

Der Rosenkavalier

“The Rose-Bearer, or “The Knight of the Rose”

A romantic comedy in three acts

Music

by

Richard Strauss

Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

**Premiere at the Königliches Opernhaus,
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by

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Story Synopsis

Der Rosenkavalier is a romantic comedy in which a thirty-two year old woman, the Princess von Werdenberg, known as the Marschallin, the wife of the old Field Marshal, sends her seventeen-year old lover, Count Octavian Rofrano, as the Rose-Bearer to assist in the wedding of her boorish cousin, Baron Ochs. The unforeseen results are that Octavian falls in love with Baron Ochs's bride-to-be, Sophie, and the Marschallin loses her young lover.

As the opera begins, it is morning, and the Marschallin and her lover, Octavian, are relaxing in her bedroom. The Marschallin's cousin, Baron Ochs, pays an unexpected visit to seek her help with his betrothal to Sophie von Faninal. When Ochs enters her bedroom, Octavian hides, and then reappears dressed in maid's clothes; he is introduced as Mariandel, and Ochs, a licentious boor, proceeds to flirt with her. Ochs requests that the Marschallin recommend a member of their family to present the traditional silver rose to his betrothed, and make her notary available to him to arrange his marriage contract. The Marschallin selects Count Octavian as the Rose-Bearer. Ochs hires the intriguers, Annina and Valzacchi, to assist him in arranging a rendezvous with Mariandel.

Alone, the Marchallin laments her advancing age, and decides that she must end her affair with Octavian for their best interests. When Octavian returns, she dismisses him: he swiftly departs, the Marschallin becoming further saddened because they did not kiss goodbye.

At von Faninal's townhouse, Sophie eagerly awaits Octavian, the Rose-Bearer: when he arrives, they immediately fall in love. Sophie vows not to wed the crude and boorish Baron; Octavian vows to help her. After the intriguers, Annina and Valzacchi, discover the newfound lovers embraced, Ochs is called, and Octavian challenges him to a duel, accidentally wounding his arm. Octavian hires the intriguers, Annina and Valzacchi, and plans an intrigue to discredit the Baron. Annina gives Ochs a note from "Mariandel" that expresses "her" desire to rendezvous with him at an inn that very evening.

In a private room at the inn, Octavian has devised an elaborate masquerade to trap Ochs and expose him as a licentious libertine. As Ochs tries to seduce Mariandel, Annina, dressed in mourning clothes, claims that Ochs is her husband who has abandoned her; children run to him yelling "Papa." The police arrive to investigate the noise, and Ochs protests that he is merely enjoying dinner with his fiancée, Sophie. Faninal and Sophie arrive and become shocked to find the Baron in a compromising and scandalous rendezvous with "Mariandel."

The Marschallin arrives. She learns that Sophie and Octavian are in love and blesses their future happiness, at the same time, dismissing Ochs and terminating his engagement. After a poignant and bittersweet farewell to the young lovers, the Marschallin leaves arm-in-arm with Faninal.

Principal Characters in the Opera

The Marschallin,

Princess Marie Thérèse von Werdenberg Soprano

Count Octavian Rofrano, her young lover Soprano

Baron Ochs von Lerchenau ,

the Marschallin's cousin Bass

Von Faninal, a rich tradesman Baritone

Sophie, Faninal's daughter Soprano

Marianne Leitmetzerin,

Sophie's governess Soprano

Valzacchi, an intriguer Tenor

Annina, Valzacchi's companion Contralto

Maids and servants, Major-domos, a notary, a milliner,
an animal vendor, three orphans, a singer, a hairdresser,
footmen, innkeeper, policemen, couriers, waiters,
watchmen.

TIME and PLACE:

About 1745,

during the reign of Empress Maria Thérèse of Austria

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

Before the curtain rises, an Introduction describes a night of passionate love between the Marschallin, Princess Marie Thérèse Werdenberg, and her young lover, Count Octavian Rofrano.

Two musical themes interplay to convey the lover's ecstasy and bliss: the first theme represents Octavian's youthful ardor.

The Young Octavian's spirited theme:

Con molto agitato



The second theme expresses the sensual passion of the mature woman.

The Marschallin's motive:



A third theme expresses the love of the Marschallin and Octavian.

The love of the Marschallin and Octavian:



Act I: The Marschallin's bedroom

Der Rosenkavalier's Viennese ambience captures the opulence of aristocratic life during the mid-eighteenth century.

The Marschallin, a woman approaching her mid-thirties, indulges in an affectionate conversation with her handsome young seventeen year-old lover, Count Octavian Rofrano, one of a succession of lovers she has taken to amuse herself during the frequent absences of her husband. In her sumptuous bedroom, both relax after a stormy night of love, and whisper loving endearments to each other.

A servant interrupts them to deliver the Marschallin's morning cup of chocolate. As he approaches, Octavian hurriedly hides behind a screen, leaving his tell-tale sword on the couch. Afterwards, the Marschallin becomes irritated, reproaching her young lover for his carelessness. Octavian sulks, but their intimacy is seemingly restored as they resume exchanging tender and affectionate sentiments while sharing the morning chocolates.

Octavian boasts about their good fortune; their opportunity to spend the night together while the Marschallin's husband hunts in the Croatian woods. The Marschallin again reproaches Octavian, this time, because he has mentioned the Feldmarschall, reminding her of her nightmarish dream in which her husband discovered their affair. Octavian becomes perplexed, affronted that she thought about the Feldmarschall during their passionate moments of love.

A commotion is heard from the outside antechamber: the Marschallin becomes fearful that the noise heralds the arrival of the Feldmarschall, unexpectedly returning from the hunt. She quickly directs Octavian to hide in an alcove, while she herself continues to listen anxiously to the noises.

The Marschallin hears a brusque male voice imperiously demanding admission to her boudoir, and becomes relieved that it is not her husband. She advises Octavian that a visitor has arrived: this time, instead of hiding, Octavian disguises himself in the female clothes of a chambermaid; he now appears as “Mariandel.”

The Marschallin’s boorish country cousin, Baron Ochs of Lerchenau, forces his way past the servants and bursts into her bedroom. Octavian reappears, dressed in a chambermaid’s frock and cap and makes a mock curtsy to the Marschallin.

The clumsy and oafish Baron collides with Mariandel, becomes attracted to her, and immediately begins flirting with her.

Baron Ochs’s Theme:



Ochs diverts his attention from Mariandel and explains the purpose of his visit: he announces that he plans to marry Sophie von Faninal, the daughter of a wealthy and recently ennobled supplier to the army, making no secret that this suitable match will restore his otherwise hopelessly ruined financial position. Apologetically, the Marschallin acknowledges that she read about his intentions in his letter to her, although in truth, she was given his letter, but harbored such resentment toward her boorish cousin, that she never opened it.

