

## No bears at the opera

I got to sketch through a dress rehearsal of [Arabella](#) last night, thanks to the ever-fabulous Minnesota Opera Company. I've seen a lot of opera through their Social Media Preview events now, and I gotta say, Arabella was probably one of my favorite stories I've seen performed.

First performed in 1933, this opera is a comedy about a young woman named Arabella whose financially ruined family needs her to marry into money but who desperately wants to marry for love. She's very beautiful and has a number of suitors, but none really float her boat. On the other hand, her little sister Zdenka, who dresses as a man so the family won't have to pay to have two daughters out in society, is secretly head-over-heels for one of Arabella's longtime suitors, Matteo.

Which brings us to reason #1 that I loved Arabella: Although the story could easily have gone there, the two sisters are not at odds with one another. They love each other deeply and support one another. Ladies supporting each other! I am always down for more of that!

Arabella's suitors are, by and large...not fantastic prospects.

But then, along comes Mandryka. Mandryka is rich, handsome, and just got back from hunting a bear. Which he might have actually been wearing when he showed up. Reason #2 why I loved Arabella is Mandryka's coat.

Mandryka comes in talking big about this bear he was hunting and how he basically got a little bit mauled by the bear and spent a his time in recovery with nothing but Arabella's photo to keep him company. Which strikes me as a little creepy. I mean, dude spent like twelve weeks staring at a photo of a woman he'd never met, lovesick? I once had a stranger at con recognize me by my OK Cupid profile photo, and I made an excuse to flee. But then I suppose I wasn't looking for a rich husband, and the dude at con wasn't wearing a bear, so different circumstances.

Side note: It was around this point in the show that the friends I was sitting with and I all fell in love with the bear in Mandryka's story. During intermission, we talked about how the bear should come back, the bear should show up for the big party in act 2, the bear would woo Arabella and fix everything and the show would now be called Bearabella. I spent the rest of the opera pretending the bear was in the background of every scene, waltzing with pretty girls and making "Oh no you didn't" faces along with the other suitors. Not gonna lie, the bear is reason #3 why I loved Arabella. He didn't show up on stage, but the whole bear story was just fantastic.

Anyway, at the party in the second act, Mandryka meets Arabella, they fall in love and get

engaged, and then everything goes to hell in typical comedic opera fashion. Mistaken identity! Eavesdropping! Drinking! A woman who appears to be dressed as a lion tamer cracking her whip seductively at party guests! I swear I'm not making that last one up!

And here we come to reason #4 why I loved Arabella - the biggest reason: Arabella is a woman who demands respect and gets it.

When everything is confused and Mandryka accuses Arabella of being unfaithful to him with Matteo, she's like "NOPE. You don't get to talk to me like this, and you'd better hope I can forgive you." When Mandryka is proven wrong, he immediately repents - loudly, repeatedly, with genuine sorrow - and she still takes some time before she can forgive him. Arabella is in charge of the outcome of this story, and she won't settle for less than a man she loves with all her heart who will treat her with respect. She also stands up for her little sister even when Zdenka screws up big-time, is 100% pure class when she turns down suitors, and basically refuses to take any shit from anyone.

Arabella is my new favorite opera heroine.

For more information on the show or to buy tickets, [click here](#). This one's definitely worth your time.