

*Ariadne auf Naxos: A Study in Transformation through Contrast and Coalescence*

By

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## Abstract

*Ariadne auf Naxos*, by composer Richard Strauss and librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, concerns the simultaneous performance of a tragedy and a comedy at a rich man's house in Vienna, and the conflicts that arise between the two groups. The primary focus of this paper is the character Zerbinetta, a coloratura soprano who is the main performer in the *commedia dell'arte* troupe.

Following consideration of the opera's historical background, the first segment of this paper examines Zerbinetta's duet with the young Composer starting from "Nein Herr, so kommt es nicht..." in the Prologue, which reveals her coquettish yet complex character. The second section offers a detailed description of her twelve-minute aria "Großmächtige Prinzessin" in the opera, exploring the show's various levels of satire. The last segment is an investigation of the differing perspectives of the performers and the audience during Zerbinetta's tour de force. The basis for this study is the second version of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which premiered in 1916.

## Compositional background of *Ariadne of Naxos*

*Ariadne auf Naxos* was written by German composer Richard Strauss with a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. It was originally composed as a divertissement for Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Molière's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. The premiere of the opera in 1912 was unsuccessful because the audience who were more interested in the opera had to wait for the play to end. The play and the opera together were six hours in length, obviously a huge demand on the audience. The play-going public had no interest in the opera and the opera-goers did not wish to see the play.<sup>1</sup> The first version of *Ariadne* was quite lengthy, and required a significant number of actors aside from the vocalists, which made it expensive to produce.

Hofmannsthal proposed that Strauss write a second version with a prologue explaining why *commedia dell'arte* elements are introduced into the tragedy of Ariadne. The second version of the opera premiered in 1916 in Vienna. Although the second version was not received with enthusiasm at the time, it remains as the version performed today and will be the focus of this paper.

## Central Idea

*Ariadne auf Naxos* is a masterpiece that builds on contrasts to achieve a greater unity, which was librettist Hofmannsthal's favorite technique. *Ariadne* is an opera-within-an opera. It provides a setting in which a tragedy and a comedy are performed at the same time, leading to a variety of conflicts. Strauss showed little interest when Hofmannsthal first proposed to write

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Del Mar, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary on His Life and Works*, Volume II (London: Barrie and Rockliff. 1969), 9

*Ariadne*, but started to gain interest after Hofmannsthal's suggestion of striking a contrast between Zerbinetta and Ariadne in order to bring the two different characters together. Below is an excerpt of a letter from Hofmannsthal to Strauss:

...they summon the clever soubrette (Zerbinetta); they tell her the plot of the heroic opera, explain to her the character of Ariadne, and set her the task of working herself and her companions as best she may into this opera as an intermezzo, without causing undue disturbance. Zerbinetta at once grasps the salient point: to her way of thinking a character like Ariadne must be either a hypocrite or a fool, and she promises to intervene in the action to the best of her ability, but with discretion. This offers us the opportunity of stating quite plainly, under the cover of a joke, the symbolic meaning of the antithesis between the two women. Does this appeal to you?<sup>2</sup>

Originally, Hofmannsthal intended to focus the opera on the classical heroine Ariadne,<sup>3</sup> the tragic and noble character, but Strauss turned it around and focused on Zerbinetta instead, making her into a more interesting character. Strauss's early pre-sketches of *Ariadne of Naxos* show that he greatly favored the coloratura soprano: As seen in Figure 1, all the numbers that involve Zerbinetta were laid out in detail whilst others were only briefly described.

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<sup>2</sup>Donald G. Daviau and George J Buelow, *The Ariadne auf Naxos of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Straus* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 45

<sup>3</sup>Forsyth, 133.

- a) Rezitativ und Arie der Ariadne
  - b) Lied des Harlekin
  - c) große Koloraturarie und Andante und dann Rondeau, Thema mit Variationen und allen Koloraturspäßen (womöglich mit obligater Flöte) der Zerbinetta, wo sie von ihrem Ungetreuen spricht (Andante) und dann Ariadne zu trösten sucht: Rondeau mit Variationen (zwei bis drei).  
Paradenummer.
  - d) Männerquartett (Harlekin): "komm mit mir", geht in Quintett mit Zerbinetta über.
  - e) Männerterzett (buffo), wenn Harlekin und Zerbinetta verschwunden sind.
  - f) Das Finale (geschlossen und fortlaufend) beginnt mit der Meldung der Najade. (Ein hymnenartiges Marschthema, dazu Duett: Ariadne, Zerbinetta, steigert sich und schließt mit dem Eintritt des Bacchus ab.)  
Liebesduett.  
Schlußensemble. (Bw. 22 May 1911, p. 102.)
- (a) Recitative and aria of Ariadne,
  - b) Harlekin's song
  - c) Great coloratura aria and *andante*, then rondo, theme with variations and all coloratura tricks (if possible with flute *obbligato*) for Zerbinetta, when she speaks of her unfaithful lover (*andante*) and then tries to console Ariadne: rondo with variations (two or three).  
*A pièce de résistance.*
  - d) Male quartet (Harlekin): 'Komm mit mir' going over into quintet with Zerbinetta.
  - e) Male trio (buffo), after Harlekin and Zerbinetta have disappeared.
  - f) Finale (unbroken and continuous), beginning with the Naiad's warning. (A hymn-like march theme, add the duet of Ariadne and Zerbinetta, rising towards a climax and concluding with Bacchus' entry.)  
Love duet.  
Final ensemble.)