Ochs requests that the Marschallin provide a “bridegroom’s envoy”; an ambassador from their family who will deliver the traditional ceremonial Silver Rose to his bride-to-be, a prevalent custom of the Viennese aristocracy. Simultaneously, Ochs continues to flirt outrageously with Mariandel, ludicrously excusing his premarital appetite for the pretty maid.

The Marschallin has an inspiration and suggests that her “young cousin,” Count Octavian Rofrano, would be a perfect family representative to act as the Baron’s Rose-Bearer. Ochs further requests that she make her notary available to him to draw his marriage contract. The Marschallin agrees and invites Ochs to remain, since her morning reception is about to begin and her notary will be present. While Ochs awaits the notary, he continues to

shamelessly flirt with Mariandel who recklessly encourages him.

In a crude and moronic account, Ochs describes his philosophy of pleasure, relating his lewd sexual exploits, and proudly pointing to his illegitimate son who now serves as his valet. At the same time, he unsuccessfully attempts to persuade the Marschallin to part with Mariandel, suggesting that she would be a suitable maid for his bride-to-be.

After the Marschallin has Mariandel fetch a locket-portrait of her young cousin, Count Octavian Rofrano, Ochs becomes astonished at the resemblance between the young nobleman and the maid, Mariandel, but fails to penetrate the charade. Nevertheless, Ochs concludes through innuendo that Mariandel must be the Marschallin's bastard sister, reasoning that it is a customary Viennese practice to keep illegitimate children as servants; after all, his own bastard son is his valet. Ochs gladly accepts the Marschallin's suggestion to appoint Count Octavian Rofrano as his Rose-Bearer.

An entire assemblage of people who had been waiting in the ante-chamber crowd into the Marschallin's boudoir. Each of the callers competes for the Marschallin's attention: a notary, a boy carrying the day's menu, a milliner, a scholar, an animal dealer with dogs and a small monkey for sale, Asiatic carpet-sellers, tradesmen, insurance agents, salesmen, the Marschallin's hairdresser, a distressed widow with her three children, an Italian tenor accompanied and his flautist, and finally, Valzacchi and Annina, Italian intriguers looking for employment opportunities.

As all compete to attract the Marschallin's interest, Ochs begins to discuss his marital arrangements with the notary. Meanwhile, an Italian tenor entertains the morning reception, singing a sentimental aria about the hopelessness of resisting the power of love.

Italian tenor: Di rigori armato il seno,

Tempo di menuetto



While the Italian tenor entertains, Ochs rudely rants at the Marschallin's notary, losing his temper, banging on the table, and interrupting the second verse of the tenor's aria: the notary has refused to insert ridiculous – and illegal – clauses into Ochs's marriage contract.

The Marschallin, displeased with her hairdresser's efforts, instructs her major-domo to dismiss everyone. The intriguers, Valzacchi and Annina, ingratiate themselves

with Ochs who avails himself of their services; he seeks their help in arranging a rendezvous with Mariandel. At the Marschallin's request, Ochs leaves the silver rose in her care, and she confirms that she will deliver it to Count Octavian Rofrano, his Rose-Bearer. All depart.

The Marschallin, alone for the first time, becomes pensive, particularly appalled by the thought that her arrogant and boorish cousin, an unscrupulous, oafish fortune-hunter and womanizer, will be marrying a pretty, young, and wealthy bride, and flattering himself by considering it his right to receive a considerable fortune: *Da geht er him*, "Now go your ways, vain pretentious profligate!" Nevertheless, she expresses her mature perceptiveness and concludes that it is useless to be concerned about such injustices: it is the way of the world.

Ochs's arranged marriage prompts the Marschallin to nostalgically reminisce about her own past: like Ochs's bride-to-be, she was the young 16-year old Resi, another young innocent girl who came fresh from a convent and was sent lamb-like into a loveless marriage with the Feldmarschall. She wonders what has become of that young Resi now? Where has that vibrant youth disappeared to? She reminisces about her youth: in spirit she is still that young Resi, but she is conscious of the rite of passage, and realizes that she is destined to be an old woman.

The Marschallin philosophically reflects on youth and maturity, and concludes that Time possesses the sublime mystery of life: Time is that eternal measure of change that relentlessly alters one's body and soul. She realizes that each person copes differently with the inevitable progress of Time: she still feels like that same young Resi, but she acknowledges that age is overcoming her; before long, she will pass through the crowds in her carriage and be called *die alte Frau, die alte Marschallin*. "That old woman, the old Field Marshall's wife."

The Marschallin muses that others seem to know nothing of Time, nor care about it. Why has God made her so perceptive? She acknowledges that Time relentlessly flows onward, and each of us bears its mysteries differently, nevertheless, Time, like the sand in an hour-glass, cannot be grasped or held because each irreversible moment of the present vanishes in an instant. Time becomes the recurrence of yesterday into today; the futile persistence of the younger self inside the inexorably aging body; Time viciously surrounds us, internally gnawing at us, and externally shifting our faces and torturing our bodies. The Marschallin, despairing that she is aging, laments that she now views life through the symbols of Time: clocks and mirrors.

Octavian returns, now changed into morning clothes and riding boots. The Marschallin pretends to be delighted, but her reflections about Time have made her pensive, awakening her to an uneasy reality. Both Octavian and the Marschallin sense that suddenly, somehow, something has changed in their relationship. The Marschallin's mood has become melancholy which confuses and bewilders the young Octavian, who, in his immaturity, interprets her sad demeanor as an indication that she no longer loves him.

Octavian becomes impetuous and anxious, incessantly demanding that they embrace and that she vow her love. The Marschallin cautions him to be sensible, that embracing too much is meaningless, and he should not be like other men, such as the Feldmarschall, or her disgusting cousin, Baron Ochs.

Nevertheless, the sighing Marschallin cannot control her fears about the frailty and transience of earthly things and the passage of Time; everything we try to grasp dissolves, slips through one's fingers, and fades like a mist or a dream: *Die Zeit, die ändert doch nichts an den Sachen*, "And time, how strangely does it go its way." She fears Time and its irrevocable flow, sometimes arising in the middle of the night to stop all the clocks.

Octavian again implores her to suppress her sadness: it is his love for her that reverses Time. Nevertheless, the Marschallin's anxious sentiments have raised her consciousness, and she has resolved that she must be honorable and end her relationship with Octavian. She becomes resigned and resolute, and prepares to say her farewell to Octavian. She tries to console him, telling him that sooner or later, he will leave her for a younger and prettier woman. Octavian is almost moved to tears, feeling rejected and spurned, and protesting that neither today nor tomorrow could he ever think of leaving her. But the Marschallin advises him that their parting is rightful, necessary, and an inevitable reality; it is the only way they can be true to each other.

She explains that life is a process of giving and taking: *Leicht will ich's machen dir und mir*, "I want to make it light between you and me. We must hold all of our pleasures – hold them and leave them. If not, much pain and grief await us, and none on earth or heaven will pity us." Octavian is hurt and confused by the sudden strangeness of the Marschallin's words, complaining that this morning, she is "talking like a priest."

