

Akhnaten Libretto

ACT I

(Year 1 of Akhnaten's Reign
Thebes.

The opera begins with an orchestral Prelude.
The curtain rises towards the end of the Prelude,
revealing the Scribe in the funeral setting. He
delivers the Refrain, Verse 1 and Verse 2 of the text
as the Prelude is completed. In the moments of silence
before the funeral begins, he continues his speech
through Verse 3)

Prelude

(Text: Recited by the Scribe from the Pyramid Texts
of the Old Kingdom)

SCRIBE

Refrain

Open are the double doors of the horizon
Unlocked are its bolts

Verse 1

Clouds darken the sky
The stars rain down
The constellations stagger
The bones of the hell hounds tremble
The porters are silent
When they see this king
Dawning as a soul

Refrain

(repeat above)

Verse 2

Men fall
Their name is not
Seize thou this king by his arm
Take this king to the sky
That he not die on earth
Among men

Refrain

(repeat above)

Verse 3

He flies who flies
This king flies away from you
Ye mortals
He is not of the earth
He is of the sky
He flaps his wings like a zeret bird
He goes to the sky
He goes to the sky
On the wind
On the wind

Scene 1: Funeral of Amenhotep III

(The scene presents the funeral of Akhnaten's father,

Amenhotep III. As the starting point of the opera, it represents the historical moment immediately before the "Amarna period" or the reign of Akhnaten and depicts the society in which the reforms of Akhnaten, reforms which appeared so extreme that they can be called revolutionary, took place. The action of the scene centers on the funeral rites of the New Empire of the 18th Dynasty. It is dominated by the Amon priests and appears as ritual of extraordinary traditional character drawn from The Egyptian Book of the Dead. The funeral cortege enters downstage led by two drummers and followed by a small body of Amon priests who in turn are led by Aye, father of Nefertiti, advisor to the recently dead pharaoh, and the Pharaoh to be)

FUNERAL CHORUS

(Text sung in Egyptian by the from Budge,
The Egyptian Book of the Dead)
Ankh ankh, en mitak
Yewk er heh en heh
Aha en heh

(As the music goes to the cellos alone, the deceased Amenhotep III enters behind the procession. He appears to be headless and is holding his head in his hands. The music for orchestra, small chorus and solo bass voice (Aye) resumes)

SMALL CHORUS

(Text sung in Egyptian by from Budge, The
Egyptian Book of the Dead)
Ya inen makhent en Ra,
rud akit em mehit
em khentik er she nerserser
em netcher khert

(During the next section for orchestra alone, the funeral cortege, Amon priests and Amenhotep III, moves upstage. Akhnaten and the people of Thebes join Aye downstage. In the final section of the funeral, the people of Thebes and Aye join the orchestra in a last salute to the departing Amenhotep III)

AY, CHORUS

Ya, inen makhent en Ra, etc.
Ankh ankh, en mitak, etc.

Scene2: The Coronation of Akhnaten

(The short opening to the second scene show Akhnaten alone as the Scribe, Aye and the people of Thebes leave and the funeral cortege departs. Akhnaten's attendants appear and, by changing his costume, prepare him to receive the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. There is not singing or narration in this section. The next section for orchestra accompanies the appearance of the Scribe, the Amon High Priest, Aye and Horemhab as well as the people of Thebes. Akhnaten has remained with his attendants. The following section includes the trio of Amon High Priest, Aye and Horemhab with orchestra. The dramatic intent of this moment is to prepare Akhnaten to receive the double crown)

AMON HIGH PRIEST, HOREMHAB

AYE, LARGE CHORUS

(Text: Sung in Egyptian by from Budge,
An Egyptian Reading Book)
Ye-nedj hrak yemi em hetepu
Neb aut yeb sekhem kha-u
Neb wereret ka shuti
Nefer seshed ka hedjet
Mertu netcheru maanek
Sekhi men em weptek

(The opening music of the scene recurs as the Scribe announces the names and titles of the new Pharaoh. During this speech Akhnaten receives the double crown from the Amon High Priest assisted by Aye and Horemhab)