Figure 14 Strauss's early sketch of some ideas for operatic numbers in *Ariadne auf Naxos*

By putting a spotlight on Zerbinetta, Strauss fully exploits the potential of comedic

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<sup>4</sup>Forsyth, 131-32.

writing and pokes fun at not only operatic traditions but also the execution of dramatic elements in operas, while also providing insight into the performer's perspectives. Important scholars who have addressed these aspects of work include David B. Greene,<sup>5</sup> Donald G. Daviau and George J. Buelow,<sup>6</sup> Bryan Gilliam,<sup>7</sup> and Scott Warfield.<sup>8</sup> Strauss and Hofmannsthal use clever techniques such as juxtaposition and parody to bring the two elements together seamlessly. The duo manages to conceive a masterpiece that combines seriousness and parody, forming a perfect contrast between Ariadne's opera company and Zerbinetta's burlesque troupe.

### Vorspiel

The Prologue was composed for the second version of the opera. Two performing groups, an opera company and a *commedia dell'arte* troupe, arrive at the house of the richest man in Vienna to provide an evening's entertainment. The two groups show their disdain for each other's art, claiming themselves to be superior. To their shocking discovery, shortly before the performances, the rich man has requested for the comedy and tragedy to perform at the same time so that the fireworks can start at nine o'clock. The young Composer, a role in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, is distraught and mourns that his masterpiece will be ruined by farce. Zerbinetta comforts the

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<sup>5</sup>David B. Greene, *Listening to Strauss Operas* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1991).

<sup>6</sup>Daviau, and Buelow.

<sup>7</sup>Bryan Gilliam. 2003. "Ariadne, Daphne and the Problem of Verwandlung." *Cambridge Opera Journal*. Vol. 15 [January] [accessed 16 February 2015]

<sup>8</sup>Scott Warfield. 1993. Review of *Listening to Strauss Opera's: The Audience's Multiple Standpoints* by David B. Greene. *Music Library Association*. Vol. 49, no. 3 [March] [accessed 15 February 2015]

Composer and advises him not to take himself so seriously. When the Composer rebukes her, Zerbinetta shows him that she is more than an entertainer and understands greater depths of humanity.

The Prologue serves an important function. First of all, it marks the theme of the opera: the meeting of two contrasting musical forms. By setting the scene at the rich man's house with bizarre requests concerning the form of the performances, Strauss and Hofmannsthal created a platform for the exchange of two starkly different styles of music. On the other hand, the setting reflects on real-life production difficulties in an exaggerated manner. It provokes the audience to think from the producer's and performer's perspectives,<sup>9</sup> and highlights the conflicts between the opera company and *commedia dell'arte* group with the climax being the duet between the Composer and Zerbinetta, which will be the first performance excerpt of this recital. This is the first point of unity between the idealist and the comedian and they reach an understanding.

The Composer is a young man who takes his music extremely seriously. He talks about deep subjects of humanity such as the suffering and glory of a noble woman waiting for her one true love, and dismisses any sort of comic entertainment as he believes them to contain little substance, and that they are performed solely to get a good laugh out of the audience. He also finds performers of comic characters to be shallow, and that they are incapable of understanding the great sufferings of humanity. Upon the news of having to perform with Zerbinetta's troupe at the same time, he mourns the ruination of his great music. Any addition of comic relief in his opera he considers a catastrophe because it belittles his work.

Zerbinetta's troupe, on the other hand, responds to the situation quite well. After all,

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<sup>9</sup>Greene, 157.

improvisation is their trade, and they are accustomed to adapting to all kinds of circumstances. They immediately come up with plots and possibilities of insinuating themselves into the show.

The layout of the characters is exceptionally clever. The contrast is double-sided: it not only exists among the two performing groups but also between the Composer and Zerbinetta themselves. The Composer is a serious figure, but he takes himself so seriously that he becomes a caricature.<sup>10</sup> Zerbinetta seems to be a mere flirt, but she reveals insights into womanhood that the Composer greatly values.

In the early portions of the duet between the Composer and Zerbinetta, the Composer dwells on his operatic heroine Ariadne: she is such a noble lady that if she does not find her lover she will face the only option of death. The Composer's melodies are lyric, lush, and declamatory with long phrases. Zerbinetta's vocal lines are, by contrast, chirpy and segmented. Often, when she interrupts the Composer, there is a sudden meter change, which makes the disparity between the two even stronger. She tries to snap the Composer out of his self-pity and see more possibilities in life instead of wallowing in his emotions. Below is an example of their vocal patterns: most of the Composer's phrases are three measures long and sung expressively in 4/4, while Zerbinetta chirps in a high range and in the dance-like meter of 6/8 (Example 1).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Greene, 128.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Strauss. *Ariadne auf Naxos: Oper in einem Aufzug nebst einem Vorspiel* (London: Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd, 1987), 63.