The Marschallin is totally resigned and tells a tearful Octavian that he must leave. She will go to church now, and then she will visit her old and crippled Uncle Greifenklau, and to please the old man, she will dine with

him. If she decides to go to the Prater in the afternoon, she will send Octavian a message, and he may join her if he so wishes, but he may only ride beside her carriage: henceforth, she and Octavian will be together only in public.

Octavian kisses her hand as she urges him to be good and obey her wishes. Her gentle but firm words of ravishing sweetness have defined what their changed relationship must be; it has transformed into a *noblesse oblige* in which Octavian will no longer be her lover. Octavian, hurt, peeved, and uncomprehending, yields to her insistence and obediently departs.

The Marschallin suddenly realizes that she has seen Octavian for the last time on intimate terms, and becomes distraught because he left without a kiss: the “forgotten kiss.” She calls to Octavian, but her liveries advise her that he has gone; Octavian has slipped from her, like any lightly held object caught in the flux of Time.

The pageboy is summoned to take the silver rose to Octavian. In a moment of bittersweet introspection, the Marschallin remains transfixed as she looks sadly into the mirror.

Act II: The reception salon in the Faninal residence

In the grand salon of von Faninal’s lavishly decorated town house, all are excitedly preparing to receive Sophie’s future bridegroom, Baron Ochs, who will be preceded by the Rose-Bearer, Octavian.

Von Faninal’s theme:

Molto allegro



Faninal goes to fetch Ochs, a Viennese tradition in which the future father-in-law escorts the groom, and presents him to his daughter for the first time: etiquette demands that the bride’s father must not be present when the Rose-Bearer arrives.

Sophie, accompanied by her governess (or chaperone), Marianne Leitmetzerin, prepares herself for the solemn occasion and eagerly awaits the arrival of the Rose-Bearer. Marianne peers through the window and chatters about the splendor of the family’s coaches and horses, expressing her delight that all of their neighbors bear witness.

As Octavian arrives, Marianne describes the two coaches: the first is drawn by four horses but is empty; the

second has six horses, and bears a handsome *Rosenkavalier*. Footmen in the street are heard calling to the Rose-Bearer, “Rofrano, Rofrano,” while Marianne, still looking through the window, describes his progress toward the house.

The excitement climaxes as the double doors open and Octavian enters, dressed resplendently in glittering white and silver, and bearing the silver rose. Octavian advances toward Sophie with noble bearing and grace, but blushes with embarrassment; Sophie turns pale, elated by his splendid appearance. Sophie and Octavian stand opposite each other, their hearts pulsating; an enchanting first meeting in which both are overcome by stirring sensations of love.

Sophie: The Rose Theme:

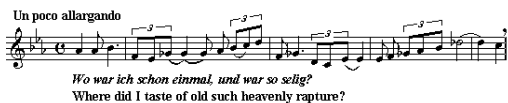


Luster of the Rose:



Formally, Octavian asks the hesitant Sophie to accept the rose, a token of love on behalf of his kinsman, Baron Ochs. Sophie smells the artificial scent of the rose and becomes ecstatic: *Wie himmlische, nicht irdische, wie Rosen vom hochheiligen Paradies*, “How heavenly the flower, certainly not from the earth. A blossom from the sacred groves of Paradise.” Both express their bliss, sharing the dawning of their love.

Octavian and Sophie: Wo war ich schon einmal,



Sophie and Octavian face each other seated on chairs; Marianne, the chaperone, is seated between them. They converse breathlessly; cousins from Austrian peerage who are meeting for the first time. Sophie, barely fifteen years-old, admits that she inquired about Octavian in the *Ehrensiegel Österreichs*, “Nobility Register”: she learned that Octavian is seventeen years-two months old, and then pronounces a long list of his Christian names, confessing

that she is aware that beautiful women call him by his pet name, Quinquin.

Sophie, displaying spirit and wit, tells Octavian that she looks forward to her marriage, even though it is a marriage that has been arranged by her father and she has not yet seen her bridegroom; Octavian, enthralled with her beauty, hardly hears her words. In her excitement, Sophie comments to Octavian that she has never met such a young gentleman who appealed to her so much, prompting Octavian to kiss her hand; both become even more strongly attracted to each other, and more in love.

Faninal arrives with Ochs, followed by Ochs's bedraggled-looking servants, and presents the Baron to Sophie. She becomes dismayed at her first sight of him, a boorish man behaving coarsely, who prompts her to remark to Marianne that he has the manners of a horse-dealer, adding in consternation, "And, my God, he's pockmarked as well." Ochs patronizes Faninal with compliments about his beautiful daughter, his odious demeanor and manners distressing not only Sophie, but infuriating Octavian.

Faninal introduces Octavian, the Rose-Bearer, and Ochs again expresses his astonishment at Octavian's resemblance to Mariandel, the Marschallin's maid. Ochs proceeds to assess Sophie's physique and prides his good fortune. He engages Sophie in conversation, inquires about her marital expectations, and then brusquely tries to pet her and place her on his knee. Sophie erupts into disgust and tears herself away from him, becoming furiously irritated by his crudeness, and repulsed by his manner. Octavian cannot bear watching Ochs's insolent and brazen behavior and fumes in rage.

Faninal appears not to notice that anything is amiss, his only concern being that he and his family are about to achieve upward social mobility. Nevertheless, Marianne persistently makes excuses to Sophie for Ochs's behavior, trying to convince her that she is fortunate to be marrying so splendid a nobleman. But Sophie is unable to control her rage and explodes at Ochs: "No man has ever spoken to me like this." Ochs, associating the seductive charm of the waltz with himself, replies leeringly that very soon Sophie will discover his charming qualities.

Baron's Waltz: Mit Mir



Ochs excuses himself to join Faninal and the notary to settle his marriage contract. As he leaves, he sarcastically tells Octavian that he would have no objection if the young

man decides to warm up Sophie for her wedding night. Sophie bursts into tears, telling Octavian that she will never marry that awful creature: "Not for all the world." Octavian tries to console her and expresses his deep feelings and compassion for her, despite being somewhat inhibited by the presence of Marianne. But suddenly the chaperone is called away to deal with the Baron's illegitimate sons and retinue of ill-mannered rustic boors who have become drunk on Faninal's brandy, and have been lecherously chasing the maids.

Sophie and Octavian are finally alone, and Octavian expresses his tender, protective feelings toward her, a contrast to Ochs's coarse insensitivity. Anxiously, Sophie pleads with Octavian to help her escape marrying Ochs, a fate that would be worse than death: Octavian promises his help, and advises her to remain firm. In a moment of bliss, Sophie and Octavian fall into each other's arms and declare their love for each other: they kiss.

