

# WHAT TO EXPECT FROM *DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER*

IN THE ROILING WAVES OF A STORM-TOSSED SEA, A DARK SHIP APPEARS on the horizon. The wind whips its blood-red sails, and the driving rain lashes its tall black mast. On the deck stands a pale captain, doomed to roam the seas forever ... or until the day love sets him free. When the composer Richard Wagner first read the story of the Flying Dutchman, he found in its titular captain a kindred spirit. Trapped in a tempestuous marriage, perpetually on the run from moneylenders, and desperately searching for an audience for his art, Wagner identified strongly with the captain's longing for love, stability, and a place to call home. Yet there was another figure in the story who embodied Wagner's struggles even more powerfully: Senta, a young woman so obsessed with a portrait of the Flying Dutchman that she literally leaps into its haunted world. For Wagner was also poised to leap into a new narrative realm, and *Der Fliegende Holländer* marks the first of his operas to employ a set of dramatic principles that he would spend a lifetime developing.

Wagner hoped audiences would be drawn into his operatic art just like Senta is drawn into the Dutchman's portrait, and the idea that a story or image can completely consume the viewer lies at the very heart of the Met's new production. Harnessing the Met's famous proscenium arch, director François Girard and his set designer, the painter John Macfarlane, have built a golden frame around the Met's stage, turning the performance itself into a painting that will captivate the viewer just as the Dutchman's portrait captivates Senta.

In honor of both Wagner's vision and Girard's conception, this guide presents *Der Fliegende Holländer* as an opera about the narrative power of music, images, and poetry. The materials on the following pages include an introduction to Wagner's theories about opera and drama, a series of excerpts from Wagner's own writings, and classroom activities that will bring *Der Fliegende Holländer*'s music and story to life. By delving into the opera's music, drama, and design, this guide will forge interdisciplinary classroom connections, inspire critical thinking, and help students explore not only Wagner's riveting opera but also the profound impact that storytelling can have on both our world and ourselves.

## THE WORK:

### *DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER*

An opera in three acts, sung in German

Music and libretto by Richard Wagner

Based on the novel *From the Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski* by Heinrich Heine

First performed January 2, 1843, at the Court Opera, Dresden, Germany

## PRODUCTION

Valery Gergiev, Conductor

François Girard, Production

John Macfarlane, Set Designer

Moritz Junge, Costume Designer

David Finn, Lighting Designer

Peter Flaherty, Projection Designer

Carolyn Choa, Choreographer

Serge Lamothe, Dramaturg

## STARRING

Sir Bryn Terfel  
THE DUTCHMAN

Anja Kampe  
SENTA

Franz-Josef Selig  
DALAND

Sergey Skorokhodov  
ERIK

Mihoko Fujimura  
MARY

David Portillo  
THE STEERSMAN

A co-production of the Metropolitan Opera, Dutch National Opera, the Abu Dhabi Festival, and the Quebec Opera

Production a gift of Veronica Atkins



KAMPE



FUJIMURA



SKOROKHODOV



PORTILLO



TERFEL



SELIG

This guide includes five sections:

- **THE OPERA'S PLOT AND CREATION:** The source, the story, who's who in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, and a timeline with key dates for Wagner's work
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:** Two activities designed to align with and support various Common Core Standard strands used in ELA, History/Social Studies, and Music curricula
- **PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:** Two activities to be used during the *Live in HD* transmission
- **POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:** A wrap-up activity that will help students reflect on the transmission, express their opinions about the performance, and integrate the *Live in HD* experience into their understanding of the arts and humanities more broadly
- **STUDENT RESOURCE PAGES:** Classroom-ready worksheets supporting the activities in the guide

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera and the performing arts. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

In particular, this guide will offer in-depth introductions to:

- *Der Fliegende Holländer's* depiction of different storytelling techniques, including images, spoken words, and songs
- Wagner's ideas about drama, music, poetry, and stagecraft, and his efforts to create a "total art work" seamlessly combining these elements
- Wagner's musical language, and how this language is used by opera, film, and theater composers today
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

**SUMMARY:** In a small village on the coast of Norway, a young woman is obsessed with an oil painting. Somber in color and cracking with age, the painting depicts nothing more than a man with a pale face and dark coat, but it comes with a terrifying story: A captain, caught in a storm, swore to the devil that he would make it around a rocky cape even if it meant sailing until Judgment Day. The devil took him at his word, and now the cursed captain must sail forever—or until true love breaks the spell. Every seven years, the captain may return to land for one night only, to search for the eternal love that will be his salvation. But the captain has long since lost all hope—for who would ever agree to love a cursed man “through death and beyond”?

The young woman has heard this story since she was a child, and its hold on her has grown stronger with each passing year. The painting fills her every waking hour, and the captain haunts her dreams at night. Her friends and family beg her to forget the story. But when her father brings a mysterious sailor to visit, the young woman immediately recognizes him as the captain from the painting ... and decides to take his fate into her own hands.

**THE SOURCE: FROM THE MEMOIRS OF HERR VON SCHNABELEWOPSKI BY HEINRICH HEINE** In 1839, Richard Wagner fled Riga (then part of Russia, now the capital of Latvia) with his creditors hot on his heels. Under the cover of night, he and his wife slipped across the Russian border and boarded a ship destined for London. The sea crossing was treacherously stormy; the ship, the *Thetis*, was forced to take shelter on the coast of Norway. And it was here—anchored near a small town called Sandwike, listening to the sailors’ cries echoing against the steep walls of the fjord—that Wagner first read about the Flying Dutchman.



Market in the harbor of Riga. Unknown photographer. c. 1850–80

## VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

### SOPRANO

the highest voice type, normally possessed only by women and boys

### MEZZO-SOPRANO

the voice type lying below the soprano and above the contralto; the term comes from the Italian word “mezzo,” meaning “middle”

### CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

### TENOR

the highest standard voice type in adult males

### BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

### BASS

the lowest voice type

The story appeared in *From the Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski* (pronounced “HAIR fohn SHNAH-bel-eh-VOHP-skee”), a satirical novel by Wagner’s friend Heinrich Heine (“HINE-rik HIGH-neh”). In one chapter, Heine’s hero sees a play about the cursed ship of the Flying Dutchman. The narrator revels in the story’s ghoulish details, but the play’s real purpose in the novel is to catalyze a romantic interlude between the hero and a woman he meets in the theater. In fact, this dalliance causes the hero to miss most of the play; when he returns to the auditorium, it is just in time to see the heroine sacrifice herself to lift the captain’s curse. An implicit comparison thus emerges between the faithful (and fictional) maiden of the play and the (real-life) temptress from the theater, and the chapter ends with a tongue-in-cheek warning that although women should avoid marrying a Flying Dutchman, men should avoid women altogether.

Wagner, by contrast, found the Flying Dutchman’s story to be no laughing matter. He was deeply impressed by the heroine’s faithfulness and the redemption she promised, and in the cursed captain’s stormy existence he saw an uncanny echo of his own tempestuous life. He soon set about crafting an opera based on the story, filling in the pieces missing from Heine’s narrative and moving the setting from Scotland (as in Heine’s version) to Sandwike to reflect his experience on the *Thetis*. Unfortunately, the opera’s creation would prove to be yet another source of turbulence and frustration for the young composer. Hoping that the work would spark his career in Paris, Wagner sold his plot to the Paris Opera—only to see the story given to another composer for musical elaboration. Infuriated and hurt by the betrayal, Wagner revised his original plot and set about composing his own version of the opera, which premiered in Dresden in January 1843.

**ACT I: *Norway*.** On the storm-lashed coast of Norway, a merchant ship takes shelter to wait out a terrible squall. As the crew rests, the ship’s steersman keeps watch and thinks of his beloved, who he knows waits for him at home. Suddenly, out of the swirling wind and waves, a ship with blood-red sails and a black mast appears beside the merchant ship. Stepping onto the shore, the captain of the ghostly vessel reflects on his fate: Long ago, caught in a storm, he swore to the devil that he would make it around a rocky cape even if it meant sailing until Judgment Day. Now, cursed, he must sail the seas forever, setting foot on land only one night every seven years to search for the true love that will release him from his endless wandering. If he cannot find a wife who will be faithful to him forever, he must sail the ocean for eternity.

Soon, the merchant captain Daland notices the phantom ship. The strange captain introduces himself simply as “a Dutchman,” and he offers Daland a chest full of treasure in exchange for one night of lodging ... and the right to marry Daland’s daughter.

Blinded by the glittering treasure, Daland consents. The storm dies down, and a gentle wind from the south blows the two ships into Sandwike, Daland's home port.

**ACT II:** The women of Sandwike sit at their spinning wheels and wait for their beloved sailors to return from sea. Senta, Daland's daughter, does not join them: She is too busy staring at a painting of a pale man dressed in black. The women tease her, telling her that she is more in love with the painting than with her suitor, the hunter Erik. Senta announces that the sailor in the painting is the "Flying Dutchman," the captain of a ghostly ship, and she asks her nursemaid, Mary, to tell the captain's story. Mary, superstitious and fearing the devil's wrath, refuses to do so. Gesturing to the painting, Senta tells the story herself and declares that she will be the one to save the captain with a promise of eternal love. Erik enters with news of Daland's return, and Mary and the others hurry off to greet the sailors. Erik declares his love for Senta, but she can focus only on the painting and barely acknowledges him. Hurt and frightened, Erik tells Senta of a dream he had in which he saw her sailing away on the Flying Dutchman's



An early set model for John Macfarlane's stage design

ship, clasped in the captain's embrace. Instead of distracting Senta from the painting, however, Erik's story only pushes her to further proclamations about how she will save the captain. Heartbroken, Erik rushes away.

A moment later, the Dutchman enters. Senta cannot believe her eyes, for she recognizes him as the man from the painting. Daland enters and asks his daughter to welcome the stranger, whom he has brought to be her husband. The captain, unaware that Senta recognizes him, warns her to think carefully about the decision. Senta, however, immediately promises to be faithful to him forever. Daland returns and is overjoyed to learn that his daughter has accepted the wealthy suitor.

**ACT III:** The townspeople gather at the harbor to celebrate the merchants' safe return. Next to Daland's ship, a strange vessel has also dropped anchor. Although the ship is dark and silent, the villagers call to its sailors to join the festivities. Suddenly the ghostly sailors appear, mocking their captain's desperate quest for a bride. The villagers run away in terror.

Senta enters, followed by Erik. He pleads with her not to marry the Dutchman, insisting that she has already pledged her love to him. The Dutchman overhears them and believes that he has lost both Senta and the salvation she promised. As his crew prepares to cast off, he declares that he is the Flying Dutchman of legend. Senta ecstatically replies that she knows who he is. As the ship pulls away, Senta cries that she will remain faithful to him "through death and beyond"—and throws herself into the sea.

