

ELEKTRA

Richard Strauss

Ancient Mycenae. In the courtyard of the palace of Agamemnon, murdered king of Mycenae, servant girls comment on the wild behavior of Elektra, Agamemnon's eldest daughter. When they have gone, Elektra bemoans her father's murder at the hands of her mother, Klytämnestra, and her mother's lover, Aegisth. Calling on her father's spirit, she vows vengeance. She is interrupted by her younger sister, Chrysothemis, who urges Elektra to give up her obsession with revenge so they both can lead normal lives. As noises from within the palace herald the approach of Klytämnestra, the girl rushes off, leaving Elektra to face their mother alone. The queen staggers in; drugs, loss of sleep and fear of retribution have made a wreck of her. She appeals to Elektra to tell her what kind of sacrifice to the gods will give her peace. Her nightmares will cease, Elektra responds, when the blood of an impure woman is shed. Challenged to name the victim, Elektra screams it is Klytämnestra herself, and that she and her banished brother Orest will wield the ax. Klytämnestra is shaken, but when her Confidante runs in and whispers something, her mood changes abruptly. Laughing maniacally, Klytämnestra leaves her puzzled daughter. The mystery is explained when Chrysothemis reappears with news that Orest is dead. Stunned, Elektra tells her sister she must now help kill Klytämnestra and Aegisth. When the girl pulls away in terror and runs off, Elektra starts to dig for the buried ax that killed Agamemnon. She is interrupted by a stranger who says he has come to inform Klytämnestra of Orest's death. When Elektra reveals her name, he tells her Orest lives. Servants come and kiss his hand. The dogs of the house know me, he says, but not my own sister. Crying his name, Elektra falls into Orest's arms and tells him she has lived only for his return. Their reunion is cut short when Orest is summoned before Klytämnestra. Hardly has he entered the palace when a scream is heard and Elektra, anxiously waiting, knows he has killed their mother. Aegisth now arrives, and Elektra joyfully lights his way into the palace, where he too meets his doom. While the halls resound with tumultuous confusion, Elektra, transported, begins an ecstatic dance. But the release of so much pent-up hate and joy proves too much for her; when Chrysothemis returns, Elektra falls lifeless.