While Sophie and Octavian embrace, the intriguers, Valzacchi and Annina, gradually creep close to them, and then tear them away from each other, Valzacchi grabbing Octavian, and Annina pouncing on Sophie: immediately, they call for Baron Ochs.

Ochs confronts the young couple and asks for an explanation. *Eh bien, Mam'zelle*, "Well Ma'mselle. What have you to say to me?" Actually, Ochs is amused rather than annoyed, congratulating Octavian for his speed in presumably making his bride-to-be more accessible.

Octavian awaits Sophie's declaration that she refuses to marry Ochs, but she is too nervous to speak. Octavian becomes Sophie's spokesman, boldly telling Ochs that she refuses to marry him. Ochs brushes aside Octavian's protest, arrogantly proclaiming that he will tame her and she will soon get used to him. Annoyed, Ochs grabs Sophie and tries to force her to leave with him, but Octavian intervenes with drawn sword. Ochs thunders epithets at Octavian but refuses to duel, excusing himself by claiming that he is busy with the marriage contract. Octavian becomes impudent and insults him, further challenging Ochs by vigorously accusing him of being a lecher, a scoundrel, a liar, a dowry hunter, an evil bastard, and a filthy peasant.

As Ochs tries to leave, Octavian lightly wounds his upper arm with his sword, causing the cowardly Baron to scream: "Help! Murder! Police! I'm dying! Get a doctor, bandages! I'll bleed to death." Bedlam and pandemonium reign as servants rush in and compound the chaos and turmoil. Bandages and brandy are brought for the wounded Baron.

Faninal becomes furious, disgraced by the treatment the Baron has received in his home, and apologizes profusely to Ochs. Sophie reveals to her father that she truly loves Octavian, and the newfound lovers embrace. Faninal becomes enraged and threatens to send Sophie to a nunnery if she refuses to marry Ochs; at the same time, he orders Octavian to leave his house and never return. Faninal turns to the wounded Baron who is melodramatically screaming in pain and requesting a drink, and further patronizes him by reaffirming his determination to have Sophie marry him.

Sophie indignantly refuses her father's wishes, likewise threatening him that she would rather enter a convent than marry Ochs. Octavian quietly assures Sophie to have confidence in him, and that she can rely on his support to resolve her dilemma. As Octavian leaves, he begins an intimate and animated conversation with the intriguers, Valzacchi and Annina, no doubt engaging them to assist him in a plot to discredit Ochs.

Ochs blames his misfortunes on the awful city of Vienna: he longs to be back home, but swears revenge on Octavian. Lying on a sofa with his arm in a sling, and sipping a glass of wine that slowly retrieves his confidence, Annina, the conspirator for hire, reads a letter to the Baron: the letter, supposedly written by Mariandel, advises Ochs that she is lovesick and craves a rendezvous with him.

Ochs suddenly recovers, no longer bothered by his wounded arm, nor by thoughts of Octavian's impudence: he has now become obsessed and inspired by the idea of seducing the lovely chambermaid. Ochs complacently hums his favorite waltz and then toddles off to bed, having decided that he will respond to Mariandel later. Nevertheless, Ochs has made a fatal mistake; he failed to pay the conspirator, Annina, for her information.

Act III: A private room in an Inn. Dinner for two is set at a table. There is a bed in an alcove, hidden by a drawn curtain.

At the inn, elaborate preparations are being made for Octavian's revenge upon Ochs. Valzacchi and Annina have united with Octavian who has masterminded an intrigue to trap and expose the Baron as a libertine and philanderer. For their charade, Annina is dressed as a lady in mourning: Valzacchi arranges her veil and dress, and perfects her make-up. Octavian arrives dressed in female clothes, his riding boots visible when he lifts the dress. He throws a purse to the intriguers who thank him profusely.

Five dubious-looking characters arrive: Valzacchi positions them behind various trapdoors in the floor and

behind concealed windows in the walls and rehearses them; when he claps his hands, the various doors and windows will open and heads will gaze into the room. Valzacchi lights the candles in the room, and waiters arrive to complete dinner preparations.

Octavian (Mariandel) arrives on one arm of the Baron, Ochs's wounded arm adjusted in a sling. Anticipating his seduction of Mariandel, Ochs has rented the inn exclusively for himself for the entire evening. The landlord, waiters, and Valzacchi, all fuss around Ochs to help him prepare for his assault on Mariandel: however, as the waiters light candles, Ochs extinguishes them to soften the mood.

Ochs excuses everyone so he can be alone with Mariandel. At the dinner table, he offers Mariandel wine but she declines, feigning innocence and pretending to be afraid. Mariandel notices the bed in the alcove and explodes into a rage as if she is being scandalized. Ochs pacifies her and feigns gallantry, but as he nears her to become more intimate, he again notices with discomfiture her striking resemblance to Octavian, the scoundrel whose face now haunts him.

In the background, musicians play Ochs's favorite waltzes, to which Mariandel tearfully exclaims, *Die schöne Musi*, "Such lovely music," and then lapses into a sentimental mood. Ochs senses that she is overcome with wine, and decides that it is an opportune moment for his attack. He removes his wig and turns to Mariandel, thinking that he can resolve her problem by fondling her and undoing her brassiere. Suddenly, he becomes terrified as spooky faces appear throughout the room, peering at him from mysterious places, even from the floor. Mariandel placates him, telling him that the apparitions are just figments of his imagination.

When Ochs rings for help, a door opens and Annina, dressed in mourning, screams that the Baron is her husband who has abandoned her: "That's him! That's my husband"; Ochs denies ever having seen her. The landlord and staff rush in, and four children scream at Ochs: "Papa, Papa, Papa. Listen to your children." Valzacchi castigates Ochs: "So you were thinking of bigamy? Watch out that the Purity Police doesn't get you."

Ochs foolishly opens a window and calls for the police. When the police arrive, the landlord identifies Ochs as a Baron, but when the inspector asks Valzacchi to confirm his identity, he betrays Ochs and asserts that he has never seen him before.

Mariandel points to the bed in the alcove, and to avoid arrest on a charge of debauchery, Ochs tells the police that Mariandel is his fiancée, Sophie von Faninal. At that very moment, Faninal himself arrives – having been summoned

by the conspirators - and becomes shocked and enraged at Ochs for suggesting that the girl he is with is his daughter Sophie. He sends for Sophie, who has been waiting outside the inn in her carriage, and she becomes delighted to find her unwanted bridegroom in an awkward situation; a libertine caught *in flagrante*. However, Faninal senses a scandal attached to his name and faints; he is carried to an adjoining room, followed by Sophie.

Ochs insists to the police that the young lady is indeed his fiancée; he attempts to leave the inn with Mariandel, all the while muttering to her that if she behaves herself he will marry her and make her a Baroness. Mariandel whispers to the police officer that she has something to reveal which the Baron must not overhear. Two policemen detain Ochs while Mariandel goes behind the alcove curtain. From inside the alcove, female garments are thrown out, piece by piece, to the amusement of the police officers and the consternation of Ochs. While Ochs struggles with the constables, the landlord rushes in to announce that the Marschallin has arrived; Ochs's servant summoned her in the hope that she would be able to extricate her cousin from his present predicament.

