

# The libretto in brief

Traduzione di Rodney Stringer

## Scene One

On the great terrace of Herod's palace by moonlight, while the Tetrarch's birthday is being celebrated in the banquet hall within, the young captain of the royal guard, Narraboth, gazes spellbound at Salome's beauty. His friend, Herodias's page, tries in vain to distract his contemplation of that poisonous flower. Suddenly the voice of the Prophet Jochanaan is heard from the cistern below, in which he is imprisoned. The soldiers of the royal guard discuss the Prophet's obscure words.

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## Scene Two

Salome enters, disgusted by the behaviour of the banqueters and by the advances made by her stepfather Herod. She wants to breathe in the fresh air and to gaze at her own pale beauty mirrored in the moon. Jochanaan's voice again resounds from the cistern and arouses Salome's curiosity. She asks to see the unknown prisoner, but the guards obey the Tetrarch's orders and refuse to open the cistern. The princess, however, is aware of her power over Narraboth, and induces the captain to carry out her wishes. Jochanaan comes up from the cistern.

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## Scene Three

The Prophet curses and showers abuse upon Salome's infamous mother. But the more he rejects the daughter of the sinful Herodias, the more Salome's morbid lust is stirred: she desires to touch and kiss him, even though Jochanaan repulses her in disgust. Narraboth implores Salome

to contain herself, as he cannot bear to see the princess in this state. In the end he is so distraught that he stabs himself before her eyes, but she does not even notice. Still cursing Salome, the Prophet goes down again into the cistern.

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## Scene Four

Followed by Herodias and his court, Herod comes out onto the terrace looking for Salome. Consumed with greed for his stepdaughter, he tries in vain to seduce her, but the Tetrarch's advances are interrupted by the sound of the Prophet's renewed curses from below. Herodias asks the King to silence the prisoner by handing him over to the Jews. But Herod is afraid of Jochanaan's prophecies and defends him. Meanwhile the Jews quarrel amongst themselves. Herod then asks Salome to dance for him. With a calculated air of refusal, the girl arouses the Tetrarch's lust to a point where he swears before all that he will carry out whatever wish she may care to express. Thus the Dance of the Seven Veils can begin. When it is over the princess asks the Tetrarch for Jochanaan's head to be brought to her on a silver tray. Herod reacts with incredulity and horror, while Herodias gives her enthusiastic approval. Herod attempts in every possible way to dissuade Salome from her loathsome request, but she remains adamant. Finally, Herodias removes the ring of death from the exhausted King's finger and has it delivered to the executioner. Salome waits anxiously beside the cistern, until the

executioner hands her the tray bearing Jochanaan's severed head. Lost in contemplation, Salome embarks on a long and voluptuous monologue with Jochanaan's head, ending with the famous necrophilic kiss and the words "Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jochanaan". Appalled and bewildered, Herod orders his soldiers to slay the princess.