# WHO'S WHO IN *DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER*

CHARACTER		PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
The Flying Dutchman	Captain of a cursed ship (that is also called <i>The Flying Dutchman</i> )		bass-baritone	Doomed to wander the seas forever, the Flying Dutchman can only be saved by true love.
Senta	A young woman	ZEN-tuh	soprano	Obsessed with the legend of the Flying Dutchman, Senta will make the ultimate sacrifice to save its captain.
Daland	A merchant, Senta's father	DAH-lahnd	bass	Daland loves his daughter, and he hopes to find her a wealthy husband.
Erik	A hunter, Senta's suitor		tenor	Erik is in love with Senta, but he cannot understand her frightening fascination with the Flying Dutchman.
Mary	Senta's nurse		contralto	Mary is superstitious, and she fears the story of the Flying Dutchman.
Steersman	A sailor on Daland's ship		tenor	In charge of steering the ship through the treacherous waters of the sea, the steersman takes time off to dream of his beloved.



1813 Richard Wagner is born on May 22 in Leipzig, a town in eastern Germany.

1831–32 Wagner undertakes six months of study with the music director of Leipzig’s St. Thomas Church, the same church where Johann Sebastian Bach was employed a century before.

1833 The 20-year-old Wagner gets his first job, directing the chorus at a theater in Würzburg, a city in northern Bavaria.

1834 Wagner returns to Leipzig, where he joins a group of German intellectuals calling themselves Junges Deutschland (“Young Germany”). The group includes Heinrich Heine, whose novel *From the Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski* (published this same year) will provide the source material for Wagner’s *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

1836 Wagner marries the actress Christine Wilhelmine Planer, known as “Minna.” Their marriage is stormy. Within months she will run off with a merchant, only to return to Wagner shortly thereafter.

1837 Wagner takes a position as music director of a theater in Riga (the capital of modern Latvia). Fortunately, the move allows him to escape his creditors in Leipzig. Unfortunately, he soon begins accruing new debts in Riga. This perpetual cycle of debt will continue to plague Wagner for almost 30 more years.

1839 In July, Wagner flees Riga. Moneylenders have seized his passport, so he and Minna must cross the border in the dead of night. They board a ship, the *Thetis*, to London, from which they plan to travel on to Paris. Due to stormy seas, the *Thetis* is forced to take refuge in a Norwegian port. Wagner will later claim that the voyage inspired his opera *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

1839–42 Wagner takes up residence in Paris, the cultural capital of Europe. The Paris years, however, are brutal. Wagner and Minna are perpetually broke, and their marriage remains unhappy. Moreover, Wagner is profoundly snubbed when the director of the Paris Opera gives Wagner’s plot for a Flying Dutchman opera to a different composer to write the music. Furious and disgusted, Wagner sets about writing his own version of the opera.

After three years of personal and professional disappointments in Paris, Wagner decides to return to Germany and takes up residence in Dresden.



**1843** On January 2, Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* premieres at the Dresden Court Opera with Wagner himself conducting.

**1848** Revolutions break out across Europe. The political turbulence soon spreads to Dresden. Wagner, caught up in the revolutionary excitement, produces a series of firebrand speeches and essays. When the revolutions fail, Wagner must flee the city. He will remain in exile for almost 15 years.

**1864** King Ludwig II ascends the throne of Bavaria. An idealistic 18-year-old and a great lover of music, Ludwig offers Wagner the financial support necessary to realize his grand artistic ambitions.

In the summer, Wagner takes up with Cosima Liszt von Bülow, the woman who will prove to be the love of his life. Wagner is by now divorced, but his affair with Cosima is nevertheless one of the great “soap opera moments” in the history of music, since she is not only the daughter of famed pianist Franz Liszt (one of Wagner's best friends) but also the wife of conductor Hans von Bülow (one of Wagner's early musical champions). Their daughter, Isolde, will be born in 1865; Wagner and Cosima will marry in 1870.

**1876** *Der Ring der Nibelungen*, Wagner's 16-hour cycle of four operas, premieres at Wagner's new opera house at Bayreuth (pronounced “BYE-royt”). The result of almost 30 years of labor, the *Ring* is the greatest expression of Wagner's operatic ideals. The Bayreuth opera house, designed by Wagner and built with Ludwig's funds, features a sunken orchestra pit, dimming electric lights, and rows of seats that all face toward the stage, and it will become one of the primary models for modern theater design.

*Der Fliegende Holländer* is performed for the first time in the United States, in Philadelphia.

**1883** On February 13, Wagner dies in Venice. His body is taken back to Germany and interred at his estate near Bayreuth.

**1889** *Der Fliegende Holländer* is performed for the first time at the Metropolitan Opera. To this day, it remains one of Wagner's best-loved works.



Wagner at the time of *Der Fliegende Holländer*'s premiere, 1843

## Beginning to See the Leit: Exploring Leitmotifs in *Der Fliegende Holländer*

### Music

#### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Beginning to See the Leit*, as well as the text and translation of "Senta's Ballad," the opera synopsis, colored pencils, and the audio selections from *Der Fliegende Holländer* available online or on the accompanying CD.

#### CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Art, History, English, Drama, Music, Film, Creative Writing

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To strengthen students' comprehension of *Der Fliegende Holländer's* characters and story
- To develop students' musical vocabulary
- To deepen students' understanding of how composers can link music and plot elements through the compositional technique known as leitmotif
- To extend students' ability to discuss, depict, and describe music through verbal, visual, and dramatic modes of expression

How do we know the Wicked Witch of the West is on her way? How can we tell, in the immortal words of *Jaws*, that "we're going to need a bigger boat"? In these two iconic films, witch and shark alike are announced by musical motifs that we recognize in a heartbeat and instantly link to a character or creature. Today, this compositional technique is closely associated with movie music, but the composer most famous for pioneering the use of such musical themes, known as leitmotifs, is Richard Wagner. This activity will introduce students to a series of leitmotifs from *Der Fliegende Holländer*, casting students in the role of "leitmotif detective" as they imagine which characters or plot element each musical theme might represent. By completing this activity, students will develop a working knowledge of some of the most important musical themes in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, a knowledge that will facilitate their active engagement with the opera's music and story during the *Live in HD* transmission. They will also emerge with a deeper appreciation for how different listeners experience music in diverse ways. Students will:

- Review the plot of *Der Fliegende Holländer* and identify possible characters and ideas ripe for musical representation
- Create visual and poetic responses to leitmotifs heard in the opera's overture
- Examine the musical elements of individual leitmotifs and consider how these elements might help listeners link each musical theme with its intended subject



Wenceslaus Hollar. Sailing ships in a sea storm. 1627–1636. Etching. RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

A passage from the overture to *Der Fliegende Holländer*

- Compare how different listeners experience different leitmotifs and discuss the role that leitmotifs play in creating a dramatic story onstage

### GUIDE TO AUDIO CLIPS FOR THIS ACTIVITY

For this activity, there are 10 audio selections from *Der Fliegende Holländer*, available online or on the accompanying CD:

- TRACK 1:** Leitmotif 1: Senta's Theme, Overture (excerpt)
- TRACK 2:** Leitmotif 2: Sailors' Theme, Overture (excerpt)
- TRACK 3:** Leitmotif 3: The Flying Dutchman's Theme, Overture (excerpt)
- TRACK 4:** Overture (complete)
- TRACK 5:** The Flying Dutchman's Act I Monologue (excerpt) / Leitmotif 3
- TRACK 6:** The Flying Dutchman's Act I Entrance (excerpt) / Leitmotif 3
- TRACK 7:** Senta's Ballad (excerpt) / Leitmotif 3
- TRACK 8:** Sailors' Act III Chorus (excerpt) / Leitmotif 2
- TRACK 9:** Senta's Ballad (excerpt) / Leitmotif 1
- TRACK 10:** Senta's Ballad (complete)

### STEPS

In this activity, students will explore a range of leitmotifs presented in the overture to *Der Fliegende Holländer* and think about how Wagner uses various musical elements (orchestration, dynamics, tempo, and major/minor modes) to develop these musical-narrative themes. With each listening excerpt, students will create both visual and verbal representations of the music they hear, drawing illustrations, writing poems, and preparing musical analyses. Finally, students will compare their multimodal experiences in small group discussions.

**STEP 1:** Start the activity by asking students to think about a movie or television soundtrack they know well. Ask for a few volunteers to hum a memorable tune from their chosen soundtrack for the class. Next, ask if anybody recognizes this tune; if so, do students associate the tune with any particular idea, character, or event in the film/show? Does everybody agree on what the tune represents? Why or why not? If students feel stumped, prompt their thinking with the following movies and TV shows, all of which have now-iconic soundtracks:

*Star Wars* | *Indiana Jones* | *Harry Potter* | *Game of Thrones*  
*The Lord of the Rings* | *The Lion King* | *Frozen* | *The Avengers*

Explain to students that if a musical theme recurs every time a subject appears onstage or onscreen, then that theme is called a *leitmotif*. A leitmotif is, essentially, a theme song; a more extended definition of the term can be found in the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* included elsewhere in this guide. Next, explain to students that Richard Wagner,

### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.11

Create a presentation, art work, or text in response to a literary work with a commentary that identifies connections and explains divergences from the original.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**FUN FACT:** Over the years, the story of the Flying Dutchman has appeared in numerous novels, movies, TV shows, and music albums—as well as the Disney franchise *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In the 2006 film *Dead Man's Chest*, the pirate Davy Jones (Bill Nighy) sails a ship called *The Flying Dutchman*; in the sequel, 2007's *At World's End*, the hero Will Turner (Orlando Bloom) takes control of the ship, although this means that, like the captain in Wagner's opera, he can set foot on land only once every few years.

the composer of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, played a major role in the development of leitmotifs in the 1800s.

**STEP 2:** Divide students into groups of three, and then pass out the synopsis of *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Ask students to take turns reading the synopsis aloud in their groups. As they read, students should compile a collective list of the possible subjects (characters, plot elements, symbols, and dramatic themes) that could be turned into leitmotifs. For example, the first sentence of the synopsis includes two possible recurring plot elements: the storm and the ship.

**STEP 3:** In the next step of this activity, students will listen to three different leitmotifs from the overture to *Der Fliegende Holländer*. At this stage, the three leitmotifs will be identified simply as "Leitmotif 1," "Leitmotif 2," and "Leitmotif 3." Explain that it will be students' task to figure out what each leitmotif might represent. In order to do so, students will need to work together. They will also need to take turns playing three different investigative roles, described below:

*The Illustrator:* As the Illustrator listens to the excerpt, they will draw whatever they imagine the music to be depicting (an event or an object or a character). For example, if the Illustrator thinks the music depicts the Flying Dutchman, the Illustrator would draw the Flying Dutchman, using the music as a guide.

*The Poet:* As the Poet listens to the excerpt, they will write a poem about whatever they imagine the music to be depicting.

*The Music Critic:* As the Music Critic listens to the excerpt, they will describe what they hear using any musical terminology they know. Elements students may wish to describe include orchestration, tempo, dynamics, and major vs. minor (definitions for each of these terms are available in the *Ten Essential Musical Terms*). In their review, students are welcome to use simple English descriptions, such as "fast," "slow," "loud," and "soft," as well as more formal musical terms, such as "allegro," "lento," "forte," "piano," etc.

Pass out the "Leitmotif Listener Packets" and give each group a packet of colored pencils. Explain that for Leitmotif 1, each student in a group will take on one of the three roles described above. As the class moves on to Leitmotifs 2 and 3, students will take on new roles; after listening to all three leitmotifs, students will have played each of the above roles once.

