

Libretto to Mark Geiger's David and Bath-sheba, a mini-opera in three scenes.

(Loosely based on the biblical account in 2 Samuel 11, 12)

Queen Bath-sheba, soprano  
Rachel, daughter of Bath-sheba by Uriah, soprano  
King David, tenor  
Nathan the Prophet, baritone

-----SCENE 1 (The morning. David's palace. David and Bath-sheba are present. To the right is the balcony of SCENE 2)

B.-sh. The child lies in fever; he writhes; he cries out. I fear for his life, and he only a few weeks old!

Dav. The child shall live! Do not fear, my beloved!

I remember the first time I saw you. In my restlessness I trod the rooftops. You were bathing. I had never dreamt of such beauty.

(intermittently and alternately:)

I had never seen such beauty.

B.-sh. You had never seen [such] beauty.

Dav. & B.-sh.  
never seen.

(exit Bath-sheba)

Dav. My God, hear me, I beg You! It is already three long days the child's been deathly ill. We fear for his life, we fear so! Have mercy on the child! Lord, have mercy! He is so young! He's so young, just a newborn! Have mercy, Lord, please, on him!

Lord God, why do You turn from me, turn away Your face from me? It matters not. I was born to serve You, and I will die serving You! Whether or not You hear me, whether or not You bless me, You are and will be my God!

God, Who rescued our people from hard bondage in Egypt, Who made earth and sea, Who made sun and moon, great mounts, tall trees, swift birds, strong beasts, all!

I was born to serve You, and I will die serving You! Whether or not You hear me, whether or not You bless me, You are and will be my God!

(enter Bath-sheba)

B.-sh. Do not worry, my husband, you are a good man; you have done all that you could.

Dav. How is the child?

B.-sh. Not better. Do not worry, my husband, you are a good man; you have done all that you could. I love you.

Dav. And I love you! And you are right: all is in God's hands! God, Who rescued our people from hard bondage in Egypt, Who made earth and sea, Who made sun and moon, great mounts, tall trees, swift birds, strong beasts, all! You are right, Bath-sheba, you are right! I love you!

B.-sh. I remember the first time I met you. In your palace I felt small, alone. You were wanting. I had never dreamt of such glory.

(intermittently and alternately:)  
I had never seen such glory.

Dav. You had never seen [such] glory.

B.-sh. & Dav.

never seen!

Dav. When you came to me, I took you in my arms!

B.-sh. You took me in your arms! Then I stole a kiss!

Dav. Then you stole a kiss!

B.-sh. Then another kiss!

Dav. Then another kiss!

B.-sh. Then I gave you the rest!

Dav. Then you gave me the rest!

B.-sh. Then I gave you the rest!

(exit David. Enter Rachel, precipitously)

Rach. Mother!

B.-sh. Calm, child! What is it?

Rach. Just another dream, I guess. It was terrible!

B.-sh. Now it is over!

Rach. Yes. But waking is worse: he is gone! I miss him so! Mother!

B.-sh. Calm, my child! What is it?

Rach. The dream was back! It was terrible!

B.-sh. Now it is over!

Rach. Yes. But waking is worse: he is gone! I miss him so! He was a good father!

He is gone! I miss him so!

B.-sh. Of course you do! He was your father and a great and a brave warrior! He died at Rabah at the front of our line. I loved him too! You must put your memories aside; we must put our memories aside if we are to go on living! If we are to go on living? Sometimes life is hard! I know it well!

(intermittently and jointly, and alternately:)

Rach. I can't forget him!

B.-sh. Don't forget him! Keep his memory safe in your heart forever!

Rach. I'll keep his memory safe always! I'll keep it safe!

-----SCENE 2 (Midday. A balcony adjacent to the palace. Nathan is present (as well as musicians, dancers and onlookers off stage). Enter Rachel, accidentally bumping into Nathan)

Rach. Who are you?

Nath. I am, just, an old man. I often come here to see the dances. I know much about our people's sacred past. There you see the story of Moses. And who

are you?

Rach. I am, just, a girl. My mother is a wife of King David. I feel out of place over there in his big house, it's so quiet. So I came here to see what was happening.

Nath. Will you stay to see the dances? I would be glad to explain them to you.

Rach. I suppose I could. My mother did not forbid it.

(the last two, and the following two lines are sung jointly:)

You would be glad to explain them to me? I would be glad to stay and see them with you.

Nath. You suppose you could? Your mother did not forbid it? She did not forbid it!

(there follow five short dances:)

Rach. What does it mean?

Nath. Israel leaving Egypt with much spoils.

Rach. What does this mean?

Nath. God divides the waters.

Rach. What is this?

Nath. Moses climbs the Holy Mountain and receives the law.

Rach. And this?

Nath. The people transgress.

Rach. And this?

Nath. The wanderings for forty years of our people in the wilderness.

Rach. It's so sad! After all that he had done, Moses wasn't allowed to enter the promised land.

Nath. Yes, it's sad. But it was right. But God's will is always right.

Rach. Then why did He let my father die?!

Nath. I don't know, but,

Rach. Yes?

Nath. I don't know, but I know God's will is always right!

Rach. So you say!

Nath. I know God's will is always right!

Rach. You're so sure! How do you know?

Nath. Yes, it's sad, but it was right. But God's will is always right.

Rach. Then why did he let my father die?!

Nath. I don't know, but,

Rach. Yes?

Nath. I don't know, but I'll find out!

-----SCENE 3 (The evening. David's palace. David is

present. Enter Nathan)

Dav. What brings you, Nathan?

Nath. Judge this case for me! In a certain town there were two men, one rich, the other poor. The poor man had nothing but a ewe lamb. She shared what little food he had and slept in his bosom. Then the rich man had a visitor. So he took the poor man's ewe lamb to be a meal for him and his friend.

Dav. As the Lord lives the man who has done this merits death! He shall restore the ewe lamb fourfold because he has done this and had no mercy!

Nath. You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: you have cut down Uriah the Hittite, you've taken his wife as your own! I made you king of Israel, I rescued you from Saul! Why have you spurned Me?

(jointly:)

Therefore the child born to you must die!

Dav. I have sinned against the Lord!

I have sinned against the--

(enter Bath-sheba, still groggy (having been napping). Exit Nathan)

Dav. You heard?!

B.-sh. What did he mean by "you cut down Uriah"?

Dav. When you became with child by me I sent for Uriah. He came to me, but he wouldn't go home to you. He was a good soldier. So I sent him back to the battle with instructions to Joab that he see to it that Uriah be lost.

(intermittently and jointly:)

Listen to me, Bath-sheba!

B.-sh. I can't believe that you cut down Uriah!

(exit David)

Uriah, if you hear me, know that you were betrayed!

And know, Uriah, you will be avenged! Vengeance will come home to the traitor! You'll see him pay!

(enter David)

Dav. The child is gone. I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.

B.-sh. He is gone! My child is gone! Where is my hate? It is gone.

I remember the first time. Never seen! The first time I met you. Glory?  
I remember the first time, the first time I met you.

B.-sh. & Dav.  
Never seen!