The Marschallin makes a regal entrance and immediately announces that the farce is over. She assures the police officers that they can depart, explaining that what has happened was merely a Viennese masquerade; at the same time, she reminds the police Inspector to obey her wishes since he did indeed once work as a bodyguard for her husband. The police excuse themselves.

The Marschallin now takes command of the entire tangled situation: Octavian emerges from the alcove in proper clothes, stupefying Ochs, who suddenly regains his composure; he begins to gloat, believing he has discovered an affair between the Marschallin and Octavian. Sophie returns and angrily tells Ochs that her father has ordered that they never wish to see him again. Ochs makes a final attempt to effect a reconciliation with Faninal, but the Marschallin intervenes, advising him that his engagement is terminated: in excusing him, she expects him to depart with dignity and in silence; as such, she is willing to forgive and forget everything that has happened.

Ochs, realizing that his betrothal plans have been crushed, decides that his only alternative is to leave with as little fuss as possible. Nevertheless, his departure becomes calamitous when all the trap-door manipulators and protagonists in the charade emerge: the landlord pursues Ochs with a bill; Annina and the children resume their screams of "Papa"; and waiters, musicians, and other participants in the charade demand payment for their services.

The Marschallin observes Sophie and Octavian, and expresses shock at how quickly her forecast that Octavian would find a new lover has materialized. Octavian is duly embarrassed, forced to introduce Sophie, the young woman he loves, to the Marschallin, the woman who had been his mistress. Sophie, shy and incredulous, remains devastated and embarrassed. In a noble, generous, and sympathetic gesture, the Marschallin orders Octavian to go to Sophie and pursue his bliss.

Octavian addresses Sophie, failing to understand why she is not elated now that she is free from her horrible fiancé. But Sophie feels ashamed: she wants to go to her father, and tells Octavian to go to the Marschallin. Octavian, bewildered and confused, begs her to stay.

The Marschallin questions Sophie, wondering how she has come to love Octavian so quickly - 12 hours. Nevertheless, she blesses the young couple, ordering Sophie and Octavian to ride together in her coach: she will ride with the disappointed Faninal who will drive her home. Octavian, almost speechless, thanks the Marschallin for her kindness.

The Marschallin expresses the poignancy of this bittersweet moment in her life “*Hab mir’s gelobt*,” “I vowed to myself.”

Trio: *Hab’ mir’s gelobt ihn lieb zu haben,*

Moderto e molto sostenuto



The heart of *Der Rosenkavalier* is the poignant and touching final trio sung by the Marschallin, Sophie, and Octavian. The Marschallin displays her strength of character and her nobility, revealing that she truly wanted to love Octavian properly; in that way, his love would be there for another. Nevertheless, she never thought that she would have to relinquish him so soon, but the Marschallin is well familiar with the ground rules of love and life; with dignity, humility, and compassion, she accepts the turn of events.

Octavian is unable to comprehend reality, yet he senses that he is experiencing a sublime moment in his life; an ecstatic and enraptured moment in which he has found Sophie. Sophie would like to kneel before the Marschallin and thank her for relinquishing Octavian to her, but she is fearful and unable to express herself. Octavian tries to thank the Marschallin, but she responds to him tersely: *Ich weiss gar nicht*, “I know nothing, nothing.”

As the Marschallin departs, restraining her tears, Octavian and Sophie stare at each other ecstatically; finally alone together, they fall into each other's arms, their only thoughts, how incredulous their destinies have become: *Ist ein Traum*. "It is a dream."

Octavian and Sophie: Ist ein Traum,

Andante tranquillo



Ist ein Traum, kann nicht wirklich sein dass wir zwei bei einander sein!
 'Tis a dream, tell me it is true that you love me and I love you!

Octavian revels in his happiness in finding Sophie: Sophie, although frightened, envisions that she has entered heaven. Octavian and Sophie embrace, "It is a dream, we are together, for all time and eternity."

The Marschallin and Faninal pass through benevolently. Faninal praises the young lovers. As they exit, the Marschallin fails to look at Octavian.

As Octavian and Sophie leave, Sophie drops her handkerchief. In the empty room, the Marschallin's servant-boy comes running in, finds the handkerchief, and runs off with it.

Octavian and Sophie have found each other, enraptured by their newfound love. For the Marschallin, the turn of events has been both bitter and sweet: nevertheless, Time, which she feared so much, has endowed her with humility and wisdom; as such, the loving Octavian and Sophie can look toward a bright future together.

Richard Strauss.....and Der Rosenkavalier

Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) became the foremost post-Wagnerian German composer during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, his fame attributed to his genius as a composer of opera, lieder, or art songs, and symphonic tone poems. Strauss's musical style was distinctly different from the hyper-Romanticism of his predecessor, Richard Wagner: his musical Expressionism was unique, individual, and possessed an independent musical signature.

Strauss was born and educated in Munich, the son of Franz Strauss, recognized at the time as Germany's leading French horn virtuoso. From the age of 4, the young Richard devoted all of his energies to music: by age 18 his musical output had already become prodigious; more than 140 works that included songs, chamber, and orchestral pieces. Those early compositions were strongly influenced by his father: they were classical, and therefore, rigidly formal in structure.

In 1884, at the age of 20, Strauss was commissioned by Hans von Bülow to compose the *Suite for 13 Winds* for the Meiningen orchestra: the young composer conducted the work's premiere which led to his appointment as assistant conductor of the orchestra, and henceforth, he became eminent throughout all of Europe as both composer and conductor. Strauss proceeded to conduct major orchestras in both Germany and Austria, achieving his reputation for his interpretations of Mozart and Wagner, and eventually becoming director of the Royal Court Opera in Berlin (1898-1919), and musical co-director of the Vienna State Opera (1919-1924).

Strauss's musical compositions fall into three distinct periods. His first period (1880-87) includes a *Sonata for Cello and Piano* (1883), the *Burleske* for piano and orchestra (1885), and the symphonic fantasy, *Aus Italien* (1887), "From Italy," the latter, heavily influenced by the styles of Liszt and Wagner; in Strauss's early compositions, he expressed his admiration for Wagner in secret so as not to affront the elder Strauss who detested Wagner both musically and personally.

In Strauss's second creative period (1887-1904), his unique musical style burst forth, in particular, his unprecedented mastery of orchestration. Like Franz Liszt, he abandoned classical forms in order to express his musical ideas in the programmatic symphonic tone poem, an orchestral medium that was totally free from the restrictions of earlier classical styles. Strauss perfected the descriptive medium of the tone poem genre, imbuing it with profound drama that he achieved through the

recurrence and interweaving of leitmotif themes, and the exploitation of the expressive power and virtuosity of a huge orchestra, the latter saturated with impassioned melodiousness, descriptive colors and instrumentation, and harmonic richness. Although he supplied detailed scenarios for each of his tone poems, he was irritated when analysts excessively indulged them, claiming that “a poetic program is exclusively a pretext for the purely musical expression and development of my emotions.”