Ask students to decide among themselves who will be the Illustrator, the Poet, and the Music Critic for the first excerpt (or, if necessary, assign roles). Ask them to open

Wagner's essays on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the "total" union of music, poetry, stage design, and movement) were published nearly a decade after the premiere of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, but that didn't mean that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* principle couldn't be retroactively applied to his earlier works. In late 1852, Wagner wrote a series of "remarks on the performance of *Der Fliegende Holländer*" for his friend Franz Liszt (who was then planning a new production of the work), articulating how both the stage design and the singer's gestures should be aligned with the music and poetry of the score. Although Wagner briefly describes the stage design—for instance, he explicitly states that the sea must be "as wild as possible," boldly declares that the ships "can never be realistic enough," and explains how to effect the "nuances" in the first act's changing weather patterns through painted drops—he saves most of the essay for an in-depth look into how the lead singer should portray the character of the Dutchman, "upon which the entire success of the opera depends." Here is a short excerpt from this essay.

## Remarks on the Performance of *Der Fliegende Holländer*

[The Flying Dutchman's] first entrance must be exceptionally solemn and serious: As he steps onto the solid land, the hesitation and slowness of his movements should form a marked contrast with the uncanny speed of his ship in the water. He steps onto the rocky shore—crossing from his ship on a plank prepared by his crew—during the deep trumpet chords (in B minor) at the very end of the introduction. The first notes of the recitative (the low E# in the basses) are accompanied by the Dutchman's first steps on land. The rocking quality of his movements, so typical of sailors who step ashore after a long while at sea, is accompanied musically by the

wave-like figures in the cellos and violas. He takes his second step on the first quarter-note of the third measure; his arms remain crossed and his head bowed. His third and fourth steps fall on the eighth and tenth measures. [...]

The first phrases [of the recitative] should be sung without the slightest excitement, as though sung by someone utterly exhausted (although the rhythm should be very precise, both here and in the rest of the recitative). Even when he gets to the bitter words "Oh, you proud ocean ...," he will exhibit no special ardor: Rather, he will simply turn his head back toward the sea with terrible disdain. After "but my torment is endless," he lets his head drop again, as though he is both tired and sad; by contrast, he sings the words "you, the flood-waters of the sea ..." while staring straight ahead. As for his gestures during the allegro ("How often, in the deepest depths of the sea ..."), I don't want to constrain the singer too much; nevertheless, he should keep in mind my main point that, no matter how passionate he [i.e., the singer] may feel, no matter how much pain he may wish to express in his performance, he should for now maintain the greatest possible calm in his outward appearance: A few arm and hand movements (which should not be too large) will suffice to express the weighty tone of this scene.

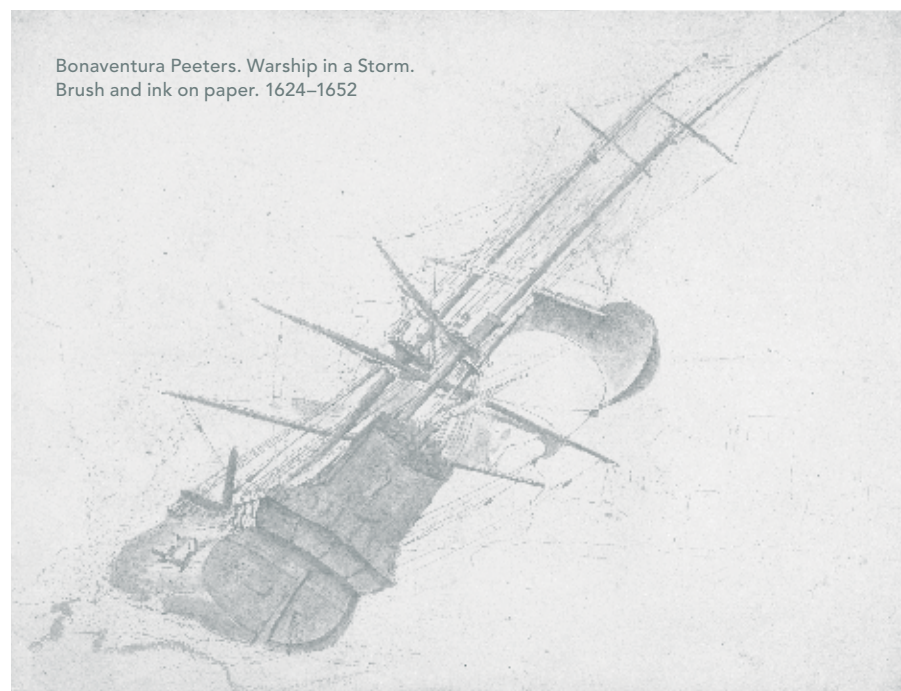
Translated by Kamala Schelling. German source: Richard Wagner, "Bemerkungen zur Aufführung der Oper *Der Fliegende Holländer*," in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 2nd edition (Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsche, 1888) 5:160–62.

their packets to the appropriate page for their “job” (the Illustrator will turn to the “Illustrator” page, etc.).

**STEP 4:** Have students circle Leitmotif 1 on whichever sheet they are using for the first task. Play **Track 1**. As the students listen, they should complete their first task. As soon as the clip ends, play it again while students continue to embellish their work. Once the clip has played through twice, give students two minutes to share and compare their thoughts within their groups. The following questions will help guide students’ small group discussions. The questions can be read to the whole class prior to the discussion, or teachers can use these questions to prompt discussion while circulating from group to group.

- What subject does each student in the group imagine the leitmotif might be depicting?
- Which musical elements noted by the Music Critic most shaped the thinking of the Poet and the Illustrator?
- What do the Poet’s and the Illustrator’s representations have in common? What is different?

After hearing each group member’s ideas, has anyone changed their prediction about what the leitmotif represents?



**STEP 5:** Rotate tasks. The order is always I-P-M so the Poet for the first round will be the Music Critic for the second round, the Music Critic for the first round will be the Illustrator for the second round, and so forth. Students should circle Leitmotif 2 on whichever sheet they are using for the second task. Then repeat Step 4, now having students listen to **Track 2**. Finally, rotate tasks again and repeat Step 4 for **Track 3**.

**STEP 6:** Before moving on, you may wish to play the beginnings of Tracks 1, 2, and 3 again to ensure that students remember each of these themes. You may also wish to have students hum a bit of each leitmotif to help review and recall what they have heard.

In the rest of this activity, students will explore how Wagner brings these three leitmotifs back throughout the opera by identifying which leitmotif appears in various scenes. Explain to students that they will now hear three excerpts from various points in the opera, all of which feature the same leitmotif. Play **Tracks 5, 6, and 7** in succession, then ask students to vote on which leitmotif they just heard (the answer is Leitmotif 3). Next, ask a few students to share what they think Leitmotif 3 represents. Accept and encourage all answers, but guide students toward the following: "Leitmotif 3 represents the Flying Dutchman."

Play Tracks 5, 6, and 7 again. Before playing each track, offer students some context (described in the teacher's guide below) for where the excerpt appears in the opera. Even if there are words in the excerpt, no libretto is provided; students should continue using the music itself to develop a creative description and understanding of what is happening onstage. Students are also welcome to add to their Illustrator/Poet/Music Critic sheets, if they desire.

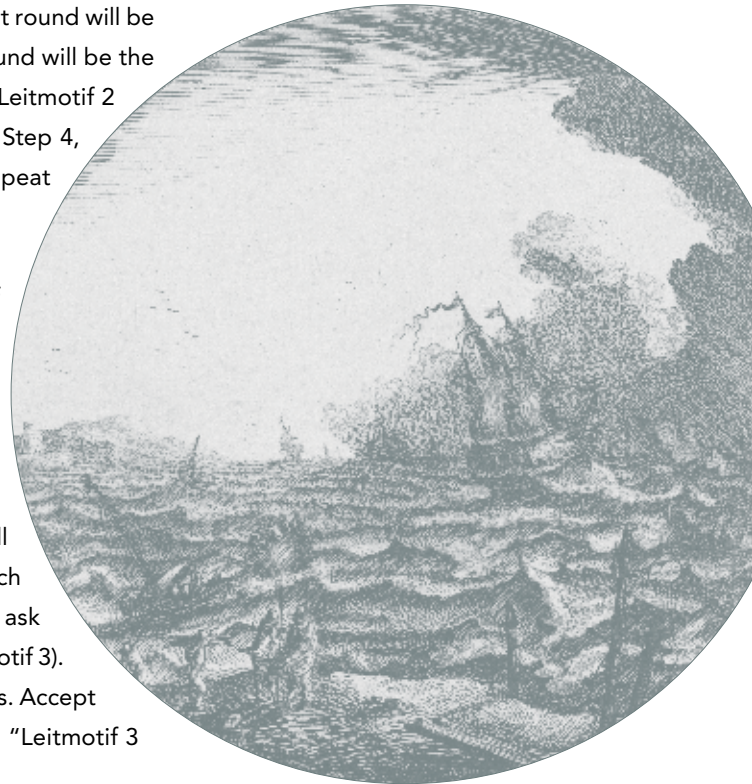
### **Leitmotif 3: The Flying Dutchman's Theme**

**TRACK 5:** This theme is linked with both the character of the Flying Dutchman and his ship. This excerpt occurs when the captain himself appears onstage for the first time.

**TRACK 6:** This excerpt occurs when the Flying Dutchman's ship appears onstage for the first time.

**TRACK 7:** This excerpt comes from Senta's Ballad, when she tells the story of the Flying Dutchman while staring at his painting.

After playing each track, give students time to discuss in their groups what they have heard. Some guiding questions:



Matthieu van Plattenberg. 1617–1660.  
Ships in a storm at sea. Etching.  
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

- Does this presentation of the leitmotif sound like what you heard in the overture? How is it the same? How is it different?
- Why might Wagner have chosen to vary it in this way? Based on what you know of the plot, why might this musical variation be important?
- Based on the music, what else do you think is happening onstage? Why?

Repeat the above steps for Leitmotif 2 (**Track 8**) and Leitmotif 1 (**Track 9**). Again, a teacher's guide to these excerpts is provided below.

### Leitmotif 2: The Sailors' Chorus

**TRACK 8:** This theme is linked with the merchant sailors reveling on land. This excerpt comes from the final act of the opera, when the sailors and townspeople celebrate the return of Daland's ship.

Anonymous. Cutaway view of an Admiral ship. Northern Netherlands. 1690–1710. Etching.

Senta's theme from her ballad





### Leitmotif 1: Senta's Theme

**TRACK 9:** This theme represents both Senta and the salvation she promises. This excerpt also comes from "Senta's Ballad," when she tells the story of the Flying Dutchman. This excerpt occurs as she explains how the Dutchman may be released from his curse.

**STEP 7 (optional):** If time allows, students may enjoy hearing how Wagner combines multiple leitmotifs in a single aria. Distribute "Senta's Ballad," available in the reproducible handouts for the other classroom activity, *Senta of Attention*. Play the ballad in its entirety (**Track 10**), and ask students to make a mark in the text whenever they hear a leitmotif they know. After students have finished listening, ask them to share which leitmotifs they heard. Why would Wagner have used these leitmotifs in this aria? Do the leitmotifs add any additional information to what is already present in the text?