Componist  
Sie hält — ihn für den To - des - gott. — In ih - ren Au - - gen, in

Feierlich bewegt *♩. ♩. des 6/8*  
*pp*

immer fließender  
ih - rer See - - le ist er es, und dar - um, ein -

Zerbinetta (aus der Tür) (sehr zierlich) *♩. ♩. des 4/4*  
Das will sie Dir weis ma - chen.  
- zig dar - um — Ein - zig nur dar - um

*espr.*  
*pp*

Example 1: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “Sie hält ihn...”, mm. 1–12

The conflict between the Composer and Zerbinetta continues until Zerbinetta assures the Composer that he will survive, referring to the performing situation and the perseverance of his art. The Composer, curious, asks her what she really means. Zerbinetta then breaks into a lyrical moment, a short soliloquy: “Ein Augenblick...” She reveals that she is playing a role of a

coquette, but the audience does not know what her heart really yearns for, or what she really is as a person. This part of Zerbinetta’s music is similar to that of the Composer’s, illustrating that Zerbinetta really understands the Composer’s insights of humanity in the bottom of her heart, that she in truth shares the same sentiments of the Composer, and yet it is hard for others to tell because of the comic roles she usually plays. Below is an excerpt of Zerbinetta’s lyric section:<sup>12</sup> the structure of her vocal lines resemble that of the Composer’s, suggesting she is speaking of more profound emotions (Example 2).

Zerbinetta (scheinbar ganz schlicht, mit äußerster Coquetterie)

Ein Au - - - gen - blick - - - ist

ruhig bewegt (stark rubato, die in Klammern eingeschriebenen Zeitmaßveränderungen nur als unmerkliche Modifikationen).

we - - nig ein Blick - - - ist viel. - - - Viele

benen Zeitmaßveränderungen nur als unmerkliche Modifikationen).

Example 2: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “Ein Augenblick”, mm. 1–12

<sup>12</sup>Strauss, 71.

This is a wonderful point of correspondence between two worlds: the serious and the farcical, both in terms of music and character. Musically, Zerbinetta has taken up the Composer's singing style, exchanging melodies with him in harmony. They are singing to each other. And because we now learn that Zerbinetta is capable of deep thoughts, she has been brought into the Composer's world, and the Composer falls in love with her. In other words, by introducing multiple contrasts, Strauss and Hofmannsthal managed to unite the two entities by adding complexity to Zerbinetta's character and making fun of the serious Composer, supported by musical devices.

The Prologue is an important introduction to the juxtaposition of operatic elements, setting the scene for the bizarre interruptions by the comedy group in Ariadne's laments in the opera itself, which in turn brings out the themes of the whole production.

### The Opera

In the opera, two characters undergo major transformation: Ariadne and Zerbinetta. They are the two main focuses of contrast in this part of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The role of Ariadne is performed by the Prima Donna, who is also sort of a caricature. In the Prologue, she behaves like a Diva, making all kinds of unreasonable demands and thirsting for attention. She has a truly glorious voice but is quite obnoxious. She refuses to work with anybody and is horrified at the idea of having to work with Zerbinetta's troupe. This in itself already forms a stark contrast with the role of Ariadne, as she is a noble princess waiting for her one true love.

*Ariadne auf Naxos* is based on the mythological love story of Ariadne. She is abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos with the company of three nymphs: Naiad, Dryad, and Echo.

The three nymphs strongly recall the Three Ladies in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* who serve the Queen of the Night. Even their singing style is reminiscent of the Mozartian ensemble: they sing in harmony, and then they exchange melodies in sequence. Below is an excerpt demonstrating these qualities:<sup>13</sup>

**ruhig** M. ♩ = 66  
*tranquillo*  
 Najade. *p* (ohne Ausdruck) Ach, wir sind es ein - ge - wöh - net. Wie der  
 noch ruhiger *pp*  
*più tranquillo*  
 Echo. *p* (ohne Ausdruck) Ach, wir sind es ein - ge - wöh - net.  
 Dryade. *p* (ohne Ausdruck) Ach, wir sind es ein - ge - wöh - net.  
**ruhig**  
*tranquillo*  
 noch ruhiger *pp*  
*più tranquillo*  
 Wel - len säuf - tes Gaukeln - wie der  
 Wie der Blät - ter leich - tes Schau - keln,  
 L. H.

Example 3: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “Ach, wir sind es eingewöhnet”, mm. 1–8

<sup>13</sup> Strauss, 97.

The nymphs begin the Prologue by singing about the sleeping Ariadne in a pastoral 6/8 meter that blooms into melismatic sections. Meanwhile, Ariadne’s melodies resemble those of the Composer, but in an even more elaborate manner. The melodies seem to be supported by harmonies that go on and on without reaching a true resolution, just like the Wagnerian *unendliche Melodie*. It begins in E-flat major, modulates through a number of different keys momentarily, comes back to the key of E-flat and then stops at the dominant of E-flat major by the end of the phrase, calling for another resolution. Below is an example of Ariadne’s melodic style:<sup>14</sup>

**Ariadne** (ohne ihrer irgendwie zu achten, vor sich, monologisch)

Ein Schö -

- nes war: hieß The-seus - A - riadne

Example 4: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “Ein Schönes war”, mm. 1–14

<sup>14</sup> Strauss, 106.