SCRIBE

(Text Recited from a list of Akhnaten's titles)
Live the Horus, Strong-Bull-Appearing-as-Justice;
He of the Two Ladies, Establishing Laws and
causing the Two-Lands to be Pacified;
Horus of Gold,
Mighty-of-Arm-when-He-Smites-the-Asiatics;
King of Upper and Lower Egypt,
Nefer Kheperu Ra Wa en Ra,
Son of Neb-maet-Ra
(Lord of the Truth like Ra)
Son of Ra, Amenhotep (Amon is pleased)
Hek Wase (Ruler of Thebes), Given Life.
Mighty Bull, Lofty of Plumes;
Favorite of the Two Goddesses,
Great in Kingship in Karnak;
Golden Hawk,
wearer of Diadems in the Southern Heliopolos;
King of Upper and Lower Egypt.
Beautiful-is-the-Being of Ra,
The Only-One-of-Ra,
Son of the Sun,
Peace-of-Amon, Divine Ruler of Thebes;
Great in Duration, Living-for-Ever-and-Ever,
Beloved of Amon-Ra, Lord of Heaven.

AMON HIGH PRIEST, HOREMHAB

AYE, LARGE CHORUS

(Text: Sung in Egyptian by from Budge,
An Egyptian Reading Book)
Ye-nedj hrak yemi em hetepu
Neb aut yeb sekhem kha-u
Neb wereret ka shuti
Nefer seshed ka hedjet
Mertu netcheru maanek
Sekhi men em weptek

Scene 3: The Window of Appearances

(A windowed balcony of the palace used for state appearances. The music from the opening of the coronation scene is heard again, played on large bells and providing a musical and dramatic transition to what follows. Akhnaten is joined by Nefertiti and his mother, Queen Tye. They approach the Window of Appearances and sing, first a solo, then duet, then trio through the window. It is a hymn of acceptance and resolve and, in spirit, announces a new era)

AKHNATEN:

(Text sung in Egyptian from Budge,
The Gods of the Egyptians)
Tut wu-a yeri enti
Wa-a wa-u yeri wenenet
Perer en rem em yertif
Kheper netcheru tep ref

AKHENATEN, TYE

Yeri semu se-ankh menmen
Khet en ankhu en henmemet
Yeri ankh-ti remu en yetru
Apdu genekh pet

AKHNATEN, NEFERTITI:

Redi nefu en enti em suhet
Se-ankh apnetu yeri ankhti khenus
Djedfet puyu mitet yeri
Yeri kherti penu em babasen

TYE, AKHNATEN, NEFERTITI:

Se-ankh puyu em khet nebet
Hrak yeri
Enen er a-u

(The music continues with full orchestra. Tye and Nefertiti leave Akhnaten alone. He stands gazing at the distant funeral cortege floating on barques across a mythical river to the Land of the Dead)

ACT II

(Years 5 To 15 Thebes and Akhetaten)

Scene 1: The Temple

(The scene begins with a short introduction for orchestra. We then see an Amon temple and a small group of Amon priests led by their High Priest. They sing a hymn to Amon)

AMON HIGH PRIEST, AMON PRIESTS

(Text sung in Egyptian from Gardiner,
"The So-Called Tomb of Queen Tye",
Journal of Egyptian Archaeology)
Amen men khet nebet
Ya-u-nek em em djed
Sen er ayu
Nek henu nek en
En wered ek imen

(The following orchestral section introduces Akhnaten, Queen Tye and a small party of followers, Aten priests, soldiers, etc, of the new order. After surrounding the temple, Atenists, led by Akhnaten and Queen Tye, attack it. Here we see Akhnaten for the first time as the rebel he was, venting his hatred if the old order on the Amon temple. The attack is complete, and the roof of the temple is pulled off as the light of "the Aten" pours into what once was the "holy of holies." The attackers sing a vocalise, no words being necessary here)

Scene 2: Akhnaten and Nefertiti

(An orchestral transition prepares the scene, which is devoted entirely to a duet between Akhnaten and Nefertiti.

With the introduction of the solo trombone, the Scribe begins reciting a poem. The first time we hear the poem it is as if addressed to a god.

With the entrance of the strings, the poem is heard again, this time spoken as an exchange between two lovers. During this second reading, Akhnaten and Nefertiti appear. There follows the duet between the two, not alone together. The vocal text is the same poem sung in Egyptian.