**STEP 8:** Close the lesson with a full-class discussion on leitmotifs. Invite students to reflect on and share their experiences with this activity. Some guiding questions:

- Did you accurately predict what the leitmotifs represented?
- Which elements of the music (instrumentation, dynamics, tempo, etc.) helped you recognize the character or theme represented by the leitmotifs? Did different students link any given leitmotif to different subjects, or did listeners make similar connections? What might affect how we hear stories in music?
- Why might a composer choose to include leitmotifs in an opera score (or a score for film or theater)? How might leitmotifs help the audience understand the story?
- If there were a leitmotif (and there might be!) for a character or plot element on your list that we haven't heard yet, what might it sound like?

**FOLLOW-UP:** Students can explore leitmotifs in other media beyond opera. For example, students can analyze leitmotifs in Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, an orchestral work with narration in which both instruments and melodies are linked to specific animal characters. Students could each be assigned a leitmotif from *Peter and the Wolf* and present on how that music develops alongside the represented character throughout the work. Leitmotifs similarly abound in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's musical *Into the Woods* (also a film): Jack's magic beans, Rapunzel, and the Witch are among the characters and props that have music to match. Students can be assigned a particular work to watch or listen to while making a map (or some other visual representation) of major musical themes and what they represent. Students can also be allowed to choose a favorite scored work to explore (from *Harry Potter* to *Star Wars* to *The Lord of the Rings*).

**FUN FACT:** Wagner's stormy voyage on the *Thetis* didn't just inspire the story of *Der Fliegende Holländer*—it actually inspired the *sound* of the opera, as well. Later in life, Wagner would claim that the cries of the *Thetis's* crew directly inspired the opening lines of the opera, when Daland's crew can be heard singing as their ship nears Sandwike.

*English / Language Arts,  
Social Studies*

**IN PREPARATION**

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Senta of Attention*, a synopsis of the opera, chart paper, Post-Its, and the audio selections from *Der Fliegende Holländer* available online or on the accompanying CD.

**CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS**

Art, History, English, Drama, Music, Gender Studies

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- To strengthen students' comprehension of *Der Fliegende Holländer's* characters and story
- To deepen students' critical thinking about gender stereotypes in *Der Fliegende Holländer* and in opera more broadly
- To extend students' abilities to analyze arguments, develop original opinions, and engage in debate around a nuanced topic

**Senta of Attention: Making Sense of *Der Fliegende Holländer's* Heroine**

Richard Wagner, composer and librettist of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, once described the character of Senta as “completely naïve,” offering this as an explanation for her “apparently crazy” obsession with the Flying Dutchman. Yet just now naïve is this character really? Are there other ways modern audiences might understand her?

Senta first appears in the opera as an offstage bargaining chip. Once she shows up for real, she has only one interest: the salvation of a man she has never met but whose portrait and story haunt her. And when she finally meets the Dutchman, she almost immediately sacrifices herself to save his soul. Yet while Senta's obsession with the Dutchman and her all-encompassing dedication to his salvation might make modern audiences raise their eyebrows, Senta also acts entirely autonomously and premeditatedly: She has committed herself to the Dutchman long before she knows that he is a real person (let alone that her father has struck a deal to “sell” her to the mysterious sailor), and she takes her infamous leap off the Norwegian cliffs only after the Flying Dutchman offers to release her from her promise. So is Senta truly as naïve as Wagner claimed, or is she a powerful woman who makes up her own mind and catalyzes a spiritual transfiguration?

Dramatic plot points that can seem questionable or discomfiting—or even downright offensive—to modern audiences show up all the time in works of art, and opera is no exception. Rather than shying away from discussions of gender roles in potentially off-putting stories like that of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, teachers should provide students with opportunities to engage with the uneasiness that these tales provoke and think critically about troubling or gray areas of representation. In this activity, students will explore the character of Senta through a variety of lenses: the libretto itself, critical essays, and performers' opinions about the roles they sing. Students will:

- Review the plot of *Der Fliegende Holländer* and trace how Senta's character develops across the span of the opera
- Navigate critical perspectives on the role of Senta and critique excerpts of *Der Fliegende Holländer's* libretto
- Debate whether the character of Senta is reductive or empowering

**GUIDE TO AUDIO CLIPS FOR THIS ACTIVITY**

For this activity, there are seven audio selections from *Der Fliegende Holländer*, available online or on the accompanying CD:

**TRACK 10:** Senta's Ballad (complete)

**TRACK 11:** Senta's Ballad, Stanza 1

**TRACK 12:** Senta's Ballad, Stanza 2

**TRACK 13:** Senta's Ballad, Stanza 3

**TRACK 14:** The Dutchman and Daland Strike a Bargain

**TRACK 15:** Senta Meets the Dutchman

**TRACK 16:** Erik Confronts Senta

## STEPS

In this lesson, students will explore the character of Senta from a variety of perspectives and through a range of media. After reviewing the plot of *Der Fliegende Holländer* and listening to Senta's ballad, students will create and act out their own endings to scenes from the opera involving Senta. Finally, students will navigate a collection of short excerpts from articles about Senta and discuss the treatment of female characters in opera more generally.

**STEP 1:** Launch the lesson by asking students to discuss the following questions in small groups:

- What are some old-fashioned stereotypes about women?
- Can you think of any books, movies, stories, etc. that perpetuate these stereotypes?
- Can these stereotypes ever be empowering or are they only damaging to women?
- Should we continue to read and watch books and movies that include these old-fashioned stereotypes?

After a few minutes of discussion, have students share some of their thoughts.

**STEP 2:** Tell students that some operagoers find the character of Senta to be old-fashioned; some even find Wagner's portrayal of *Der Fliegende Holländer's* female lead to be sexist. Let students know that in this activity, they will be asked to investigate these concerns by reading a variety of perspectives on Senta's character.

Begin by reviewing the plot of *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Distribute the synopsis and take turns reading it aloud; students might also find the *Who's Who* chart helpful.

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.b

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.



In 1907, Johanna Gadski (at right of picture) sang the role of Senta at the Met. A reviewer for the *San Francisco Call* wrote that "her conception of the romantic, dreaming maiden, who is possessed of a strange love for the Hollander, who is but a myth or a fear to her youthful companions, is full of poetry and tenderness."

MET ARCHIVES

**FUN FACT:** According to Wagner’s memoirs, his decision to travel by ship to London rather than overland to Paris was due to the presence of an unusual traveling companion: his Newfoundland dog, Robber. Wagner reasoned that it would be easy to travel with Robber on a ship, while transporting him by carriage would have been almost impossible. Nevertheless, Robber’s presence on the boat was not without its complications. During the voyage both Richard and Minna suffered severe sea sickness and spent a good deal of time sleeping in the captain’s berth, where Robber watched over them carefully. Unfortunately, the cask containing the ship’s brandy was stored under the very berth where the Wagners slept, and Robber growled furiously at any sailor who attempted to approach the barrel.

As your students read, ask them to think about the following questions. You can also use these questions to spark a class-wide discussion after reading.

- What do you learn about Senta from this synopsis?
- What aspects of the plot (and the opera’s portrayal of Senta in particular) might operagoers consider to be old-fashioned or stereotyped?
- After reading the synopsis, what questions do you still have about who Senta is? Do you think the opera will answer them?

**STEP 3:** Now let’s listen to Senta herself. In a famous aria from *Der Fliegende Holländer*, often referred to as “Senta’s Ballad,” she explains her passion for the portrait of the Dutchman and tells the Dutchman’s story. The ballad is available as four tracks in the audio clips accompanying this guide: **Track 10** has the complete aria, while **Tracks 11 through 13** each include one stanza of the aria.

Play the stanzas one at a time. Before each stanza, ask students to quickly review the English translation. Play the stanza, then pause to ask students a few guiding questions (provided below) to ensure their understanding. Alternatively, you can play the entire ballad in a single listening, inviting students to think about the questions below as the music plays.

**STANZA 1:** What does the Flying Dutchman look like?

What does his ship look like?

**STANZA 2:** Why is the Flying Dutchman cursed?

What will it take to release him from his curse?

**STANZA 3:** Who does Senta think will save the Flying Dutchman?

After listening to Senta’s ballad, begin a broader class discussion about the opera’s story and Senta’s character. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- What if the painting were not a portrait, but simply a painting of a ship at sea? What if it were a photograph rather than a painting? What if Senta had read about the Flying Dutchman in a book and had never seen his picture? How would these changes affect your understanding of Senta’s obsession?
- When Daland brings the mysterious captain home, Senta immediately recognizes the Flying Dutchman. But do you think this stranger is necessarily the Flying Dutchman? How else might we explain Senta’s reaction to his arrival?
- What do Senta’s friends (the chorus in the recording) think of her obsession with the Flying Dutchman? Do you think they feel sorry for her? Do you think they feel sorry for him? Do you think they’re afraid? Why or why not?
- If you were to play the role of Senta, what emotions would you try to express? Fear? Excitement? Sadness? Joy? Other emotions? A mixture of the above? Why?

**STEP 4:** Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Each group will be assigned one of the three “Choose Your Own Adventure” libretto excerpts included in the reproducible handouts. Ensure that the three excerpts will be studied by an approximately equal number of groups and distribute the relevant handouts to each group. (Note that to facilitate this step, translations are in colloquial prose and do not precisely correspond to the line divisions of Wagner’s poetry.)

Explain that each excerpt focuses on a different scene from the opera involving Senta (either directly or indirectly) and point out that each excerpt ends with a question. In their groups, students will write and act out at least two different endings for the scene, thinking about different ways that the questions be could answered.


Audio excerpts corresponding to each of these scenes are available online or on the accompanying CD as **Tracks 14–16**. Listening to these selections is optional.

**STEP 5:** Have students begin working in groups on their Choose Your Own Adventure libretto excerpts. Students can use the work space on their reproducible handout to write their multiple scenes. Students should begin by choosing two members of the group (or rotating through the group) to read the scene aloud. Then, either in pairs within the group or as a full group, students will write two possible endings to the scene, retaining the libretto form and format. (Students may imagine musical settings of their new text as a bonus.) While circulating, ask students questions to deepen their thinking, including:

- Which possible ending for the scene is more satisfying to you as an audience member?
- Which possible ending for the scene is closest to the opera? Why do you think Wagner selected that plotline?
- Which possible ending do you think makes for a more dramatic opera? Is it the same ending that is most satisfying to you personally?

**STEP 6:** Each group (or selected groups, depending on time) will share *one* of their endings with the rest of the class. Begin with the Daland/Dutchman scene and ask students from each Daland/Dutchman group to present. Students should briefly remind their classmates how this scene ends in Wagner’s opera (they can refer back to the synopsis to do this); then, they should act out their new ending. Following the performance, have a brief full-class discussion about the possible endings, focused around the questions listed in Step 5. Repeat with the Dutchman/Senta scene and the Senta/Erik scene.