Just like any heroine in Wagnerian operas, Ariadne's lament is extensive. Zerbinetta and company make their first entrance at Ariadne's mention of death: "... und eine Tote sein." As bizarre as the situation may seem that a burlesque troupe is making an appearance in the middle of a Wagnerian lament, their function is to cheer up Ariadne and prevent her from killing herself. Harlequin sings his aria "Lieben, Hassen," but Ariadne is unmoved. She resumes her lament.

Soon after, the four clowns Brighella, Scaramuccio, Truffaldin, and Harlequin make their big ensemble entrance. The meter changes from Ariadne's 4/4 to a joyful 2/4. They proclaim that although they respect Ariadne's great love for Theseus, they do not approve of a doleful attitude and encourage Ariadne to cheer up by singing and dancing. Zerbinetta joins in and soars high above in her vocal line, displaying her virtuosity in the high range. The ensemble sings at length about dancing and singing, and then the company leaves Zerbinetta alone with Ariadne to sing the famous number "Großmächtige Prinzessin."

"Großmächtige Prinzessin" is one of the most virtuosic coloratura arias in operatic history and the next excerpt on this program. It demands a tremendous amount of stamina and varied stylistic interpretations. Above all, since Zerbinetta is the central character of the opera, she is the embodiment of the main theme, which is fully displayed in the aria: she becomes transformed in several ways.

Zerbinetta's aria is a twelve-minute soliloquy. The aria contains rich musical and contextual elements that divide into several sections. In this aria one witnesses the transformation of Zerbinetta from a coquette into something more substantial: a woman who expresses her

longing for one true love and yet succumbs to her whims of new exciting romance, representing the deeper yearnings of humanity. The musical analysis of this aria is mostly based on the work of Norman Del Mar.<sup>15</sup>

To begin to understand the structure of this epic aria, it is essential to be acquainted with the libretto of Zerbinetta's soliloquy, which is basically an essay on love. Zerbinetta's aria can be divided into four main sections: recitative, arietta, arietta, and rondo. The first section is characterized by the alternation between rapid, speech-like patterns and more legato phrases.

Below is the libretto and translation for the first section:<sup>16</sup>

Großmächtige Prinzessin,  
wer verstünde nicht,  
daß so erlauchter und erhabener Personen  
Traurigkeit mit anderen Maas  
gemessen werden muß,  
als der gemeinen Sterblichen.  
Jedoch, sind wir nicht Frauen unter uns,  
und schlägt denn nicht in jeder Brust  
ein unbegreiflich Herz?  
Von unsrer Schwachheit sprechen,  
sie uns selber eingestehn,  
ist es nicht schmerzlich süß?  
Und zuckt uns nicht der Sinn danach?  
Sie wollen nicht mich hören...  
schön und stolz und regungslos,  
also wären Sie die Statue  
auf ihrer eignen Gruft.  
Sie wollen keinen anderer Vertraute  
als diesen Fels und diese Wellen haben?

High and mighty princess,  
who wouldn't understand  
that for such noble and lofty persons  
sadness must with another standard  
be measured,  
than for ordinary mortals.  
And yet, are we not both women,  
and does there not beat in each breast  
an inexplicable heart?  
To speak of our weakness,  
to admit it to ourselves —  
is it not painfully sweet?  
And do our sense not thrill from it?  
You do not wish to hear me...  
Beautiful and proud and motionless,  
as though you were the statue  
on your own tomb.  
Do you want to have no other confidante  
than this rock and these waves?

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<sup>15</sup>Norman Del Mar. *Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary on His Life and Works*, Volume II (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1969). 36-40.

<sup>16</sup>Robert L. Larsen and Martha Gerhart, *Coloratura Arias for Sopranos* (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc, 2002), 25.

Prinzessin, hören Sie mich an —  
nicht Sie allein, wir alle ach,  
wir alle was ihr Herz erstarrt...  
wer ist die Frau,  
die es nicht durchglitten hätte?

Princess, listen to me:  
Not for you alone — all of us, ah,  
for all of us that which numbs the heart...  
who is the women  
who has not suffered through it?

Zerbinetta begins by addressing Ariadne's grief, "Großmächtige Prinzessin...", somewhat sarcastically assuring her that a noble princess's grief is surely deeper than that of a commoner. Then she proceeds to establish a connection with Ariadne by referring to womanhood: every woman in this world has experienced heartbreak owing to the change of heart in men, but are women not guilty of yearning for new love as well?

This section of the aria is marked by varying accompanimental textures. First of all, the piano is the sole accompaniment until the eleventh bar when strings enter. Despite the inclusion of other instruments, the piano remains the principal accompanist of Zerbinetta until the next arietta section, reminiscent of Strauss's *Lieder*. The texture of the accompaniment adapts accordingly to the text, mostly written in a simple, chordal form to support the flow of the libretto until Zerbinetta speaks of a "thrill" — the yearning for excitement and love adventures. Here the accompaniment suddenly moves in fast arpeggios to illustrate the word, shifting quickly to respond to the context (Example 5).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Larsen, 311.



Example 5: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, "...und zuckt uns nicht der Sinn danach?"