At the end of the duet the music returns to the orchestra alone. There is a brief pause, then Akhnaten and Nefertiti resume singing while behind them is seen the funeral cortege in a later stage of its journey, this time ascending on wings of large birds to the heavenly land of Ra)

SCRIBE

(Text recited and then sung in Egyptian, a love poem found in a royal mummy of the Amarna period, from *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, translated by Sir Alan Gardiner)

Sesenet neftu nedjem
Per em rek
Peteri nefruk em menet
Ta-i nehet sedj emi
Kheruk nedjem en mehit
Renpu ha-i em ankh
en mertuk.
Di-ek eni awik kher ka-ek
Shesepi su ankhi yemef
I ashek reni er heh
Ben hehif em rek

Scene 3: The City

(The Scribe speaks the first part of this scene alone, without musical accompaniment. His speech is taken from the boundary markers or stelæ of Akhnaten's new city, Akhetaten, The Horizon of the Aten. During his speech, Akhetaten - a new city of light and open spaces that represents architecturally and visually the spirit of the epoch of Akhnaten - appears behind him)

SCRIBE

(Text recited from the boundary markers found in the valley at Tel-el-Amarna, in Breasted, *A History of Egypt*)

Stela 1

And his majesty said unto them, "Ye behold the City of the Horizon of the Aten, which the Aten has desired me to make for him as a monument in the great name of my majesty forever. For it was the Aten, my Father, that brought me to this City of the Horizon. There was not a noble who directed me to it; there was not any man in the whole land who led me to it, saying, 'It is fitting for his majesty that he make a City of the Horizon of Aten in this place.' Nay, but it was the Aten, my Father, that directed me to make it for him. Behold the Pharaoh found that this site belonged not to a god, nor to a goddess, it belonged not to

a prince nor to a princess. There was no right for any man to act as owner of it.

Stela 2

I will make the City of the Horizon of the Aten for the Aten, my Father, in this place. I will not make the city south of it, north of it, west of it or east of it. I will not pass beyond the southern boundary stone southward, neither will I pass beyond the northern boundary stone northward to make for him a City of the Horizon there; neither will I make for him a city on the western side. Nay, but I will make the City of the Horizon for the Aten, my Father, upon the east side, the place for which he did enclose for his own self with cliffs, and made a plain in the midst of it that I might sacrifice to him thereon: this is it.

Neither shall the Queen say unto me, Behold there is a goodly place for the City of the Horizon in another place', and I harken unto her. Neither shall any noble nor any man in the whole land say unto me, 'Behold there is a goodly place for the City of the Horizon in another place', and I harken unto them. Whether it be downstream or southward or westward or eastward, I will not say, 'I will abandon this City of the Horizon.

Dance

(The dance, which immediately follows the brass fanfare, contrasts with the heavy traditional ritual of the temple scene which opened this act. Musicians, triangle, wood block, tambourine, appear on stage with dancers, as well as Akhnaten and principal members of his entourage, in a dance that marks the celebration and inauguration of the city of Akhetaten)

Scene 4: Hymn

(The music that follows the dance is taken from the orchestral introduction to the coronation scene and serves as preparation for Akhnaten's "Hymn to the Aten". At its conclusion, Akhnaten is left alone. The "Hymn to the Aten" is a central moment of the opera. In it, Akhnaten espouses in his own words the inspiration for his religious and social reforms. The Hymn is sung in the language of the audience)

Hymn to the Aten

AKHNATEN

(Text sung in English from Winton Thomas's English translation published in *Documents from Old Testament Times*)
Thou dost appear beautiful
On the horizon of heaven
Oh, living Aten
He who was the first to live

When thou hast risen on the Eastern Horizon
Thou art fair, great, dazzling,
High above every land
Thy rays encompass the land
To the very end of all thou hast made.

All the beasts are satisfied with their pasture
Trees and plants are verdant

Birds fly from their nests, wings spread
Flocks skip with their feet
All that fly and alight
Live when thou hast arisen.
How manifold is that which thou hast made
Thou sole God
There is no other like thee
Thou didst create the earth
According to thy will
Being alone, everything on earth
Which walks and flies on high.
Thy rays nourish the fields
When thou dost rise
They live and thrive for thee
Thou makest the seasons to nourish
All thou hast made
The winter to cool
The heat that they may taste thee.
There is no other that knows thee
Save thy son, Akhnaten
For thou hast made him skilled
In thy plans and thy might
Thou dost raise him up for thy son
Who comes forth from thyself.