Strauss's symphonic poems dominated his musical output during his second creative period: *Don Juan* (1889), *Macbeth* (1890), *Tod und Verklärung*, “Death and Transfiguration,” (1890), *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, “Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks,” (1895), *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” (1896), *Don Quixote* (1897), and *Ein Heldenleben*, “A Hero's Life,” (1898), the latter portraying Strauss himself as the hero against his adversarial critics. In 1903, he composed the *Symphonia Domestica* for a huge orchestra, its programmatic theme describing a full day in the Strauss family's household, including duties tending to the children, marital quarrels, and even the intimacy of the bedroom.

Strauss endowed the tone poem form with a new vision and a new language: he innovated harmonies and developed instrumentation that vastly expanded the expressive possibilities of the modern symphony orchestra; nevertheless, his textures were always refined, and achieved an almost chamber-music delicacy. His Expressionism is magnificently demonstrated in works such as *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, its instrumental colors depicting the 14th century rogue's adventures amid the sounds of pots and pans, and the hero's murmurs as he goes to the gallows: in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, ostensibly a homage to Nietzsche, the essences of man and nature are brilliantly contrasted through varying tonalities; and in *Don Quixote*, the music magically captures images of sheep, windmills, and flying horses.

In Strauss's third period (1904-49), he became the foremost opera composer in the world. Earlier, he had composed his first opera, *Guntram* (1894), but it was a failure, considered a slavish imitation of Wagner. Likewise, his second opera, *Feuersnot* (1902), “Fire-Famine,” was a satirical comic opera about small town prudery and hypocrisy that was also poorly received. Strauss was not yet in full command of his operatic powers.

But in 1905, Strauss emerged into operatic greatness with *Salome*, based on Oscar Wilde's blasphemous and scandalous play about female erotic obsession; Strauss's musical dramatization was unprecedented and deemed an explosive “shocker.” *Salome* immediately became a major

triumph; the notable exceptions, Vienna, where the powerful prelates forbade Gustav Mahler to stage it, and at the New York Metropolitan Opera House, where it was canceled because of its scandalous subject matter. Strauss followed with *Elektra* (1909), his first collaboration with the Austrian poet and dramatist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*, like *Salome*, became another exploration into female fixations, in this instance, revenge.

Both *Salome* and *Elektra* were composed for the opera stage as one-act operas; as such, they possess intense and concentrated musical drama. Strauss, a contemporary of Zola, Ibsen, Wilde, and the *fin du siècle* malaise, demonstrated in these operas his mastery at conveying psychological shock and intense emotion through the power of his music. He was a musical dramatist *par excellence* – as well as a musical psychologist – who was most comfortable with emotionally complex and super-charged characters: *Salome*, *Elektra*, and later, the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911). Both *Salome* and *Elektra* contain furious explosions of human emotion, pathological passion, perversity, horror, terror, and madness: both operas profoundly reflect the new discoveries in psychiatry that were occurring during the early 20th century.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal eventually exercised a profound influence on Strauss: they collaborated on 6 operas; all of which are considered Strauss's finest works. After *Elektra*, Strauss abandoned the violence and psychological realism of "shock" opera and composed *Der Rosenkavalier*, a "comedy in music" set in 18th century Vienna; a sentimental story evoking tenderness, nostalgia, romance, and humor, that is accented with anachronistic, sentimental waltzes.

With Hofmannsthal, Strauss composed *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912, revised 1916), a play-within-a-play that blends *commedia dell'arte* satire with classical tragedy, and combines the delicacy of Mozart with overtones of Wagnerian heroism: the philosophical *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919), "The Woman without a Shadow," a symbolic and deeply psychological fairy tale in which the spiritual and real worlds collide; *Intermezzo* (1924), a thinly disguised Strauss with his wife, Pauline, in a "domestic comedy" involving misunderstandings emanating from a misdirected love letter from an unknown female admirer; *Die ägyptische Helena* (1928), "The Egyptian Helen," based on an episode from Homer's *Odyssey*; and his final collaboration with Hofmannsthal, *Arabella* (1933), which returns to the ambience of *Der Rosenkavalier*'s Vienna and amorous intrigues.

After Hofmannsthal's death, Strauss composed operas with other librettists, though none of these ever equaled

his earlier successes: *Die Schweigsame Frau* (1935), “The Silent Woman,” a delightful comedy written to a libretto by Stefan Zweig after Ben Jonson; *Friedenstag* (1938), “Peace Day”; *Daphne* (1938); *Midas* (1939); *Die Liebe der Danae*, “The Love of Danae” completed in 1940 but not staged until 1952; and his final opera, *Capriccio* (1942), an opera-about-an-opera in which the relative importance of opera’s text and music is argued.

Strauss was most fertile in producing songs – *lieder* – some of the finest after those of Schumann and Brahms: among the most esteemed are *Zueignung*, “Dedication,” (1882-83) and *Morgen*, “Morning,” (1893-94). Other works include the ballet *Josephslegende*, “Legend of Joseph,” (1914) its scenario by Hofmannsthal, *Eine Alpensinfonie*, “Alpine Symphony,” (1915), and *Vier Letzte Lieder*, “Four Last Songs” (1948).

Strauss’s musical style was daring, brilliant, ornate, and ostentatious; a post-Romantic bravura that thoroughly pleased audiences during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the successes of *Salome* and *Elektra* earned him accolades as an avant-garde composer, after *Der Rosenkavalier*, he became more conservative and classical, unaffected by experiments in serial and atonal music that were dominating his contemporary musical world. The greater part of his career – the 38 years following *Der Rosenkavalier* – was spent polishing his unique style, striving for a perfect fusion between the distinctive refinement and delicacy of Mozart, and the profound poetic and dramatic expressiveness of the Romantics.

Strauss lived in Germany during the Nazi period: he was neither interested nor skilled in politics, and no one of his operas – before or after the Nazis – contains a political subtext or underlying ideological message. In 1933, after the National Socialists came into power, Strauss at first closely identified with the new regime, unwittingly allowing himself to be used by them; from 1933 to 1935, he served as president of the Reichsmusikkammer, the state’s music bureau. However, very soon thereafter, he came into conflict with government officials.

After Hofmannsthal’s death in 1929, Strauss collaborated with the Jewish dramatist Stefan Zweig on the lighthearted comedy, *Die Schweigsame Frau*, “The Silent Woman,” a relationship that became unacceptable and particularly embarrassing, if not scandalous to the Nazis. The Nazis eliminated Zweig’s name as the librettist, citing the story as an adaptation “From the English of Ben Johnson.” In an heroic protest and gesture of defiance, Strauss restored Zweig’s name to the libretto with his own hand, nevertheless, in 1935, after 4 performances, *Die Schweigsame Frau* was banned: Strauss was forced to

resign as president of the Chamber of Music, and was compelled to work with a non-Jewish librettist, Joseph Gregor.