**STEP 7:** The final piece of this activity involves a series of excerpts from three sources: an essay from *Opera News* by Philip Kennicott about the character of Senta; an article



from the *New York Times* by Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, in which soprano Amber Wagner is interviewed about playing Senta at the Metropolitan Opera; and an essay by Richard Wagner with instructions on how to perform the role of Senta. Six excerpts are included in the reproducibles, but depending on the number of students in the class, fewer excerpts may be used.

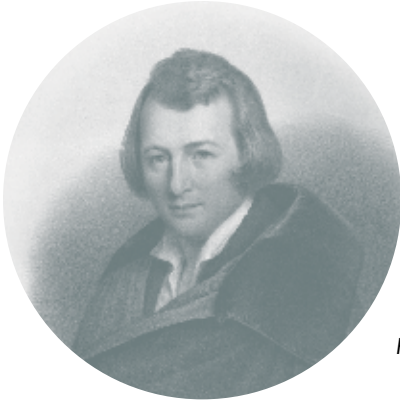
Hang labeled chart paper posters around the room (one poster for each excerpt included in the lesson) and provide a few Post-Its to each student. (Legal paper can be used instead of chart paper, if necessary.) Provide students with a packet of all included excerpts. Each group reads the assigned excerpt and all students write their thoughts—either their responses to one of the questions posed below each excerpt or their own interpretation or inquiries—on a Post-It, which they will then place on the corresponding chart paper. If time allows, students can move on to another excerpt, adding their ideas (on Post-Its) to the corresponding chart paper for each excerpt they read.

**STEP 8:** In the final minutes of the lesson, tell students to circulate throughout the room, reading the Post-It comments on each chart paper poster. Close with a final full-group share-out guided by the following questions:

- Which scene featuring Senta are you most curious about seeing in the Metropolitan Opera’s *Live in HD* screening? Why?
- If you were directing *Der Fliegende Holländer*, what choices might you make about Senta’s character?
- Do you think an actor (or opera singer) can change the way the audience understands a character that was written a long time ago? How can a performer do this?
- Philip Kennicott’s question: “How do contemporary listeners engage with an opera that seems to afford [Senta] so little dignity, so little agency, so little independence of mind and spirit?”

**FOLLOW-UP:** Senta’s friend Mary, who introduced her to the ballad of the Flying Dutchman, urges Senta to stop obsessing over the portrait of the doomed sailor. Students can imagine that they are Mary, making one last-ditch effort to save Senta. Students will write a letter from Mary to Senta laying out the arguments for why Senta might be making the wrong decision to dedicate herself to the fate of the Flying Dutchman. Students can think about the following as they consider what Mary’s arguments might be:

Love at first portrait-sight | Stranger danger | Reality vs. fantasy | Female agency



# Heinrich Heine Tells the Flying Dutchman's Story

*From the Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski, Chapter VII:*

You certainly know the story of the Flying Dutchman, the cursed ship that has sailed the seas since time immemorial. If another ship should cross its path, an envoy of the Flying Dutchman's ghostly crew will approach the ship and beg the unsuspecting sailors to deliver a packet of letters. These letters must then be nailed to the ship's mast, or disaster will strike—especially if there is no bible on board or if no horseshoe is attached to the main mast. The letters are always addressed to unknown people or people who have long been dead: Someone might suddenly receive a love letter addressed to their great-grandmother, who has lain in her grave for a hundred years. This terrifying ship—this wooden ghost—takes its name from its captain, a Dutchman who once, in the midst of a violent storm, swore to the devil that he would sail around a cape (the name of which now escapes me) even if it took until Judgment Day. The devil took him at his word, and the Dutchman must now wander the sea forever—or until true love delivers him from this fate. The foolish devil, believing that no such love exists, allows the captain to set foot on land once every seven years in search of a wife. But the poor Dutchman! He has more than once found a woman and married her, only to find himself begging to be saved from this new, domestic purgatory and returned to his ship!

It was on this fable that the play I saw in Amsterdam was based. Seven years have once again passed, and the poor Dutchman, more exhausted than ever by his endless wandering, comes ashore, makes friends with a Scottish merchant, sells the merchant some diamonds for a pittance, and when he hears that his customer has a beautiful daughter, asks for her hand in marriage. This trade, too, is completed. Now we see the Scottish merchant's house; the maiden waits for her groom with an apprehensive heart. She casts wistful glances at a large, weathered painting hanging in the parlor, which depicts a handsome man in Spanish-Dutch dress. It is an old heirloom, and according to her grandmother, it is a perfect likeness of the Flying Dutchman as he appeared in Scotland a hundred years earlier, during the time of King William of Orange. But a warning has been passed down along with the painting: that the women of the family should avoid its subject. It is for this reason that the young woman has, ever since she was a child, learned the dangerous man's features by heart. So when the real Flying Dutchman enters the room in the flesh, the young woman is startled—but not afraid.

Even the Dutchman is affected when he looks at the portrait. Someone explains to him whom the painting portrays, and—knowing how to avoid arousing suspicion—he laughs over this superstition. He scoffs at the Flying Dutchman, consigned to wander the ocean forever. Yet his voice takes on an unintentionally pained tone as he begins to describe the unimaginable sorrows this sailor must experience on the vast, empty expanses of the sea: how his body is nothing more than a coffin for his bored soul; how life pushes him away while death rejects him. Like an empty barrel tossed back and forth by the jeering waves, the poor Dutchman is caught between life and death, wanted by neither, rejected by both. His pain is as deep as the sea on which he sails. His ship is without anchor, and his heart is without hope.

I believe these were more or less the words that the "bridegroom" spoke. The bride watches him seriously and occasionally glances at his portrait. It is as though she has guessed his secret, and when he asks, "Katharina, will you be true to me?" she answers decisively: "Yes—through death and beyond."

*[At this point, the narrator leaves the theater for a romantic dalliance.]*

When I once again returned to the theater, I arrived during the last scene of the play. The wife of the Flying Dutchman—Mrs. Flying Dutchman, if you will—stands on a cliff high above the sea and wrings her hands in torment, while out at sea, her unfortunate spouse can be seen on the deck of his ghostly ship. He loves her and wants to leave her (to avoid dragging her into his damnation), and he admits to her the tragic fate and terrifying curse that are his lot. But she cries out: "I was true to you until this hour, and I know how to ensure I'll be true to you forever!"

With these words, the faithful young woman throws herself into the water far below. The curse of the Flying Dutchman is lifted; he is saved. And we see the ghostly ship sink into the abyss of the sea.

The moral of this story is that women should be careful to avoid marrying a Flying Dutchman. And we men should learn from it how women will (in the best of cases) ruin us all.

Translated by Kamala Schelling. German source: Heinrich Heine, "Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Gustav Karpeles (Berlin: G. Grote'sche, 1887), 4:291–95.

## A Man, A Plan, An Operatic Extravaganza: Wagner’s “Total Art Work”

Creating an opera is typically thought of as a collaborative art. A poet or playwright crafts a libretto from an original or pre-existing story, and then a composer sets these words to music. A director oversees the stage action, and costume and set designers figure out what the production will look like.

Richard Wagner, however, had a different idea. Early in his career, he began to imagine a new style of opera, one in which a single creator would provide the story, the libretto, and the music. He called the resulting opera a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“geh-ZAHMT-koonst-vehrk”), or “total art work,” because of the apparent artistic unity (or “totality”) of the final product. Wagner’s earliest operas (including *Der Fliegende Holländer*) featured original librettos as well as music, but by the end of the 1840s he had expanded his conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to incorporate far more than just words and music. In his seminal essays “The Artwork of the Future” (1849) and “Opera and Drama” (1850–51), Wagner suggested that not only music and poetry but also dance (or more generally, gesture and movement) and architecture, painting, and sculpture (i.e., stage design) should be conceptualized together. This way, he believed, no single element would stand out from the others, and the audience would be able to focus entirely on the story without getting distracted by the opera’s component parts.

The most famous example of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* is his four-part opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Envisioning the *Ring* as the ultimate embodiment of his operatic ideals, Wagner

designed a new opera house near the German town of Bayreuth (“BYE-royt”) for the work’s premiere. This theater, Wagner hoped, would enable the special effects he imagined for his opera, such as steam rising from the stage floor; it would also force the audience to watch the opera in a specific way. Every seat in the Bayreuth Festival Theater faced forward and offered an unobstructed view of the stage. When the opera began, the audience lights were darkened to help viewers focus on the performance. Wagner even helped direct and design the stage sets. To put Wagner’s achievement into perspective, imagine that Peter Jackson not only produced and directed *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* but also came up



An engraving of a 19th-century production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* on the London stage

with the stories, wrote the screenplays, helped design costumes and scout locations, developed the special effects, and designed a movie theater specifically for the films’ premieres.

Yet even in Wagner’s other works, the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* looms large. In an excerpt from Wagner’s own writings produced elsewhere in this guide, “Remarks on the Performance of *Der Fliegende Holländer*,” he carefully demonstrates how the many elements of *Der Fliegende Holländer*—story, poetry, music, movement, and stage design—should work together, each piece contributing to a unified, “total” whole.



# Ten Essential Musical Terms

**Ballad** A type of song, often associated with folk music, that tells a story. Ballads typically feature a “strophic” structure (i.e., the same melody is sung over and over with changing text) and predominantly syllabic melodies. In addition, ballads are usually sung by a solo performer, even though the text might include quoted speech as well as descriptions of actions and events. Examples of ballads in the Anglophone tradition include “Oh My Darling, Clementine,” “Streets of Laredo,” and “Barbara Allen.”

**Chorus** A group of performers singing together with multiple voices per part. In opera, a composer may use a chorus to represent large groups of characters, such as townspeople or guests at a party. Music for a chorus can range from simple unison melodies to complex, multi-part singing with a high degree of rhythmic and melodic independence.

**Dynamics** The relative intensity in the volume of a musical sound. When indicated in a score, dynamics are communicated by a set of standard Italian terms and symbols: *f* for forte, *p* for piano, *mf* for mezzo-forte, and so on. The concept of dynamics comprises not only the degree of loudness but also the movement between different dynamic levels. For instance, crescendo (related to the English word “increase”) means “growing louder,” while diminuendo (from the same root as the English word “diminish”) means “growing softer.”

**Leitmotif** Literally “leading theme” in German, a leitmotif is a recurring musical motto that represents a person, place, emotion, idea, object, or any other element in a musical or dramatic work. The use of leitmotifs helps give structural unity to a composition, and leitmotifs may be combined to form a dense web of thematic material. The idea originated in the mid-19th century and is especially associated with the work of Richard Wagner.

**Gesamtkunstwerk** A German word meaning “total art work,” typically used to describe an opera in which the various components—words, music, story, stage design, etc.—are created together. Although not originally coined by Wagner, the term has come to be closely associated with his operas, and Wagner theorized the term extensively in his essays “The Artwork of the Future” (1849) and “Opera and Drama” (1850–51). Wagner admitted that a *Gesamtkunstwerk* could be created by several artists working together, but he preferred to ensure his own work’s “totality” by crafting all parts himself, writing both the words and music for his operas and sometimes even directing and designing productions. Today, the term can be used to theorize other kinds of performing arts that feature numerous inextricable elements; if none of these elements (which may include visual, sonic, or other kinds of media) can be removed without destroying the integrity of the work, scholars may refer to the piece as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

**Major and Minor** Western music written since around 1600 has utilized two main strategies for organizing pitches. “Major” music is based on a scale consisting of primarily whole steps but with half steps between scale degrees 3 and 4 and between scale degrees 7 and 1. “Minor” music, by contrast, is based on a scale with half steps between scale degrees 2 and 3 and between scale degrees 5 and 6. Music composed in a major key typically sounds bright, cheery, or optimistic, while pieces in a minor key may sound somber, sinister, or plaintive.

