to speak.
Think before you speak. Be sure that what you're going to say is what you really mean.
Summarize the previous person's comments before adding your own.
Address ideas, not the person. Challenging ideas or statements is good only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.
Three before me. To make sure everyone's voice is heard, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

The Statements

- Money makes you happy.
- My emotions always run deep.
- Our fate is predetermined.
- Love stings.
- Grief will always linger.
- Pain is a universal human experience.
- What doesn't kill you always makes you stronger.
- Singing can lift your sorrows.
- Friendships are more valuable than relationships.
- Holding a grudge is healthy. (Discuss the phrase, "let bygones be bygones.")
- It is simple to "get over" a former love.
- The key to mending a broken heart is to chase a new love.
- The heart and mind always agree.
- Love conquers all.
- When love comes knocking, you must answer the door.
- It's never too late to start over.

Ariadne in the Sky with Diamonds: Corona Borealis



Ariadne in the Sky with Diamonds: Write Your Myth

Character Name: _____

What is the origin story of the character/object?
What are the special powers or abilities of the character/object?
How did the character/object end up in the sky?
What is the shape of the character/object's constellation, and why?

Ariadne in the Sky with Diamonds: Draw Your Constellation

Character Name: _____

Use this page to draw a very simple stick figure of your character/object. Darken 5–7 key points on the stick figure to form a dot-to-dot outline of the constellation. Next, transfer the design onto a piece of dark paper or cloth. Applying any kind of acrylic gem or shiny pin, glue the "stars" into their proper places on the surface. Finally, use a light-colored crayon, marker, or metallic paint-pen to connect the dots forming the constellation.

Backstage Drama

THE COMPOSER The writer of the tragic opera

THE MAJOR-DOMO A demanding butler not partial to either group

ZERBINETTA The flirty and bold leader of the comedy troupe

THE MUSIC MASTER Advisor to the Composer

THE PRIMA DONNA The soprano star of the Composer's opera

THE DANCE MASTER A member of Zerbinetta's troupe

THE WIG MAKER A member of Zerbinetta's troupe

A sunny beach filled with vacationers, a storm gathering in the distance

A crowded classroom of seventh-grade students

The funeral of a wealthy miser

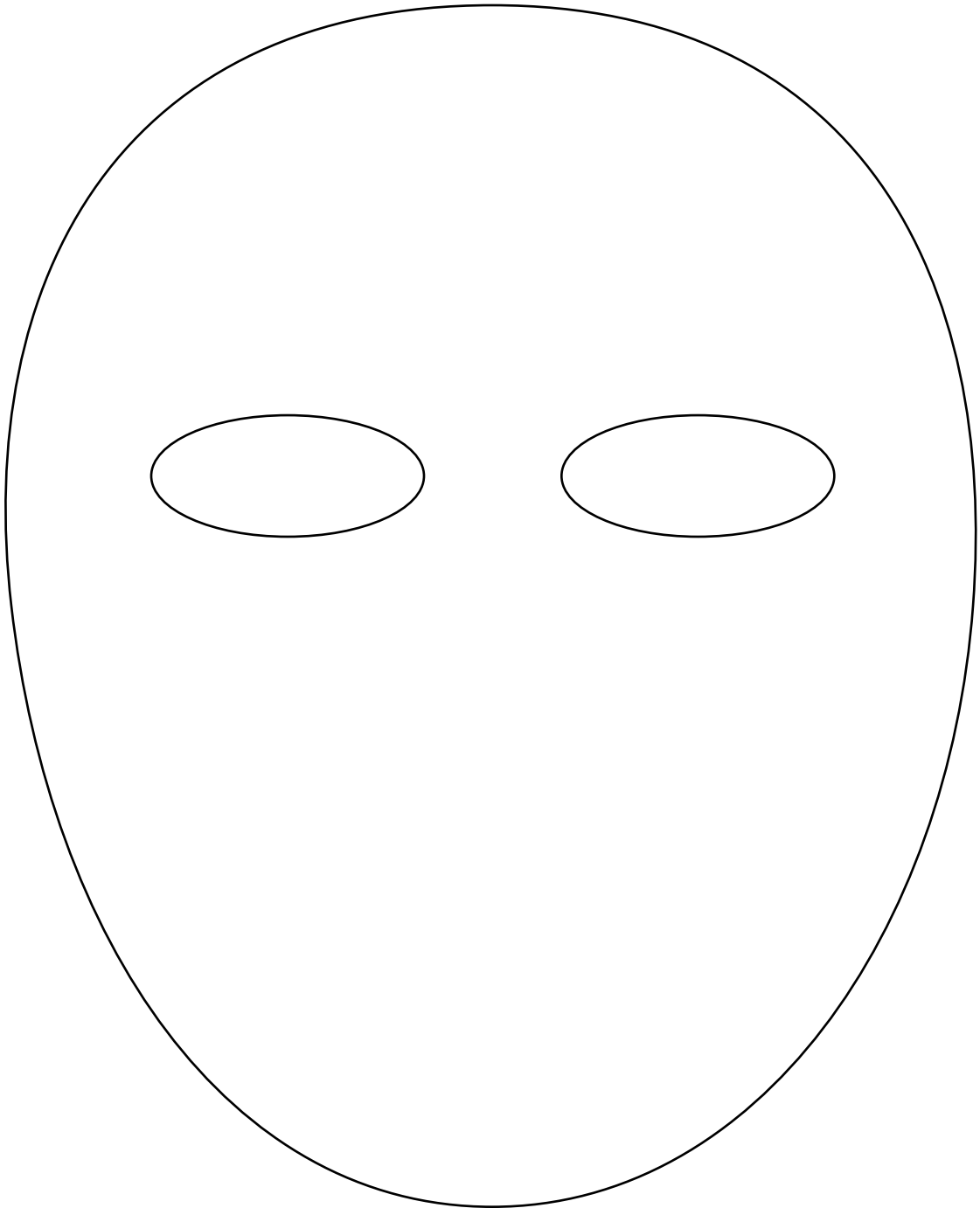
A grocery store with a shortage of grocery carts

A playground filled with six-year-olds and mosquitos

An alien aircraft headed to Mars

Send in the Clowns: Commedia dell'Arte

Send in the Clowns: Make Your Own Mask



PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

Opera Review: *Ariadne auf Naxos*

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Ariadne auf Naxos*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about the opera and this performance at the Met!

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
The Music Master pleads with the Major-Domo not to let the comedy follow the opera. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Composer tries to organize a final rehearsal of his opera. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The opera performers and comedy troupe argue over whose performance should go first. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Major-Domo announces that the opera and comedy must be performed simultaneously. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Both groups of performers strategize how best to combine the two shows. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Zerbinetta and the Composer discover they have more in common than expected. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Nymphs lament for Ariadne, who has just been abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Ariadne longs for death, vowing to forget happier days with Theseus. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Harlekin and Zerbinetta attempt to entertain Ariadne with a song. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Ariadne awaits Hermes to escort her soul to the afterlife. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The comedy troupe appears and tries to cheer up Ariadne. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Zerbinetta advises Ariadne not to succumb to suffering. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The men of the comedy troupe compete for Zerbinetta's affections. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Nymphs announce the arrival of Bacchus, the god of wine and fertility. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Bacchus arrives, and Ariadne mistakes him for Hermes, the messenger of death. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Ariadne and Bacchus confess their love for each other. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Zerbinetta reminds us of her credo. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