

## CORONATION OF ESTHER SYNOPSIS

The opera opens in Shushan, in ancient Persia, to which King Ahashveros has just moved the seat of government of his vast empire. To celebrate, the King has held a six-month long party culminating in a week-long feast for the entire population of Shushan. The King entertains the rowdy male population, while his beautiful but modest Queen Vashti entertains the women. In his wine-induced exuberance, the King boasts of Vashti's beauty to the crowd and orders her to disrobe before the men of Shushan. She refuses, and the enraged King orders Memucan, his Grand Vizier, to devise a suitable punishment. On Memucan's advice, the King orders Vashti to be irrevocably banished and all her possessions confiscated.

Some months later, Ahashveros regrets the banishment of his favorite wife and seeks to blame Memucan. Memucan suggests that a contest be held to find a replacement for Vashti. All the fairest maidens in the Persian empire would be collected and placed under the care of Hegai, the keeper of the King's women. Then each evening, Ahashveros would "interview" one of the candidates until dawn, until he has gone through them all or until he finds one to make his Queen. The King says he will let Memucan live if the plan allows him to find a woman who can replace Vashti.

Mordechai is a Jew in Shushan with political ambitions. He has raised his orphaned cousin Esther from infancy, and she is now a beautiful young woman. Although Esther has no interest in being Queen, Mordechai gives her to Memucan anyway, in hopes of currying favor with the Grand Vizier and gaining access in the King's palace. Esther becomes Hegai's favorite, and when it's her turn to see the King, Hegai advises her to dress elaborately for him, as the other interviewees have done. However, Esther chooses to wear only a plain white dress. Esther's beauty and modest dress remind the King of Vashti, and he selects her to be his new Queen. Esther is crowned, and all the Persians celebrate.