Seeing that Ariadne is unmoved, Zerbinetta defies heartless men who leave women brokenhearted, but while also admitting that women change their hearts as well as men:<sup>18</sup>

Verlassen! in Verzweiflung! ausgesetzt!  
 Ach, solcher wüsten Inseln  
 sind unzählige auch mitten unter Menschen,  
 ich, ich selber habe ihrer mehrere bewohnt  
 und habe nicht gelernt,  
 die Männer zu verfluchen.  
 Treulos sie sinds!  
 Ungeheuer, ohne Grenzen!  
 Eine kurze Nacht, ein hastiger Tag,  
 ein Wehen der Luft,  
 ein fließender Blick verwandelt ihr Herz!  
 Aber sind wir denn gefeit gegen die grausamen,  
 entzückenden, die unbegreiflichen Verwandlungen?

Forsaken! In despair! Rejected!  
 Ah, such desolate islands  
 are countless even among men.  
 I myself have inhabited many of them,  
 and have not learnt  
 to curse men.  
 Faithless, they are that!  
 Monstrous, without limits!  
 A brief night, a passionate day,  
 a flutter of the breeze,  
 a fleeting glance transforms their hearts!  
 But are we protected against the cruel,  
 delightful, incredible transformations?

<sup>18</sup>Larsen, 25.

In this ending section of the recitative, the pace begins to pick up. Strauss once again uses rapid arpeggios as accompaniment for “A brief night... transforms their hearts!” — a motive for the whims of a new romance. This section ends with a most unpredictable vocal line on the word “Verwandlung,” twisting and turning from a high B-flat, dipping down to a D-flat below the staff and stops in the key of F, preparing our ears for the D-flat major that is to come. Up to this point, Zerbinetta is still acting in the way her character is usually seen by others. She is funny, cheerful, and she points out how women are just as fickle as men. She has not yet gone through any transformation: she is simply establishing her character’s identity.

At the end of the recitative section, Ariadne is no longer interested in listening to Zerbinetta’s singing and has left the stage. The arietta section then begins with Zerbinetta is singing to the audience alone.<sup>19</sup>

Noch glaub ich dem einen  
ganz mich gehörend,  
noch mein’ ich mir selber  
so sicher zu sein,  
da mischt sich im Herzen  
leise betörend  
schon einer nie gekosteten Freiheit,  
schon einer neuen verstohlenen Liebe  
schweifendes, freches Gefühle sich ein.  
Noch bin ich wahr  
und doch ist es gelogen,  
ich halte mich treu  
und bin schon schlecht  
mit falschen Gewichten  
wird alles gewogen  
und halb mich wissend  
und halb um Taumel  
betrüg ich ihn endlich  
und lieb ihn nicht recht.

Yet when I believe myself  
belonging to one man,  
and think myself  
to be so trustworthy,  
there mingle in my heart,  
gently infatuating,  
feelings of a never-tasted freedom,  
of a furtive love  
wandering and shameless.  
So am I sincere  
and yet deceptive;  
I consider myself true  
but am quite bad.  
With false importance  
everything is weighed  
and half knowing what I’m doing  
and half in ecstasy  
I betray him in the end  
and yet really love him.

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<sup>19</sup>Larsen, 25-26.

She speaks of how she really believes that she is true to one lover but in the end betrays him, and yet still loves him. Her melodies once again recall the vocal style of “Ein Augenblick” in the Prologue duet. She is revealing to the audience that she wishes to be true to one lover, just like Ariadne. The arietta takes up the form of a gentle 3/4 movement in D-flat, full of Strauss’s favorite harmonic side-slips.<sup>20</sup> One of the best examples of this technique is at the first “Betrüg ich ihn endlich, betrüg it him endlich und lieb ihn noch recht!” The harmony slips into what seems to be F major at the second syllable of the first “betrüg” by rising a half-step from G-sharp to A in the vocal line, transitions chromatically and going through F major once again at the second “betrüg,” and finding its way back to D-flat major, the key in which this arietta section originated with when Zerbinetta was speaking of being true to one lover. This is one of the many places in the opera where Strauss displays his superior technique of fusing text and harmony. The changes in the texture and key of the harmony are so tightly tied to the libretto that the Strauss’s realization of Zerbinetta’s emotions becomes extremely effective. The audience gets to see into her changeable heart, signified by the shifting harmony, while also understanding that she really would like to be true to one lover, which is brought out by the return to D-flat major (Example 6).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Del Mar, 37.

<sup>21</sup>Larsen, 319.

1  
halb mich wis-send und halb im Tau-mel-be-

5  
trüg ich ihn end-lich, be-trüg ich ihn  
8va

10  
end-lich und lieb ihn noch recht.  
(8)

*cresc.*  
*f*  
*ff*  
*f*  
*allargando*  
*a tempo*  
*allarg.*  
*ff a tempo*

Example 6: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “...und halb mich wissend...”, mm. 1–14

The next section is also in the form of an arietta in a significantly different style.

Zerbinetta begins to name a few lovers that she has had, and speaks of how she sometimes even had more than one of them at once. She claims that it is never a whim but a necessity. It is what her heart yearns for, and it is not something that she can even understand herself.<sup>22</sup>

So war es mit Pagliazzo und Mezzetin!  
Dann war es Cavicchio, dann Burattin,  
dann Pasquariello!  
Ach und zuweilen will es mir scheinen,  
waren es zwei!  
Doch niemals Launen, immer ein Müssen,  
immer ein neues beklommenes Staunen:  
daß ein Herz sogar sich selber nicht versteht.

