

Die Tote Stadt

Opera in Three Acts by Erich Korngold (1897-1957)

First performed 1920

Libretto by Paul Schott

(a collective pseudonym for the composer and his father Julius)

based on the novel *Bruges-la-Morte* by Georges Rodenbach

Characters

Paul		Tenor
Marietta, a dancer	}	Soprano
Marie, Paul's dead wife		
Frank, Paul's friend		Baritone
Brigitta, Paul's housekeeper		Alto
Juliette, a dancer	} members of Marietta's troupe	Soprano
Lucienne, a dancer		Mezzo-Soprano
Gaston, a dancer		Silent role*
Victorin, a stage- manager		Tenor
Fritz, a Pierrot		Baritone
Count Albert		Tenor

*Gaston has a few lines sung off-stage. These are usually taken by the singer of Victorin.

Synopsis

Act I

Brigitta, Paul's housekeeper, shows Frank, Paul's friend, the "Shrine from the Past," a room in which Paul keeps the portrait and mementos of his deceased wife, Marie. Paul enters, exclaiming that he has met a woman who uncannily resembles Marie and that he has invited her to visit him. This woman, Marietta, arrives. She is a dancer in a touring company that is visiting Bruges with the popular Meyerbeer opera, *Robert le diable*. Accompanying herself on the lute, she sings a nostalgic song and then performs a seductive dance. She accidentally dislodges a curtain, exposing Marie's portrait, and is startled by its resemblance to her. She then leaves for her rehearsal of *Robert le diable*. Paul is torn between his loyalty to Marie and his desire for Marietta. When Marie appears in a vision, Paul vows his fidelity. Marie bids him "look and understand." The apparition vanishes, replaced by an image of Marietta dancing.

Act II

Paul is spying outside Marietta's house, where he encounters Brigitta, who has left his service to become a nun, and then Frank, who has arrived for a tryst with Marietta. The two men jealously struggle, and Paul wrests from Frank the key Marietta gave him. Frank runs off. When members of Marietta's troupe appear in boats, Paul hides. Marietta is serenaded and then enters with the dancer Gaston. After Fritz, the troupe's Pierrot, sings a sentimental love song, Marietta proposes a toast and suggest an impromptu performance of *Robert le diable*. Portraying Helene, she rises from a mock bier and flirtatiously dances toward Gaston. Paul, outraged by this burlesque of resurrection, emerges to stop the proceedings. Marietta is left alone with Paul. Berating her, he reveals the reason for his bizarre attraction to her, and declares that he never loved her. Marietta, challenging her dead rival, seduces Paul. She insists they go to his house to banish the phantom forever.

Act III

The next morning, Paul finds Marietta in the "Shrine of the Past". She refuses to leave, for she wants to watch Bruges' annual religious procession from the window. Paul becomes engrossed in the ancient ceremony, finally falling to his knees in religious fervour. Marietta attempts to regain Paul's attention by again seducing him. Haunted by his guilty conscience, Paul imagines that the procession is menacingly entering the room. When Marietta ridicules his superstition and accuses him of hypocrisy, Paul orders her to leave. But Marietta again challenges Marie -- "life against death." She seizes Marie's golden braid and begins an alluring dance. Paul, furious, strangles her with the braid.

When light returns to the darkened room, Marietta's body is gone and the braid is untouched. Brigitta announces Marietta, who has returned because she forgot her parasol and roses, suggesting that this is an omen that she should stay. When Paul does not respond, Marietta exits. Frank enters, and Paul tells him he will never again see Marietta; a dream of reality has destroyed his dream of fantasy. Frank asks Paul to go with him, and Paul agrees to leave Bruges, "the dead city."

[Start Page](#) [Act 1](#) [Act 2](#) [Act 3](#) Synopsis