(At the close of the Hymn, Akhnaten leaves the stage deserted, and the act ends with distant voices singing)

CHORUS

(Text sung in Hebrew by Offstage Chorus, from Psalm 104, Hebrew Bible, Masoretic text)
Ma rab-bu ma-a-se-kha ha-shem
Ku-lam be-khokh-ma a-sita
Ma-le-a ha-a-rets kin-ya-ne-kha
O-te or ka-sal-ma
No-te sha-ma-yim ka-yi-ri-a
Ta-shet kho-shekh vi-hi lay-la
Bo tir-mis kol khay-to ya-ar

(repeat first three lines)

ACT III

(Year 17 And The Present - Akhetaten)

Scene 1: The Family

(The stage is divided, one side showing a room in the palace in which can be seen Akhnaten, Nefertiti and their Six Daughters. Outside the palace, on the other side of the stage, are the people of Egypt, soldiers, outlawed priests of Amon and the Scribe. The opening of the scene depicts Akhnaten and his family in a moment of intimacy, oblivious to the crowd outside. As they sing to each other a sweet, wordless song, it is apparent that in their closeness they have become isolated from the outside world. The focus shifts to the people outside the palace. The Scribe, drawing on tablets known as the Amarna Letters that were sent to Akhnaten from Syrian princes, begins to incite the crowd, which presses toward the palace and becomes increasingly restless)

SCRIBE

(Text recited from the Amarna Letters as cited in Mercer, The Tel-el-Amarna Tablets)

Letter No. 1:

I have written repeatedly for troops, but they were not given and the king did not listen to the word of his servant. And I sent my messenger to the palace, but he returned empty-handed - he brought no troops. And when the people of my house saw this, they ridiculed me like the governors, my brethren, and dispised me.

Letter No. 2:

The king's whole land, which has begun hostilities with me, will be lost. Behold the territory of Seir, as far as Carmel; its princes are wholly lost; and hostilities prevail against me. As long as ships were upon the sea the strong arm of the king occupied Naharin and Kash, but now the Apiru are occupying the king's cities. There remains not one prince to my lord, the king; every one is ruined. Let the king take care of his land and let him send troops. For if no troops come in this year, the whole territory of my lord, the king, will perish. If there are no troops in this year, let the king send his officer to fetch me and his brothers, that we may die with our lord, the king.

Letter No. 3:

Verily, they father did not march forth nor inspect the lands of the vassal-princes. And when thou ascended the throne of thy father's house, Abdashirta's sons took the king's lands for themselves. Creatures of the king of Mittani are they, and of the king of Babylon and of the king of the Hittites.

Letter No. 4

Who formerly could have plundered Tunip without being plundered by Thutmose III? The gods of the king of Egypt, my lord, dwell in Tunip. May my lord ask his old men if this not be so. Now, however, we belong no more to our lord, the king of Egypt. And now Tunip, thy city, weeps and her tears are flowing and there is not help for us. For twenty years we have been sending to our lord, the king of Egypt, but there has not come to us a word - no, not one.

(The scene shifts back to the palace. This time Akhnaten is alone with his two eldest daughters. They continue to sing, appearing more withdrawn and isolated from the events outside)

Scene 2: Attack and Fall

(Horemhab, Aye and the Amon High Priest push to the front of the crowd and also begin to rouse the people, Large Chorus. The principals and chorus sing a text taken from the Amarna Letters. Soon the palace is surrounded. Finally, the mob bursts through the palace doors and windows in a wave of shouts, overwhelming Akhnaten and his remaining family and carrying them off)

HIGH PRIEST, AY

HOREMHAB, CHORUS

(Text sung in Akkadian from Mercer, The Tel-el-Amarna Tablets)