So it was with Pagliazzo and Mezzetin!  
Then it was Cavicchio, then Burattin,  
then Pasquariello!  
Once in a while it seemed to me that  
there were two!  
But never whims... always a necessity,  
always a new, anxious amazement:  
that a heart cannot even understand itself.

Although this section marks an important shift in Zerbinetta's mood, it is actually quite short. The function of the section is mostly to quicken the aria's pace, leading into the extensive coloratura sections in the rondo that follows. Zerbinetta talks about her romantic encounters with five *commedia dell'arte* figures in the respective order of Pagliazzo, a simple clown; Burattino, a servant; Cavicchio, a peasant; Mezzetino, another servant; and Pasquariello, an elderly gardener. Each lover is characterized by a musical gesture: Pagliazzo and Cavicchio share the same rising sequence of a turn followed by triplets, hinting at their colorful characters, while the gesture for Burattino and Mezzotino only consist of four notes laid out in a rather plain manner, suggesting that they might be rather boring. Pasquariello receives a set of triplets, giving the impression of a grumpy old man with many complaints.<sup>23</sup> Each of the gestures sound as she sings that character's name (Example 7).

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<sup>22</sup>Larsen, 26.

<sup>23</sup>Larsen, 320-21.

Allegro scherzando

So war es mit Pa - gliato - zo und Mez - zelt -

tin! Dann war es Ca - vic - chio dann Bu - rat - tin, dann Pas - qua -

riel - lo! Ach und zu - wei - len will es mir

Example 7: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “So war...”, mm. 1–8

As Zerbinetta begins to claim that moving from one lover to another is a necessity and not a whim, the music begins to soar into coloratura as shown in Example 8. The words “Launen” (whims) and “Müssen” (necessity) are assigned to descending triplets, and the words “gar sich selber” (even itself) are met with soaring scales of B-flat major and D major. The

section ends with a cadenza in the same key. This cadenza is sung unaccompanied, reminiscent of a *bel canto* aria. In this case, however, the cadenza does not mark the end of the aria, as in *bel canto*, but instead prepares for the next rondo section in which Zerbinetta will dazzle the audience with an extraordinary amount of coloratura (Example 8).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Larsen, 323.

The image shows a musical score for Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, measures 1 through 7. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line is in the upper system, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower systems. The lyrics are: "gar sich selber nicht versteht". The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. A dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) is present in the piano part. The score is divided into systems, with measures 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8. The final measure (7) ends with a double bar line.

Example 8: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, "... gar sich selber nicht versteht", mm. 1–7

This unaccompanied cadenza is significant also because Zerbinetta is slipping into a

different perspective. Beginning at “gar sich selber” (even itself), each syllable of a word is ornamented extensively regardless of whether the word itself deserves such importance. This is Zerbinetta singing coloratura to amuse her audience but at the same time gradually becoming aware that she is free to play with the music and in turn to amuse herself.

The fourth part of Zerbinetta’s aria is in the form of a rondo, with a principal theme stated a few times after the introduction of a subordinate theme. Much like the last section, the libretto is more condensed and the words are repeated along with virtuosic vocal display.<sup>25</sup>

Als ein Gott kam Jeder gegangen  
und sein Schritt schon machte mich stumm,  
küßte er mir Stirn und Wangen,  
war ich von dem Gott gefangen  
und gewandelt um und um.  
Als ein Gott kam Jeder gegangen,  
Jeder wandelte mich um,  
küßte er mir Mund und Wangen,  
hingegen war ich stumm.  
Kam der neue Gott gegangen, hingegen  
war ich stumm...

Like a god each one came,  
and his step made me speechless.  
As he kissed my brow and cheeks  
I was captivated by the god  
and completely changed.  
Like a god each one came,  
each one transformed me.  
He kissed my mouth and cheeks;  
yielding, I was silent.  
The new god came; yielding,  
I was silent...

Although the section is not extensive in terms of text, Zerbinetta undergoes yet another transformation on many levels. The first one is obvious, which is that Zerbinetta meets a “new god”—a new lover—her heart is captivated by this man, and as she yields to him she is transformed into something that cannot be put into words.

This section of the rondo consists of two episodes: cadenza and coda.<sup>26</sup> The first episode of the rondo introduces two main musical ideas, with the first being very similar to the soaring

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<sup>25</sup>Larsen, 26.

<sup>26</sup>Del Mar, 38.

coloratura style of the previous arietta section and the second one a contrasting serene lyricism.

The principal theme of the rondo is as follows:<sup>27</sup>

Example 9: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, “Als ein Gott...” mm. 1–5

The musical setting of “Als ein Gott kam Jeder gegangen” (mm.1-2) represents Zerbinetta and is also heard in the beginning of instrumental introduction in the *Vorspiel*. It is one of the most important recurring principal themes in the opera. In the two episodes of the rondo, this principal theme returns five times, each time marking the beginning of another development of the subordinate themes.

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<sup>27</sup>Larsen, 324.