Above all else, Strauss was a family man: he would use every shred of his influence as Germany's greatest living composer to protect his Jewish daughter-in-law, Alice Grab, and his two grandchildren: Strauss seemingly collaborated with the Nazis by making an "arrangement"; he would not speak out against them, but they in turn, would leave his daughter-in-law and his two grandchildren alone.

Strauss was supposedly apolitical, claiming that art supercedes politics. He tried to ignore his perception of the Nazi's disgrace to German honor, but he did become the compliant artist who quickly usurped the music posts of emigrating Jewish artists such as Bruno Walter. In 1933, after Toscanini protested and withdrew from a *Parsifal* performance at Bayreuth, he later met Strauss in Milan and greeted him with a reproachful remark: "As a musician I take my hat off to you. As a man I put it on again." Nevertheless, Toscanini was not living in Germany, nor was he obliged to protect a Jewish daughter-in-law or Jewish grandchildren.

Life under the Nazis could not have been pleasant for Strauss: he was tolerated, but treated with contempt; at one point, an hysterical propaganda minister, Goebbels, forced him to relinquish his prized Garmisch villa and make it available for bomb victims. Strauss spent part of World War II in Vienna and in Switzerland where he was out of the limelight. After the war, an allied commission investigated him and he was exonerated of any collaboration with the Nazis.

Strauss was no hero, nor was he a martyr. In historical hindsight, it would be presumptuous to stand in judgement of Strauss for his political silence. Strauss was another suffering artist, struggling for survival in a world that went mad: nevertheless, his less than heroic opposition to the Third Reich continues to shade perceptions of his works. In 1949, Strauss returned to Garmisch where he died three months after his 85th birthday.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 1874 – 1929, poet, playwright, and essayist, was born into an affluent and cultured Viennese family of Austrian, Italian, Swabian, and Jewish origins; he inherited a cosmopolitan spirit and a predilection for the arts.

By the age of 17, his lyric poetry and extraordinarily sensitive intelligence earned him recognition as a literary phenomenon, astonishing artistic circles in Vienna and

throughout the German-speaking world; he had already written a copious outpouring of lyric poems that possessed a mature beauty and perfection of form.

By his mid-20s, Hofmannsthal's muse was in transition, provoking a crisis of intellect and sensibility: he rejected the aestheticism of his earlier poetry, and began to explore new artistic forms of expression that would forge a connection between art and the human experience. Fundamentally, Hofmannsthal developed a distrust of words and language as the sole bearers of emotional expression, ultimately concluding that words by themselves were inadequate, isolated, disconnected, and insufficient to raise consciousness; he decided to abandon lyric poetry and turned to the theater in order to express himself artistically.

Hofmannsthal envisioned the theatrical arts as a unity of expressive elements, by its nature, the most capable art form to emphasize ideas, attitudes, and sentiments: theater integrated acting, gesture, scenic design, music, and dance, and in its most ideal form, was a fusion of all the arts; an ideal wholeness represented by the sum of its parts. In discussing his theory about the unity of the theatrical arts, Hofmannsthal commented: "In action, in deeds, the enigmas of language are resolved." His conception of a unified theatrical art form was ostensibly broader in scope than Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a theory that he deemed too heavily weighted toward music.

Hofmannsthal concluded that words performed through the integrated theatrical arts, could express what language alone had exhausted, and therefore, could possess a new power to stimulate thought and affect the entire range of human sensibilities. He had supreme faith in his ideals and proceeded to write robustly for the theater, much of his work reinterpreting traditional and mythological subjects, but endowing them with social, moral, and humanistic ideals.

Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Sophocles' *Electra* became the first significant materialization of his new artistic sea change; his search for a theatrical alternative to the poetic world of his youth. In implementing his theories in *Elektra*, he reduced Sophocles drama to its bare essentials, eliminating the stagnant elements of the Greek chorus altogether, as well as what he considered superfluities interfering with the main thrust of the drama. Ultimately, all the accoutrements of the theatrical stage became integrated with his text: gesture, body movement, sacrificial rituals, torch-bearing processions, and most importantly, dance.

Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* received much antagonistic criticism: it was considered a transgression against Sophocles that was saturated with excessive violence, and

contained a distorted emphasis on hysteria and neuroticisms. The critics claimed that he had reduced the drama to a reportage on the dysfunction of an abnormal and diseased family; that the character of Elektra was overburdened with revenge madness; that Chrysothemis was too possessed by denial and escape; and that Klytämnestra's paranoia and tortured conscience was too excessive.

Nevertheless, Hofmannsthal intentionally endowed Sophocles' classic drama with a modern, *fin de siècle*, Freudian treatment, distinctly separating it from the ancient world by removing its inherent conflicts and tensions between gods and mortals. Hofmannsthal's re-interpretation of Sophocles reflected the *zeitgeist* of his times, an era in which Freud was revealing discoveries in the realm of traumas, dreams, fantasies, and the subconscious: his library included first editions of the Breuer and Freud *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), all obviously relevant to his conception of the *Elektra* drama.

Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* treated the conflicts and tensions of Sophocles' drama in psychological terms, so that the drama's raw evil, dark hatreds, and violent passions of revenge, are not ordained by the gods, chance, nor fate, but motivated by mysterious, subconscious forces deep within the human psyche. His imagination was initially fired by Sophocles' description of Electra as a woman with a "tongue of fire." As a result, his Elektra is motivated by a psychological, hysterical monomania that transforms her into savagery: revenge becomes an external manifestation of incomprehensible aspects of her dark subconscious; her mind becomes maddened, distorting perceptions of love, alienation, jealousy, and sexuality.

In Sophocles, Clytemnestra prided her murder of Agamemnon as justifiable revenge for his sacrifice of her beloved daughter, Iphigenia, an element of the story missing from Hofmannsthal's version. Hofmannsthal presents Clytemnestra as a classic psychological study of inner torment, neuroses, and trauma: she appears as a debauched, decadent despot, who is eerily shrouded with talismans. She is saturated with guilt for her crime and unable to cope with her past deeds; by her own admission she has suppressed her murderous act and is only able to recall events before and after. The Confrontation scene between Elektra and Klytämnestra represents the centerpiece of Hofmannsthal's drama as well as Strauss's opera, the hollow-eyed murderess erupting into uncontrolled hysteria in her obsession to exorcise her haunting demons. Hofmannsthal clearly presented his characterizations of Elektra and Klytämnestra as if they were Freudian case studies.

