

OPERA AT RIDERWOOD
ENCORE OPERA NOTES
1:00 p.m.
October 2, 2026

DIE TOTE STADT

NEXT WEEK IN ENCORE
October 9, 2026
Der Rosenkavalier
Richard Strauss

Composer: Erich Wolfgang Korngold Libretto: Paul Schott
In German with Subtitles – 2 hours 25 minutes
Notes compiled by John Szabo

Opera at Riderwood's Octoberfest presents, for the first time, the haunting opera "Die Tote Stadt" (The Dead City) by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, one of the most influential pioneers in Hollywood film scores. This is a spellbinding tale of romance and love lost, combined with a series of hallucination sequences, resulting in an operatic thriller. A grieving widower withdraws to a melancholy town to dedicate his life to the worship of his deceased wife. But his routine is disturbed by a dancer who bears an eerie resemblance to his wife. Following its premiere in two cities, "The Dead City" became one of the most popular new works of the day.

Cast

Marietta – Angela Denoke,	Paul – Torsten Kerl,	Frank – Yuri Batukov,
Brigitta – Brigitta Svenden,	Juliette – Barbara Beier,	Lucienne – Julia Desch,
Victorin – Christian Baumgartel,	Fritz – Stephan Genz,	

Jan Latham-König conducts the Strasbourg Philharmonic & Chorus of the Opera National de Rhin in this 2001 production.

Synopsis

Act I

Paul's friend Frank is visiting the city after a long absence. Brigitta shows him the shrine that Paul has created, and he is unnerved as he has unexpectedly announced that the house should be unlocked and filled with roses. Paul returns home, insisting that Marie is alive. He excitedly tells Frank about a woman he has met who so closely resembles Marie that he believes she has been reincarnated. He has invited the woman Marietta to visit him at home. Despite Frank's warning him of the dangers of such fantasies, Paul remains convinced that his wife has returned to him. Marietta arrives at the house. She is a dancer with a visiting company who are performing

Meyerbeer's 'Robert le diable' at the local theatre. Paul places Marie's shawl around her shoulders, recreating without revealing why, a treasured photograph of his wife. He asks Marietta to sing a song about two lovers who will soon be parted by death, which Marie used to sing. On discovering a picture of Maria and realizing how similar they both look, Marietta is unnerved. She makes her excuses to leave, forgetting to take her umbrella.

Paul is torn between his loyalty to Marie and his fascination with Marietta.

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He begins to hallucinate and sees Marie alive again before his eyes. She urges him to admit that he is tempted by Marietta.

Act II

Paul's hallucinatory state continues.

He encounters strange visions from his subconscious, firstly Brigitta, who has left his service and joined a convent as a nun. She tells him she considers his taking up with Marietta a betrayal of Marie's memory, despite Paul's protests that he never broke faith with his late wife. Then a version of Frank appears and warns Paul that his attraction to Marietta is unhealthy, though it becomes clear that he himself is now a rival for her affections and keeps a token of her love.

Next, a gaggle of more Marietta admirers arrive, partying in advance of her expected arrival. This imaginary Marietta flirts with everyone but the seemingly invisible Paul, including Frank, whom she asks to sing a serenade. She then suggests they rehearse a scene from 'Robert le diable' in which a character called Hélène will be irresistibly played by Marietta. Her allure in this role drives Paul mad with jealousy and he forces the performance to stop. Marietta sends her friends away before she and Paul argue violently. She finally realizes that Paul's obsession with her is because of her resemblance to Marie and decides to confront the challenge of her dead rival, insisting that Paul should love her for herself. Paul imagines that he overcame his guilt at finding her so sexually attractive. His fantasy of Marietta intends to sever the dead Marie's hold over Paul, and he imagines them making love.

Act III

The following morning – Paul's fantasy continues.

After spending the night with Paul, Marietta directly confronts Marie. Paul hallucinates a religious procession passing by from the shrine: the prayers and music have awakened his remorse at betraying his wife. Increasingly exasperated by Paul's obsession with death and the past, Marietta starts to taunt him by dancing seductively while stroking the braid of Marie's hair. Paul is outraged by such desecration; he grabs the braid and strangles the imaginary Marietta with it.

Epilogue

Paul's fantasy ends, and the scene reverts to just moments after the real Marietta's first visit to Paul's house. Her lifeless body is nowhere to be seen, and the precious braid of Marie's hair remains untouched. He realizes it was all a hallucination – everything is as it was.

Brigitta announces Marietta's return: she has forgotten her umbrella and flowers and comes back to collect them. Frank returns, and Paul tells him that he will not see Marietta again. When Frank declares that he is leaving the city, Paul decides to do likewise. The power that Marie's memory exerted over him has been broken and he can pick up his life again – forever changed by grief and loss.

NEXT WEEK



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