The first part (cadenza) of the libretto in this section from “Als ein Gott...” until “um und um” is set to a dance-like rhythm with more regular phrasing and a bit of a twist on the word “gewandelt” to illustrate “change.” The rondo of “Als ein Gott” then returns for a second time, and this time on the word “wandelte” (change), the vocal melody begins to jump from one key to another by changing half-steps. At “hingegen” (yield), the vocal line springs into arpeggios in the key of E and then going back to D, completing a set of four triplets with wide intervallic leaps and chromaticism.

With a brief return to the theme of “Als ein Gott,” the music drifts into the second episode of the rondo (coda). As mentioned above, this part of the aria starts out more calmly. Zerbinetta begins to “improvise” more freely on her vocal line, as Strauss cleverly writes in such a manner that depicts random thought. Del Mar points out a little joke that Strauss has incorporated into this section: Before and after Zerbinetta sings “Jeder wandelte mich um” (each one transformed me), the orchestra plays a prompt for the singer (Example 10).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Del Mar, 38.

The image shows a musical score for Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, measures 1-6. The score is in 3/4 time, marked "Tranquillo". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "kam Jeder gegangen, gen. Je - der wan - del - te mich um,". Handwritten annotations include "prompt from strings" in the vocal line and "colla voce" and "p espress." in the piano part.

Example 10: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, "...kam Jeder gegangen...", mm. 1–6

Example 10 shows a prompt from the orchestra to Zerbinetta in measure 2–3, and she answers by singing "Jeder wandelte mich um" briefly.<sup>29</sup> When she stops singing in measure 5, the orchestra plays another rising figure to encourage her to make another vocal entry. Del Mar explains that star singers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century often omitted part of their vocal line in order to re-enter with greater effect at the cadenza. Strauss recreates such an instance with Zerbinetta: she misses an entry, and upon hearing the clarinet's prompt, leaves the part to the instrument before coyly joining in only for a few notes.

Zerbinetta's competition with the orchestra becomes keener as the episode develops. She starts to sing in a trance-like manner, climbing to a high E with turns and ascending triplets,

<sup>29</sup>Larsen, 327.

before eventually descending in chromatic steps back to the key of D. The flute imitates some of Zerbinetta's flowery coloratura, which recalls the composing style of famous *bel canto* composers such as Donizetti and Bellini.<sup>30</sup>

Then sounds yet another brief return of the theme of "Als ein Gott." The music starts to climb and gradually blooms into arpeggios similar to the cadenza in the first episode. However, as Zerbinetta sings higher and higher, the orchestra also gets louder. Below is an excerpt of the build up during Zerbinetta's fight with the orchestra.<sup>31</sup> in order to compete she holds a high D in measure 5-7, and even adds a trill in measure 8-9 in a vain attempt to be heard (Example 11).

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<sup>30</sup>Del Mar, 39.

<sup>31</sup>Larsen, 329.

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system (measures 1-2) shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part features sixteenth-note patterns with triplets and dynamic markings 'cresc.' and 'dim.'. The second system (measures 3-4) includes the vocal line with the lyrics 'ben, Ah!' and the piano accompaniment, marked 'pp'. The third system (measures 5-6) continues the piano accompaniment with dynamic markings 'pp', 'p', and 'f'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 11: Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, "...hingegen...", mm. 1–10

When the orchestra finally pauses at the 6/4 chord at measure 9, Zerbinetta bows and thanks them before continuing with her cadenza. Greene describes the competition between Zerbinetta and the orchestra as follows:

The 1911 *Ariadne auf Naxos* (in which coloratura display is even more extravagant, in which musical as well as plot considerations are completely put aside for a time and in which the soprano even vies with the orchestra for showiness and loudness, gives up, and bows to the conductor before beginning her final cadenza) undoubtedly mocks the singing virtuoso.<sup>32</sup>

Strauss's satire on the struggle for attention between the orchestra and the coloratura soprano is not only amusing and revealing, but also draws the audience's attention away from the role of Zerbinetta onto the soprano herself. The soprano at this moment is more interested in fighting with the orchestra than delivering her dramatic content, and yet at the same time because she has shifted onto a different level of performance the whole situation actually becomes more dramatic. To quote from Del Mar, Zerbinetta "is now purely a coloratura soprano performing on a stage in unequal competition with the orchestral resources of the composer."<sup>33</sup>

At the end of the aria, the theme of "Als ein Gott" returns for one last time. Another man enters Zerbinetta's life, she yields, and she is silent. This is a puzzling ending to such an epic aria. Zerbinetta had revealed in the Prologue that her heart yearns to find "the one." In the aria, she goes back to being the coquette that she has always been, singing of all the wonderful

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<sup>32</sup>Greene, 157.

<sup>33</sup>Del Mar, 39.

transformations she goes through when she meets a new man. She gets so carried away that the audience would have no choice but to believe her, but then she ends the aria with uncertainty. Perhaps this is part of Strauss's satire. After so much virtuosic display a grand ending is expected, but instead the exact opposite takes place. The audience is left to wonder whether Zerbinetta really meant all she said in the aria: is she content with her flightiness or is she really yearning for her one true love? The beauty of the situation is that the open-ended question is probably the answer: this opera, seemingly bizarre, mirrors real-life situations from the beginning when the two performing groups were forced to perform together. Zerbinetta cannot tell the audience what her heart really longs for because in real life one can never predict a change of heart. To further develop this idea, Strauss wrote a short reprise for Zerbinetta. Although by the end of her big scene in the middle of the opera she has chosen to be with Harlequin, she returns alone onto the stage when Ariadne and Bacchus sing their glorious love duet. There is irony in the situation: the faithful Ariadne has ended up with another man, Bacchus, while Zerbinetta is alone, singing about another lover entering her life, and that she is once again "silent." This completes the role of Zerbinetta as a realistic, complex character.