**Orchestration** An aspect of composition, orchestration is the art of choosing which instruments should play each part of a musical work. Successful orchestration requires both practical considerations (for instance, that a given melody is within an instrument’s range) and more creative elements (for instance, whether an instrument’s unique timbre is suited to the emotions or ideas that a melody needs to express).

**Overture** An instrumental piece that occurs before an opera’s first act and serves as an introduction to an opera. Overtures set the mood for the opera and often feature the opera’s main musical themes. Most overtures last only a few minutes, but the overture to *Der Fliegende Holländer* clocks in at a whopping 11 minutes in length. In fact, in the years following *Der Fliegende Holländer*’s premiere, the overture was often performed in orchestral concerts as a stand-alone work, and Wagner even published an essay to help listeners understand how the overture’s music reflected the story of the Flying Dutchman and his desperate search for a bride.

**Tempo** Literally meaning “time” in Italian, the word “tempo” refers to the speed of a piece of music. It is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed but also carry associations of gesture and character. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to speed up or slow down.

**Program Music** Music that relates a story through musical sounds alone. It is important to note that program music does not have words; instead, the music itself is supposed to evoke the ideas and images of the story. Examples of program music include Paul Dukas’s *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* and Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*. By contrast, music that does not tell a story is called “absolute music.” Most symphonies and sonatas are examples of absolute music, although Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, often called the “Pastoral Symphony” in reference to its scenes of springtime parties and storms, is a notable exception. In the 19th century, a schism developed in German musical circles between those who believed that absolute music was superior and those who preferred program music, a camp that included Wagner’s friend and supporter (and later father-in-law) Franz Liszt.

## Supporting the Student Experience during the *Live in HD* Transmission

### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the Performance Activity reproducible handouts found at the back of this guide.

### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER*

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.d

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Watching and listening to a live performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. These performance activities are designed to help students analyze different aspects of this experience while engaging critically with the performance. Each performance activity incorporates a reproducible sheet; students should bring these activity sheets to the *Live in HD* transmission and fill them out during intermission and/or after the final curtain.

For *Der Fliegende Holländer*, the first activity sheet, “Painting a Picture with ...,” invites students to think deeply about how words, images, and music can all tell stories. Before the opera begins, tell students that they will have to draw a portrait of one of the opera’s characters. As they watch the opera, they will need to watch and listen for descriptions of what this character looks like. They should pay close attention not only to the costumes but also to the words (is the character ever described by someone else onstage?) and the music (does the music offer any additional insight into the character?). Students should note these observations on their reproducible handout; then, after the opera, they should draw a portrait of the character based on these observations. Finally, students should share their portrait (and the evidence that led them to craft the portrait this way) with the class.

The second activity sheet is called “Opera Review: *Der Fliegende Holländer*,” and it includes a scene-by-scene rating system to help students keep track of the opera’s story and develop their own opinions about what they see and hear. This activity is the same for each opera, and it is intended to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations while enriching their understanding of the art form as a whole.

The performance activity reproducible handouts can be found at the back of this guide. On the next page, you’ll find a follow-up activity created specifically for reviewing the *Live in HD* performance of *Der Fliegende Holländer*. This activity is intended to inspire careful, critical thinking about what students have seen and heard while also inspiring students to engage in further discussion and study.

### These Are a Few of My Favorite Themes

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they like? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? This discussion should be an opportunity for students to review their performance activity sheets and express their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production, the singers' performances, and *Der Fliegende Holländer's* music and story.

*Der Fliegende Holländer* may be a ghost story, but the themes running through the opera are all deeply human. The need to love and be loved, the longing for a community, the loneliness of being an outsider: These themes flow like a swift current through numerous works of literature and art.

The final activity in this guide, "These Are a Few of My Favorite Themes," will create a space for your students to both deepen and broaden their thinking about *Der Fliegende Holländer's* story and themes. Begin by dividing



Senta encounters the Dutchman.  
An engraving of a 19th-century staging in Paris.

your class into groups of three to four students and assign each group one of the themes listed below; you may wish to write the themes on pieces of paper ahead of time and have each group draw a piece of paper from a bowl or hat. (Alternatively, you can invite students to come up with their own list of themes.) Each group should discuss why this theme is important in *Der*

#### IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attending the *Live in HD* transmission of *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To review students' understanding of Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*
- To deepen students' thinking about the opera's themes
- To broaden students' awareness of how these themes are explored in other stories and media
- To foster students' communication skills and encourage their creative responses to the *Live in HD* experience

#### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER*

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.c

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

*Fliegende Holländer*, as well as which parts of the opera represent Wagner's treatment of this theme.

- A story in which someone must choose between a fantasy world and reality
- A story in which someone has to choose between two people they love
- A story in which someone can save someone else by promising to love them forever
- A story in which someone tells a story and nobody else believes them
- A story in which someone is called “crazy” even though they really aren't

Next, ask students to identify another story they know that involves the same theme. Students may choose a story from any medium: novels, movies or TV shows, comic books or graphic novels, podcasts, video games, etc. Moreover, while the selected story may be a fairy tale or some other story involving magic, students are by no means required to stick to “magical” stories. Once students have selected a story, they should compare this chosen story to *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Do the two stories treat this theme the same way? Why or why not? Finally, ask each group to share their story and a few of their observations with the class. How many different stories did the class identify?

**Excerpts taken from the  
Metropolitan Opera broadcast of  
December 16, 2000**

**THE DUTCHMAN**

James Morris

**SENTA**

Nina Stemme

**DALAND**

Jan-Hendrik Rootering

**ERIK**

Roland Wagenführer

Conducted by

Valery Gergiev

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra  
and Chorus

- 1 Leitmotif 1: Senta's Theme, Overture (excerpt)
- 2 Leitmotif 2: Sailors' Theme, Overture (excerpt)
- 3 Leitmotif 3: The Flying Dutchman's Theme, Overture (excerpt)
- 4 Overture (complete)
- 5 The Flying Dutchman's Act I Monologue (excerpt):  
The Flying Dutchman's Theme (Leitmotif 3)
- 6 The Flying Dutchman's Act I Entrance (excerpt):  
The Flying Dutchman's Theme (Leitmotif 3)
- 7 Senta's Ballad (excerpt): The Flying Dutchman's Theme (Leitmotif 3)
- 8 Sailors' Act III Chorus (excerpt): Sailors' Theme (Leitmotif 2)
- 9 Senta's Ballad (excerpt): Senta's Theme (Leitmotif 1)
- 10 Senta's Ballad (complete)
- 11 Senta's Ballad, Stanza 1
- 12 Senta's Ballad, Stanza 2
- 13 Senta's Ballad, Stanza 3
- 14 The Dutchman and Daland strike a bargain
- 15 Senta meets the Dutchman
- 16 Erik confronts Senta



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Beginning to See the Leit

Leitmotif Listener Packet: *Illustrator*

**CIRCLE ONE:**

LEITMOTIF 1

LEITMOTIF 2

LEITMOTIF 3







## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Senta of Attention

#### Senta's Ballad

##### I.

**SENTA:** Traft ihr das Schiff im Meere an,  
blutrot die Segel, schwarz der Mast?  
Auf hohem Bord der bleiche Mann,  
des Schiffes Herr, wacht ohne Rast.  
Hui! – Wie saust der Wind! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Wie pfeift's im Tau! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Wie ein Pfeil fliegt er hin,  
ohne Ziel, ohne Rast, ohne Ruh'!  
Doch kann dem bleichen Manne  
Erlösung einstens noch werden,  
fänd' er ein Weib, das bis in den Tod  
getreu ihm auf Erden!  
Ach! wann wirst du, bleicher Seemann, sie finden?  
Betet zum Himmel, dass bald ein Weib  
Treue ihm halt'!

Have you ever encountered the ship on the sea  
with the blood-red sails and black mast?  
High up on deck, a pale man—  
the ship's captain—watches without rest.  
Hui! – How the wind screams! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – How it whistles in the rigging! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – He flies forth on the sea like an arrow,  
without a destination, without rest, without peace!  
Salvation can only come  
to the pale man  
if he finds a woman who will remain true  
to him even unto death!  
Oh! When will you, pale sailor, find her?  
Pray to heaven, my friends, that he'll soon find a woman  
who will remain forever true!

##### II.

**SENTA:** Bei bösem Wind und Sturmes wut  
umsegeln wollt' er einst ein Kap;  
er flucht' und schwur mit tollem Mut:  
In Ewigkeit lass' ich nicht ab!  
Hui! – Und Satan hört's! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Nahm ihm bei'm Wort! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Und verdammt zieht er nun  
durch das Meer ohne Rast, ohne Ruh'!  
Doch, dass der arme Mann  
noch Erlösung fände auf Erden,  
zeigt' Gottes Engel an,  
wie sein Heil ihm einst könnte werden.  
Ach, könntest du, bleicher Seemann, es finden?  
Betet zum Himmel, dass bald ein Weib  
Treue ihm halt'!

Through wicked wind and the wrath of storms  
he once wanted to sail 'round a cape;  
he cursed and swore with great confidence:  
I'll sail 'til Judgment Day if I must!  
Hui! – And Satan heard – Yohohe!  
Hui! – And took the sailor at his word! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – And now he must sail forever,  
through the sea, without rest, without peace!  
But in order that the poor man  
might still find salvation on earth,  
one of god's angels showed him  
how he could be saved.  
Oh! Can you, pale sailor, find it?  
Pray to heaven, my friends, that he'll soon find a woman  
who will remain forever true!

Her friends are deeply affected by this story, and they sing the final rhyme softly with her.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

III.

**SENTA:** Vor Anker alle sieben Jahr',  
ein Weib zu frei'n, geht er ans Land:  
er freite alle sieben Jahr',  
noch nie ein treues Weib er fand.  
Hui! – Die Segel auf! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Den Anker los! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Falsche Lieb', falsche Treu',  
Auf, in See, ohne Rast, ohne Ruh!

