

SYNOPSIS

From the moonlit terrace of King Herod's palace, Narraboth, captain of the guard, gazes rapturously inside at the Princess Salome, who is feasting with her stepfather and his court. The voice of the prophet Jochanaan echoes from a deep cistern, where he is imprisoned by the king, who fears him. Salome, bored with Herod's lechery and his coarse guests, rushes out for fresh air and becomes curious when she hears Jochanaan curse Herodias, her mother. When the soldiers refuse to bring Jochanaan to her, Salome turns her wiles on Narraboth, who orders that Jochanaan be summoned. Salome is fascinated by the prophet's deathly pallor and pours out her uncontrollable desire to touch him. The prophet rejects her, speaking of the Son of God who will come to save mankind.

When Salome continues to beg for Jochanaan's kiss, Narraboth stabs himself in horror, and the prophet descends into the cistern, urging her to seek salvation in the Messiah. The girl collapses in frustration and longing.

Herod appears, followed by his court. When he slips in Narraboth's blood, he becomes unnerved and begins to experience hallucinations, which Herodias scorns. Herod's thoughts turn to Salome, who spurns his attentions. Renewed abuse from Jochanaan's subterranean voice harrasses Herodias, who demands that Herod turn the prophet over to the jews. Herod's refusal incurs an argument among several jews concerning the nature of God, and a narrative of Christ's miracles by two Nazarenes.

Herod begs Salome to divert him by dancing and offers her anything she mi-

ght wish in return. Salome makes him swear he will live up to his promise, then dances, slowly shedding seven veils and finishing her performance at his feet. Salome demands the head of Jochanaan on a silver platter, ignoring Herod's desperate alternatives - jewels, rare birds, a sacred veil. The terrified king finally gives in. After a tense pause, the arm of the executioner rises from the cistern, offering the head to Salome. As clouds obscure the moon, Salome seizes her reward passionately, addressing Jochanaan as if he lived and triumphantly kissing his lips. Overcome with revulsion, Herod orders the soldiers to kill Salome.