

MARCH 24, 1986 Salome

Choreographer adds new twists to 'twisted' opera

By R.M. Campbell
P-I Music Critic

The tamest and briefest stories of the princess Salome, who lived and died nearly 2,000 years ago, were the first — those of Mark and Matthew in the Bible.

The most sexually charged biography of Salome is that of Oscar Wilde, who wrote his play one day after lunching with friends in the Paris of 1891. After he finished, at 11 p.m., Wilde dashed to the Grand Cafe, where during his meal he asked the conductor of the little orchestra to play music to "fit his mood": "... a woman dancing with her bare feet in the blood of a man she has craved and slain ..."

Fourteen years later — five years after Wilde's death — Richard Strauss took the playwright's work and used it for a one-act opera of the same name. After its premiere in Dresden, the opera was banned in Berlin, and after one performance at the Metropolitan Opera, it was banned there too. And when the opera, with Mary Garden in the title role, was performed in Seattle in 1924 it was not, one might say, well-received.

Seattle Opera's production of "Salome" opens tomorrow night at the Opera House.

Choreographing Salome's six-minute "Dance of the Seven Veils" — after which Salome asks her stepfather, Herod, for the head of John the Baptist, who has rejected her sexual advances — is Mark Morris, the wunderkind of the modern dance world who cut a wide swath in People magazine this week.

The production marks Morris' first choreographic essay in the operatic world.

He admits he has never seen the opera, but says he has listened to Strauss' score a lot. "I've read a couple of things, the Bible, Wilde. My 'Salome' file is by my bed."

"I think 'Salome' is a pretty twisted show. Everybody stalks about the moon. Nobody talks to anyone. It is almost completely dry, passionate but sterile. Herodias and Herod are sick. And it's these conditions under which Salome was brought up. She is a wreck."

Morris knows many of the accounts of Salome's life, in particular how she came



Salome gets her wish — the head of John the Baptist — in this drawing by 19th-century artist Aubrey Beardsley titled "The Dancer's Reward."



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OPERA PREVIEW

Seattle Opera production of Richard Strauss' "Salome" tomorrow night at 7:30 at the Opera House. The Gold cast includes Josephine Barstow, Geraldine Decker, Emile Belcourt, Roger Roloff and Barry Busse. Silver, Jane Mengedoht, Decker, Quade Winter, Claude Corbeil and Busse. Stefan Minde is the conductor; Sonja Frisell, stage director; Joan Sullivan, lighting designer; Mark Morris, choreographer. Gold performances are tomorrow, Wednesday and March 29; Silver, Sunday and March 28. Tickets range from \$8 to \$44.

to ask for John's head. In the Bible, Morris said, Salome seeks her mother's advice on what to request from Herod after she has danced for him. Her mother replies, "The head of John." The request for his head, Morris speculates, is the equivalent of asking Herod for John's hand in marriage.

"My problem in the dance is how it goes from pleasing Herod so Salome gets what she wants to the head. It is very tricky. It is a dramatic statement, a court dance. She dances what she has seen at home all her life, and that's a pretty twisted idea of entertainment."

Some productions in the past have substituted a dancer for the singer during the dance, because, most usually, the kind of soprano required to sing Strauss' music is not the kind of woman who can do the seductive dance of a 16-year-old seductress.

In Seattle, Morris has to work with two Salomes. One is experienced and widely known for her portrayal — Josephine Barstow in the Gold Series — and the other is making her debut in the role — Jane Mengedoht in the Silver. Neither is a dancer, but both will dance.

"What I usually do is pretty complicated and specific," he said. "They (Barstow and Mengedoht) know the music much better than I do, and they also freak out about being on the wrong foot. I have made my adjustments, and that has been interesting. If I build the dance dramatically, it holds up better. The dance is long and at the end of the opera. It is taxing to say the least."

Morris, whose sensitivity to music is among his most widely acclaimed virtues, doesn't think much of the music in "Dance of the Seven Veils."

"I think it is the lamest music in the opera. It sounds like an afterthought. It is Orientale — Western-style Eastern exotic. Pretty starch."

The 29-year-old choreographer, born and reared in Seattle, is here after a stint he and his 11-member company did at a new dance festival in Vienna. And he will stay put in his Wallingford house for a bit, teaching at the University of Washington this spring.

On the cover:

The illustration on the cover is Aubrey Beardsley's "The Climax." Both drawings of Salome are from "The Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley," Dover Publications Inc., New York.

Beliefs keep the superstar of gospel humble

By Gene Stout
P-I Music Critic

Sandi Patti has become what very few people thought possible a few years ago — a gospel-music superstar.

Patti, who performs tonight at 7:30 in the Tacoma Dome, has completed two world tours and released seven albums since she recorded her first record in college. In 1984, she won a Grammy Award for "More Than Wonderful." This year, she won another Grammy with Larnelle Harris for "I've Just Seen Jesus."

Patti, who performs more than

POP PREVIEW

Sandi Patti, gospel-pop concert, tonight at 7:30 in the Tacoma Dome. Tickets, \$10.50 and \$11.50, are available at Fidelity Lane and Ticketmaster outlets.

100 concerts a year, is the premier artist in a genre that has grown from a handful of choral groups to an entire spectrum of Christian musicians who perform pop, country, various kinds of rock, even folk and jazz.

Patti's concerts are inspira-

tional events teeming with true believers, and even though her songs have a strong Christian orientation and frequently are received with cries of "Praise the Lord," they otherwise sound like Top 40 hits.

Incredibly, Patti started singing at church when she was only 2 years old. Her father, who had performed with the Fred Waring Pennsylvanians, later formed a family singing group that toured gospel churches around the country.

While attending college in Indiana, Patti recorded jingles for Wrigley's Juicy Fruit gum and

met her future husband and business manager, John Helvering.

A business major, Helvering urged her to record an album, which she titled "For My Friends."

The album proved to be the beginning of a remarkable career, though her Christian beliefs have kept her humble.

"Success for me doesn't depend on charts and dollars and cents," she said in a People magazine interview.

"I'll know I've made it if I have a happy husband and if my child grows up loving us and loving the Lord."



Sandi Patti: She started singing in church at the age of 2.