Lim-lik-mi sha-ri a-na ma-ti-shu
Khal-kat mat sha-ri Ga-ba-sha
Tsa-na-ta-ni nu-kur-tu a-na ya-shi
A-di ma-ta-ti She-eri Gin-Ti-kir-mil
shal-nu a-na gab-bi kha-zi-a-nu-ti
u nu-kur-tu a-na ya-shi.
Ip-sha-ti e-nu-ma a-mel a-mi-ri
u-l a-mar i-na sha-ri be-li-ya
ki nu-kur-tu
a-na mukh-khi-ya shak-na-ti
E-nu-ma e-lip-pa i-na lib-bi tam-ti
kat sha-ri dan-na-tu
Ti-lik-ki Nakh-ri-ma u kapa-si
u i-nan-na a-la-ni sha-ri
Ti-li-ki-u Kha-bi-ru
Ya-nu-mi ish-ten kha-zi-a-nu
a-na sha-ri be-li-ya khal-ku gab-bu

Scene 3: The Ruins

(In the silence at the close of the last scene, the Scribe appears out of the chaos to announce the end of Akhnaten's reign)

SCRIBE

(Text recited from Aye's tomb)

The sun of him who knew thee not
Has set, O Amon.
But, as for him who knows thee,
He shines.
The temple of him who assailed
Thee is in darkness,
While the whole earth is in
Sunlight.
Who so puts thee in his heart,
O Amon,
Lo, his sun hath risen.

(The next section for orchestra and the Scribe is a reprise, in shortened form, of the opening Prelude. It serves as a transition to the present day and is divided as follows:

The Scribe describes the rebuilding of the Amon temples after the fall of Akhnaten)

SCRIBE

(Text recited from Tutankhamen's tomb)

The new ruler, performing benefactions for his father Amon and all the gods, has made what was ruined to endure as a monument for the ages of eternity, and he has expelled the great criminal and justice was established. He surpassed what has been done previously. He fashioned his father Amon upon thirteen carrying poles, his holy image being of fine gold, lapis lazuli, and every august costly stone, whereas the majesty of this august god had been upon eleven carrying poles.
All the property of the temples has been doubled and tripled and quadrupled in silver, gold, lapis lazuli, every kind of august costly stone, royal linen, white linen, fine linen, olive oil, gum, fat, incense, myrrh, without limit to any good thing. His majesty, Life! Prosperity! Health! has built their barques upon the

river of new cedar from the terraces. They make the river shine.

(The orchestral music becomes very full and no action is indicated. Finally the city of Akhetaten appears as it exists in the present: a ruined city, recently excavated, the walls barely three feet high at most.

Several groups of tourists wander through the ruins taking photos, exploring, looking about.

The last group of tourists is led by the Scribe, now appearing as a twentieth-century tour guide describing to the group what they are seeing)

SCRIBE

(Text recited from Frommer's Guide to Egypt, and Fodor's Egypt)

To reach Tel-el-Amarna, drive eight miles south of Mallawi to the point where you cross the Nile. On the east side of the Nile the distance is less than a mile and can be covered on foot or on donkey. Behind the present village, at the ancient site of Tel-el-Amarna, the ruins known as the palace of Nefertiti are among the very few remnants of the Akhnaten period. Tablets in cuneiform writing, which contain correspondence between Egypt and Syria, were found here and are now the the Cairo Museum. (To see any sights on the Eastern bank of the river you must cross by ferry which carries cars along with the usual donkey carts and local traffic. The ferry docking station is located at the southern end of the town. You should arrive there at least one-half hour before the 6:00 AM crossing. The ferry does a brisk business and you will need every available second for sight seeing. There is nothing left of this glorious city of temples and palaces. The mud brick buildings have long since crumbled and little remains of the immense stone temples but the outlines of their floor plans. In addition to the tombs and ruins of the city, there are several stelæ scattered around the plain which mark the limits of the land belonging to the city, most of them are too widely scattered to visit and are also in bad condition.

Scene 4: Epilogue

(All the tourists have left. The ruined city is empty. The ghosts of Akhnaten and the other principals appear moving about their now-dead city. Singing parts are taken by Akhnaten, Nefertiti and Queen Tye, but they sing no words. At first they seem not to know that they and their city all are dead and now a part of the past. They become aware of the funeral cortege of Akhnaten's father (Amenhotep III) moving across the background. They form a procession of their own and, as the opera ends, can be seen moving off toward the first funeral group still on its journey to the heavenly land of Ra)