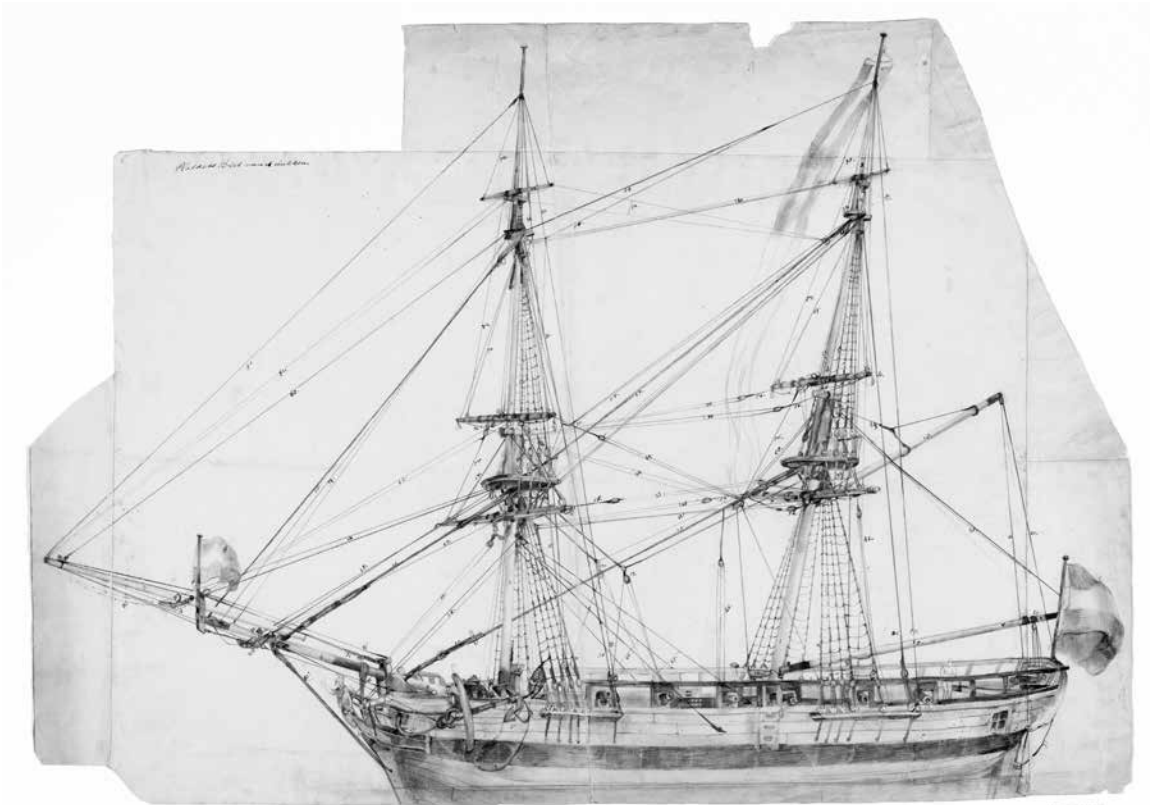
**YOUNG WOMEN:** Ach, wo weilt sie,  
die dir Gottes Engel einst könnte zeigen?  
Wo triffst du sie,  
die bis in den Tod dein bliebe treu eigen?

**SENTA:** Ich sei's, die dich durch ihre Treu' erlöse!  
Mög' Gottes Engel mich dir zeigen!  
Durch mich sollst du das Heil erreichen!

Every seven years he drops anchor and goes on land  
in the hopes of finding a woman.  
Every seven years he has courted women,  
but never has he found a woman who would remain true to him.  
Hui! – Hoist the sails! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – Raise the anchor! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – False love, false fidelity,  
and now it's back to the sea, without rest, without peace.

Oh! Where is she waiting,  
the woman god's angel could show you?  
Where will you meet her,  
the woman who would remain true to you even unto death?

I am she! I am the woman whose faithfulness will save you!  
May god's angel reveal me to you!  
I will be your salvation!



Willem Anthonie van Deventer. 1834–1893  
Two-masted schooner.  
Drawing.

RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

Choose Your Own Adventure #1: The Dutchman and Daland

Read this scene from Act I of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, in which the Dutchman asks Captain Daland whether he has a daughter. This excerpt stops before the end. Write and act out two different endings for the scene. (Bonus points for singing—this is an opera, after all!) Think about which version of the scene you like better and which version is most dramatic.

**THE DUTCHMAN:** (*introducing himself to Daland*)

Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen,  
irr' auf den Wassern ich umher;  
wie lange? weiss ich kaum zu sagen,  
schon zähl' ich nicht die Jahre mehr.  
Unmöglich dünkt mich, dass ich nenne  
die Länder alle, die ich fand—  
das Eine nur, nach dem ich brenne,  
ich find' es nicht: mein Heimatland!  
Vergönne mir auf kurze Frist dein Haus,  
und deine Freundschaft soll dich nicht gereun!  
Mit Schätzen aller Gegenden und Zonen  
ist reich mein Schiff beladen; willst du handeln,  
so sollst du sicher deines Vorteils sein.

**DALAND:** Wie wunderbar! Soll deinem Wort ich glauben?  
Ein Unstern, scheint's, hat dich bis jetzt verfolgt.  
Um dir zu frommen, biet ich, was ich kann ...  
doch darf ich fragen ... was dein Schiff enthält?

Through good weather and bad, through storms  
and rough winds, I have sailed the seas.  
How long has it been? I don't know—  
I no longer count the years.  
I think it would be impossible to list  
all the places I've been.  
And yet the one place I long to go is the one  
I can never reach again: my homeland.  
Give me, for a little while, a place to stay.  
I promise you won't regret this kindness.  
My ship is full of treasures from every  
corner of the earth, and if you do what I ask,  
I promise you'll be well paid.

How remarkable! Should I believe you?  
It looks like you've suffered greatly,  
I'll do what I can to help you, but ...  
may I ask ... what about these treasures?

The Dutchman gives his crew a sign, at which they bring a large chest from the ship to the land.

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Die seltensten der Schätze sollst du seh'n;  
kostbare Perlen, edelstes Gestein.  
Blick hin, und überzeuge dich vom Werte  
des Preises, den ich für ein gastlich Dach  
dir biete!

**DALAND:** Wie? Ist's möglich? Diese Schätze!  
Wer ist so reich, den Preis dafür zu bieten?

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Den Preis? Soeben hab ich ihn genannt:  
dies für das Obdach einer einz'gen Nacht!  
Doch, was du siehst, ist nur der kleinste Teil  
von dem, was meines Schiffes Raum verschliesst.  
Was frommt der Schatz? Ich habe weder Weib noch Kind,  
und meine Heimat find' ich nie!  
All meinen Reichtum biet ich dir, wenn bei  
den Deinen du mir neue Heimat gibst.

**DALAND:** Was muss ich hören!

This ship contains the rarest of treasures:  
priceless pearls, the most perfect gems.  
Look here, and you'll soon be convinced of their value.  
And I'm offering you all this in exchange for a simple  
place to stay.

Really? Is it possible? All this treasure!  
Who could possibly afford to buy all this?

I've already told you the treasure's price:  
a place to stay for a single night.  
What you see is only the smallest part  
of what my ship contains.  
And besides, what is money worth? I have neither wife nor  
child, and I can never return home.  
I offer you all of my wealth, if only  
you'll give me a new place to call home.

What do I hear!



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

Choose Your Own Adventure #2: Senta and The Dutchman

Read this scene from Act II of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, in which the Dutchman asks Senta to marry him. This excerpt stops before the end. Write and act out two different endings for the scene. (Bonus points for singing—this is an opera, after all!) Think about which version of the scene you like better and which version is most dramatic.

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Wie aus der Ferne längst vergang'ner Zeiten  
spricht dieses Mädchens Bild zu mir:  
wie ich's geträumt seit bangen Ewigkeiten,  
vor meinen Augen seh' ich's hier.  
Wohl hub auch ich voll Sehnsucht meine Blicke  
aus tiefer Nacht empor zu einem Weib:  
ein schlagend' Herz liess, ach! mir Satans Tücke,  
dass eingedenk ich meiner Qualen bleib'.  
Die düstre Glut, die hier ich fühle brennen,  
sollt' ich Unseliger sie Liebe nennen?  
Ach nein! Die Sehnsucht ist es nach dem Heil:  
würd es durch solchen Engel mir zuteil!

**SENTA:** Versank ich jetzt in wunderbares Träumen?  
Was ich erblicke, ist's ein Wahn?  
Weilt' ich bisher in trügerischen Räumen,  
brach des Erwachens Tag heut' an?  
Er steht vor mir, mit leidenvollen Zügen,  
es spricht sein unerhörter Gram zu mir:  
kann tiefen Mitleids Stimme mich belügen?  
Wie ich ihn oft gesehn, so steht er hier.  
Die Schmerzen, die in meinem Busen brennen,  
ach', dies Verlangen, wie soll ich es nennen?  
Wonach mit Sehnsucht es dich treibt—das Heil,  
würd' es, du Ärmster, dir durch mich zuteil!

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Wirst du des Vaters Wahl nicht schelten?  
Was er versprach, wie—dürft' es gelten?  
Du könntest dich für ewig mir ergeben,  
und deine Hand dem Fremdling reichtest du?  
Soll finden ich, nach qualenvollen Leben,  
in deiner Treu' die langersehnte Ruh'?

When I look at this young woman, I feel like  
I've waited for her forever.  
What I've dreamed of for eons is suddenly here,  
in real life, right in front of my eyes.  
In the darkest nights, full of desperate longing,  
I'd often raise my eyes to see a woman standing before me—  
but it was never anything more than a devilish trick,  
a dream brought about by my torment and loneliness.  
The faint spark that I suddenly feel glowing within me—  
is this what they call love?  
No, it cannot be! This is nothing more than longing for the  
salvation that a woman like this could perhaps offer me.

Am I dreaming?  
Is this just my imagination?  
Until now, I've lived in a world of illusions and dreams;  
perhaps dawn is breaking and I'm finally waking up?  
He stands before me, his face full of pain.  
He speaks to me of his unthinkable sorrow.  
Could a voice so full of feeling tell a lie?  
And now he's standing in front of me,  
the man from my dreams. The pain I feel burning in my chest,  
this longing, what should I call it?  
Oh, my desperate man, it is  
the salvation that I will offer you!

Will you accept your father's choice?  
What he promised me—will it happen?  
Would you really agree to marry a stranger,  
promise to be mine forever?  
Can I hope to find in your faithfulness, after a life so filled with  
sorrow, the peace I've dreamed of for so long?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

Choose Your Own Adventure #3: Senta and Erik

Read this scene from Act III of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, in which Erik begs Senta to stay with him. This excerpt stops before the end. Write and act out at least two different endings for the scene. (Bonus points for singing—this is an opera, after all!) Think about which version of the scene you like better and which version is most dramatic.

**ERIK:** Was mußst' ich hören? Gott, was muss ich sehen?  
Ist's Täuschung? Wahrheit? Ist es Tat?

What do I hear? What do I see? Am I imagining things?  
Is it real? Is this really happening?

**SENTA:** O frage nicht! Antwort darf ich nicht geben.

Don't ask! I can't give you an answer.

**ERIK:** Gerechter Gott! Kein Zweifel! Es ist wahr!  
Welch' unheilvolle Macht riss dich dahin?  
Welche Gewalt verfuehrte dich so schnell,  
grausam zu brechen dieses treuste Herz!  
Dein Vater—ha—den Bräut'gam bracht' er mit ...  
Wohl kenn' ich ihn, mir ahnte, was geschieht!  
Doch du ... ist's möglich? ... reichest deine Hand  
dem Mann, der deine Schwelle kaum betrat.