### Narrating Perspectives vs. Audience Perspective

One of the most interesting aspects of *Ariadne auf Naxos* is the shifting perspectives in the show. This has much to do with transformation through contrast and coalescence. Through shifting perspectives, a subject transforms into a different entity or comes to another point of view. They gain a different perspective through the transformation. Coalescence is reached by realizing the fact that one person could simultaneously play multiple parts, and that all the varying perspectives can be united as a new entity.

Zerbinetta's words in the duet with the Composer provoke the audience to consider the performer's reflection on themselves and their performances. The audience's usual perspective of a performer is one-dimensional: the main soprano role in *Ariadne* is Zerbinetta. From the performer's perspective, however, a soprano is performing the role of a singer in a *commedia dell'arte* troupe, and this singer is performing the role of Zerbinetta in the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In other words, the singer-actress alternately plays the three roles of the Coloratura Soprano, the Entertainer and the Common Woman.

As described above, the soprano singing Zerbinetta reveals herself while battling for attention with the orchestra. She makes fun of the vocal tradition and mocks coloratura when it becomes a pointless virtuosic display. Here, the singer-actress plays the role of a Coloratura Soprano. However, as the Coloratura Soprano begins to improvise too extensively without intention, she falls to the category of an Entertainer, whose purpose is to provide mere

amusement. Finally, one wonders whether the coquette is also being mocked as well as the Prima Donna or Ariadne.<sup>34</sup> In the duet Zerbinetta says to the Composer, "In the theater I play the role of a Coquette, but who says that is what my heart really is?" This suggests that the singer performing as Zerbinetta understands the silly caricature of such a flirtatious woman, and that she probably does not always agree with the way Zerbinetta acts or thinks. All of these contrasting perspectives are embodied in the one role of Zerbinetta, forming a sense of coalescence against which these varied perspectives cohere.

Another interesting discussion regarding Zerbinetta's perspective is the depth of her character in comparison to that of her clown counterpart, Harlequin. Harlequin and Zerbinetta both display limited moral sensibility as entertainers. Meanwhile, it is clear that Harlequin sees through this absurdity but it remains ambiguous as to where Zerbinetta stands throughout the opera. David B. Greene made the following comment on the *commedia dell'arte* group attempting to console Ariadne: "anyone whose being oneself is irrelevant to viewing the *commedia* to divert her [Ariadne] must see that the hopelessness of diverting her in this way is itself diverting."<sup>35</sup> It is clear that the actor who plays Harlequin is just being an entertainer. He is not in touch with the "absurdity" of attempting to cheer up Ariadne, but Zerbinetta does not seem to feel the same way. In the hands of Strauss and Hofmannsthal, Zerbinetta is much more than just a mere entertainer.

In Zerbinetta's aria, she mocks various attitudes. At first she appears to be mocking Ariadne because of her unending laments. Later in the aria she starts to mock the concept of

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<sup>34</sup>Greene, 157.

<sup>35</sup>Greene, 152.

coloratura writing once it becomes ridiculously extensive. Then she backs away and falls into the performer's perspective and instead mocks the role of Zerbinetta. She becomes an entertainer who cares less about what she is doing, which leads the listeners to feel the impulses of the performer instead of the character.

The audience is asked to shift their perspectives accordingly. During Zerbinetta's aria, the perspective of the listener changes in the opposite direction to that of the shift during Ariadne's lament. In the lament Ariadne sings extensively of her great suffering for love, and as the Prima Donna become shows great passion about what she is singing; she believes she is Ariadne entirely, hence the audience is moved to believe her as well. In this case, the singer falls into the perspectives of the role she is playing. However, as Zerbinetta goes on in her aria about love, she seems to forget what she is singing about when she bursts into excessive coloratura. The singer is amused by this and drifts away from the role of Zerbinetta as she gets more and more carried away. As a result the listeners feel in touch with the impulses of the performer instead of the character of Zerbinetta.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

*Ariadne auf Naxos* is not the most commonly performed opera nowadays, perhaps because that there are so many levels of satire and inside jokes that it is not accessible to a non-musical audience, but it is one of Strauss's mightiest achievements with wit, a great variety of music, and intriguing philosophical ideas. The polarities and contrasts between Zerbinetta and Ariadne, and the Composer are cleverly matched with the effective libretto and use of musical

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<sup>36</sup>Greene, 157.

styles and gestures; one is reminded of the duo of Strauss and Hofmannsthal, as they were said to have stark contrasts in their personalities as well. Strauss was known to be more straight-forward and light-hearted while Hofmannsthal was an introspective poet.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps some parts of their personal attitudes were brought into this work and contributed to the richness of the great *Ariadne of Naxos*: an opera-within-an-opera, a satire on the genre itself.

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<sup>37</sup>Greene, 13.

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