Oh, god! There's no doubt: It's true!  
What unholy power is pulling you away?  
What power has you so completely in its thrall that you would  
break this—my!—heart that loves you so completely?  
Your father brought this bridegroom with him ...  
I saw it in my dream, I knew what would happen!  
But you ... is it possible? ... you promise yourself to  
this man who has only just crossed the threshold of your home.

**SENTA:** Nicht wieter! Schweig'! Ich muss! Ich muss!

Not another word! I must go with him, I must!

**ERIK:** O des Gehorsams, blind wie deine Tat!  
Den Wink des Vaters nanntest du willkommen,  
mit einem Stoss vernichtest du mein Herz!

Oh, you are as blindly obedient as you are blind to what  
you are doing! You do this out of love for your father,  
while breaking my heart, which loves you so dearly!

**SENTA:** Nicht mehr! nicht mehr! Ich darf dich nicht mehr seh'n,  
nicht an dich denken—  
hohe Pflicht gebeut's!

No more! No more! I can't see you anymore,  
I can't think of you anymore—I made a promise,  
I must do what I said!

**ERIK:** Welch hohe Pflicht? Ist's höh're nich zu halten,  
was du mir einst gelobtest, ewige Treue?

What promise? Do you no longer feel any of that love you once  
promised me?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

Senta and Erik Version #1

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Senta and Erik Version #2

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

EXCERPT 1: It's easy to agree with Erik, her jilted lover, who can't comprehend how a young woman can fall in love with a picture and, in a matter of hours, commit herself to a man who is certainly sketchy and likely demonic: "But you—is it possible—offer your hand to a man who has hardly crossed your threshold!" [It] feels today more like a schoolgirl crush on a celebrity, with fatal consequences.

- What is Kennicott's argument here about Senta's "schoolgirl crush"? Based on what you've read and seen, do you agree with Kennicott? Why or why not?
- According to Kennicott, how does Wagner's music support Kennicott's argument that Senta might not fully understand what she's doing?

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

EXCERPT 2: [With the first photographic cameras,] widely reproducible images soon made possible a new cult of celebrity, a new mythologizing of great men (and women) on a mass scale. In retrospect, Senta's obsession feels painfully adolescent [...] in a particularly modern way: She hasn't fallen in love with a legend or a narrative, and certainly not with a man, but with an image, a picture on the wall, like something in *TigerBeat* magazine.

- In this excerpt, Kennicott is describing how the composition of *Der Fliegende Holländer* corresponded with the invention of the first photographic cameras. Why does he bring this up? What does it have to do with Senta?
- Kennicott compares Senta's obsession with the Dutchman's portrait to a teenager in love with a magazine cutout. Can you think of other modern comparisons for Senta's feelings for the Dutchman?
- Do you think it's possible to fall in love with someone through a picture?

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

**EXCERPT 3:** Recent critics have also found in Senta far more substance than Wagner, at first, seems to allow her. The starting point for this act of redemption is Senta's ballad, which Wagner claimed (after the fact and somewhat self-servingly) was the genesis and germ of the entire work. The ballad is, in any case, a magnificent piece of music, in which Senta not only tells a story but commits herself to redeem a man she has never met. What some would call a crazy celebrity crush, others recognize as a powerful woman staking out her own sense of identity.

VOCABULARY: "genesis" = origin, "germ" = a tiny part of something capable of growing into a whole

- How might Senta's ballad show her to be creating her own identity?
- Do you think Senta's love for the Dutchman is a "crazy celebrity crush" or "a powerful woman staking out her own sense of identity"? Why?
- What does it mean to redeem someone?

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

**EXCERPT 4:** [Female opera characters like Senta] emerge from male fantasies and are punished horribly for embodying them. Yet they don't lack agency, and if sung by a great soprano, each seems much more the author of her own drama than the composer and librettist who supposedly "created" her.

- What do you think Kennicott means when he says that female opera characters like Senta "are punished horribly for embodying" male fantasies?
- How can a character be "more the author of her own drama" than the people who created her?
- Do you agree that a great performer can change the way an audience understands a character who was created a long time ago?

**SOURCE**

Philip Kennicott, "Senta's Choice," *Opera News*, April 2017,  
[https://www.operanews.com/Opera\\_News\\_Magazine/2017/4/Features/Senta\\_s\\_Choice.html](https://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2017/4/Features/Senta_s_Choice.html).

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

from *The New York Times*, “Operatic Codependency? We Put Wagner On the Couch,” by Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim

EXCERPT 5: Amber Wagner, the soprano who sings Senta at the Met, argues for her character’s clarity of intention. She said in an interview that while Senta may seem more passive than the warrior Brünnhilde [from Wagner’s opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung*], she understands that in choosing the Dutchman, she is choosing death. “She talks about her holy duties,” said Ms. Wagner—no relation, it should be said, to the composer. “She does say, ‘Here’s my hand, without regret, unto death.’” It’s her way of saying, ‘I understand the gravity of what I am doing.’”

- What is Amber Wagner arguing about Senta’s actions?
- Can a performer change the way the audience feels about a character who was created a long time ago?
- Do you agree with Amber Wagner’s arguments about Senta’s choice?

from “Remarks on the Performance of *Der Fliegende Holländer*,” by Richard Wagner

EXCERPT 6: It will be difficult to mess up Senta’s role. In fact, I want to give performers only one piece of advice: Make sure that her “dreamy” qualities don’t turn into a modern, sickly sort of sentimentality! To the contrary, Senta is a healthy young woman, and the main thing about her is that she is naïve. In fact, only a totally naïve young woman could come up with an obsession like saving the cursed captain: This explains her apparent craziness, which can happen only with truly naïve people. [...] It has been said that Norwegian women have such powerful feelings that their hearts sometimes suddenly stop beating [from sheer emotion] and they die. That’s what the pale Senta’s “craziness” should be like.

- What does the word “naïve” mean?
- Do you think it’s true that Norwegian women can die from their emotions? Why would Wagner mention this nationality in particular? Why might statements like this be problematic?
- Do you think Senta is “crazy”? Why or why not? Why might calling her “crazy” explain her behavior? Why might it discount her experiences?

## SOURCES

Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, “Operatic Codependency? We Put Wagner On the Couch,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/arts/music/dan-savage-wagner-the-flying-dutchman.html>.

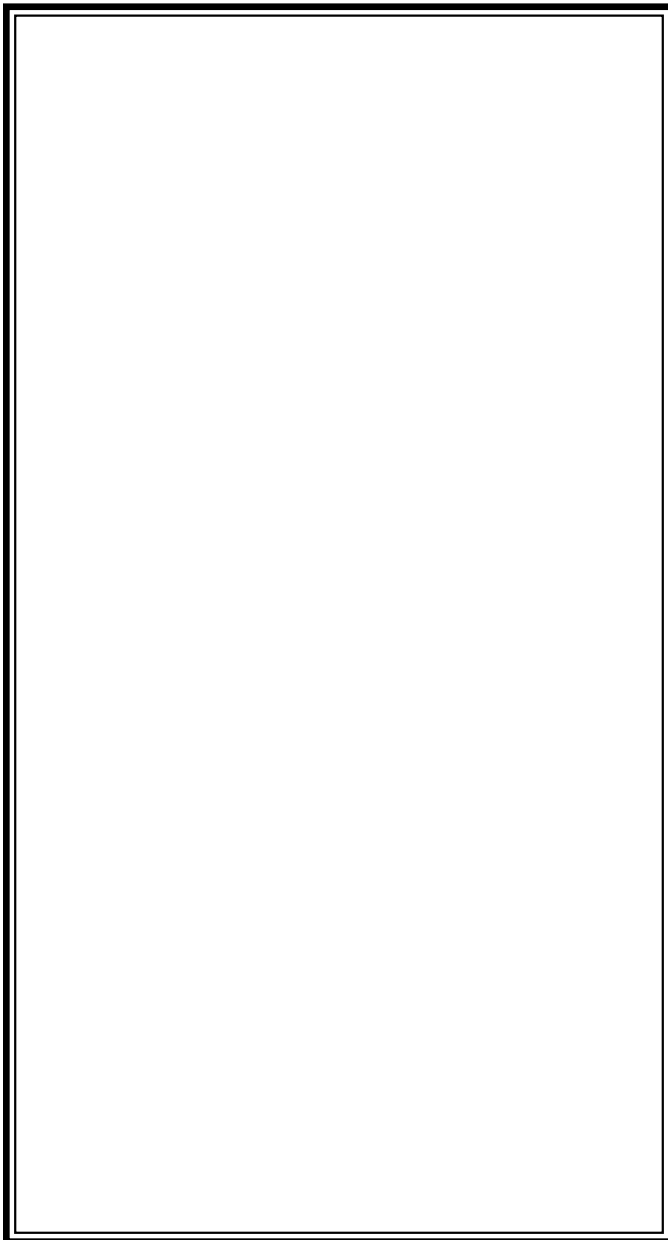
Richard Wagner, “Bemerkungen zur Aufführung der Oper *Der Fliegende Holländer*,” in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 2nd edition (Leipzig: E. W. Fritsch, 1888) 5:167–68. Translation by Kamala Schelling.

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

## Painting a Picture with ...

Have you ever heard the phrase “to paint a picture with words”? It might sound like a silly idea to craft an image with words, but in fact this phrase gets to the very heart of Wagner’s conception of opera. Wagner believed that opera was most compelling when images, words, and music all worked together to tell the story. In this activity, you will be invited to “paint a picture” of a character using images, words, and music from the opera.

When the opera begins, pick a character to track over the course of the performance. What does this character look like? How do other people describe them? What does the music tell you about the character? As you learn about the character, jot down a few ideas in each of the categories below. Then, after the opera, use your notes to draw a picture of this character. How does your portrait differ from what the character looked like onstage?



### Painting a Picture with ... *Images*

Something I saw:

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### Painting a Picture with ... *Words*

Something I read:

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### Painting a Picture with ... *Music*

Something I heard:

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Other observations:

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PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

## Opera Review: *Der Fliegende Holländer*

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Der Fliegende Holländer*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design, and rate each of the star singers. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about Wagner's opera and this performance at the Met!

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
Sir Bryn Terfel as the Dutchman	☆☆☆☆☆	
Anja Kampe as Senta	☆☆☆☆☆	
Franz-Josef Selig as Daland	☆☆☆☆☆	
Sergey Skorokhodov as Erik	☆☆☆☆☆	
Mihoko Fujimura as Mary	☆☆☆☆☆	
David Portillo as the Steersman	☆☆☆☆☆	
Conductor Valery Gergiev	☆☆☆☆☆	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
The overture MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Daland's ship is caught in a storm MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Steersman sings of his beloved MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Dutchman tells of his curse MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Dutchman strikes a bargain with Daland MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
The women of Sandwike wait for the merchants to return MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Senta tells her friends about the Flying Dutchman MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Erik confronts Senta about her obsession with the painting MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Daland introduces the Dutchman to Senta MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Dutchman sings to Senta MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Dutchman and Senta sing together MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The townspeople celebrate the return of Daland's ship MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The ghostly sailors of the Flying Dutchman break up the party MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Erik confronts Senta again MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The Dutchman reveals his identity MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Senta sacrifices herself for the Dutchman MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