Strauss's two sensational "shockers," *Salome*, and his first collaboration with Hofmannsthal, *Elektra*, became the most provocative operas of the twentieth century. After his "tragic" mood, he felt he was ready for a romantic comedy, what he termed a "drawing-room" opera. Conceptually, he was seeking a comedy placed in the eighteenth-century, envisioning at the outset, a light, Mozartian comedy of manners, perhaps in the style of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, or *Così fan tutte*. Feeding his desire to write a comedy was his perception that the German operatic repertory badly needed a new comic work since there had been no internationally successful German comic opera since Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.

Hofmannsthal developed an idea for a comic work, much of its story adapted from three French plays: Molière's comedies, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, and *Les amours du Chevalier de Faublas* by Louvet de Couvray, a contemporary of Beaumarchais.

The proposed opera would contain two main roles, "one for a baritone and one for a young and graceful girl dressed as a man, of the type of Farrar or Mary Garden. The period: Vienna at the time of Maria Theresa." Hofmannsthal suggested that the comic work be described as a "burlesque opera," but Strauss objected, sensing that the public would then associate the opera with Offenbach or Gilbert and Sullivan. Ultimately, the opera's original title was *Ochs and Lerchanau*, literally, "Baron in the lark-meadow, which was changed to *Der Rosenkavalier*, and subtitled a "Comedy for Music." In bringing this comedy to the opera stage, Strauss insisted that Hofmannsthal's comic elements should be exuberant: "Don't forget that the audience should also laugh! Laugh, not just smile or grin..." As Hofmannsthal fed him the scenario, Strauss became stimulated and motivated by his exceptional libretto, and was unhesitant in expressing his delight with his poet: "You're a da Ponte and Scribe rolled into one."

Der Rosenkavalier premiered in 1911, two years after *Elektra*. The combination of Strauss's music and Hofmannsthal's appealing story immediately established the opera as a huge success. During its first year, the opera had fifty performances in Dresden, and thirty-one in Vienna. It became so popular and famous that special *Rosenkavalier* trains ran to the theater towns, and in its time, brands of champagne and cigarettes bore its name. *Der Rosenkavalier* eventually became a distinct entry into the central repertory of all major opera houses, despite the fact that its performance was a huge undertaking that required an enormous cast, a massive orchestra, and a running time exceeding four hours; ultimately, it became a vehicle for celebrated acting-singers, as well as an assured house-filler.

In *Der Rosenkavalier* Hoffmannsthal was distinctly expressing his anti-Wagnerism; he was “turning away from Wagner’s intolerable erotic screaming - boundless in length as well as in degree: a repulsive, barbaric, almost bestial affair, this shrieking of two creatures in heat.” Therefore, Hofmannsthal strove for a sophisticated text that would portray the story’s blend of youthful and mature love in a civilized, urbane manner, far removed from Wagner’s primal sex (*Tristan*) and Jungian archetypes. Viennese waltzes replace long narratives, and instead of a monumental *Liebestod* death-scene finale, the opera concludes with a hauntingly beautiful trio ennobling Octavian and Sophie’s newfound love, juxtaposed against a bittersweet lament from a beautiful, aristocratic woman who has begun to fear the inevitable consequences of the aging process. Octavian and Sophie find love’s bliss, and the Marschallin surrenders to the inevitable with grace and dignity: there is an assurance that life continues, and each character will confront life’s next episode with an exuberant sense of hope and dignity.

Combining comedy with serious sentiment is a monumental creative challenge, a difficulty Mozart and da Ponte confronted in their *Così fan tutte*. The essence of comedy is not so much that a story possess realism, but that the events represented could indeed occur. In *Der Rosenkavalier*, Hofmannsthal and Strauss succeeded brilliantly in ingeniously integrating comedy with moments of seriousness and sentimentality.

It was not below the distinguished Hofmannsthal’s dignity to adapt a few *commedia dell’arte* archetypes for his characterizations. For centuries, the Renaissance *commedia dell’arte* genre provided the fundamental structure for theatrical comedy: those traditional clowns like Arlecchino, Brighella, Columbina, and Pantalone. The characters were always involved in humorous situations involving jealous husbands, ridiculous old men in search of young wives, conniving servants, ludicrous spinsters, and comic policemen. Many of the opera’s characterizations distinctly resemble *commedia dell’arte* archetypes: Baron Ochs is a classic, amorous old fool; Annina and Valzacchi are clever and unscrupulous hirelings; the pompous policeman in the last act is dignified only by his title of Commissary; and Faninal is a typical nouveau riche social climber.

Strauss, a master musical dramatist, contrives his musical language to ingeniously portray Hofmannsthal’s humorous characterizations: the Barons’s music is pompous and haughty; the intriguer’s music is slithery and guileful; and even the policeman’s music bears an inflated sense of his own importance. Strauss’s musical language speaks clearly: when Octavian masquerades as Mariandel

in the first act, his bold, masculine leitmotif is transformed into a delightfully feminine waltz; when the Baron tries to kiss Mariandel in the final act and again confounds him with her resemblance to the troublesome Octavian, the music parodies Octavian's leitmotif theme.

The orchestra is the story's narrator and is saturated with touches of subtle humor: in the first act, the Marschallin apologizes to Ochs for having kept him waiting; her excuse, a terrible headache; however, the orchestra contradicts the great lady by playing Octavian's lovemaking music, the real cause for the delay. In effect, much of the opera's comedy takes place in the orchestration.

Much of the charm of *Der Rosenkavalier* emanates from Strauss's musical portrait of 18th century Vienna. Although *Der Rosenkavalier* is generally regarded as Strauss's most Viennese opera, it was only Hofmannsthal, his librettist, who was Viennese: nevertheless, the opera is a magnificent blend of Viennese irony and humor, juxtaposed with German earnestness; an ambience of harsh if not clumsy humor.

Der Rosenkavalier's waltzes are largely designed to serve satirical purposes, but they have taken on a non-contextual life and identity of their own, performed extensively as concert pieces. Waltzes and Vienna are synonymous, but Strauss's waltzes in *Der Rosenkavalier* are anachronistic: the opera takes place during the eighteenth-century, a hundred years before Strauss's namesake, Johann, virtually invented the Viennese waltz.

Strauss's best-known waltz in *Der Rosenkavalier* is Ochs's favorite, *Mit mir*, plagiarized from Johann's brother Josef's famous waltz, *Dynamiden*, op 73. Richard Strauss never acknowledged his debt to Josef, though presumably his excuse for having lifted *Dynamiden* was his intent to parody the Viennese waltz rather than to write an example of it.

Der Rosenkavalier's score is primarily tonal, yet it has some bold chromaticisms; nevertheless, it contains few of the harmonic musical sensations of *Salome* and *Elektra*. There is an unconcealed eroticism that derives from the sensuous appeal of those Viennese waltz-tunes, but the true glory of *Der Rosenkavalier* is its sentimental music: Strauss's musical language tugs at the heartstrings with a luscious tenderness, at times, almost too sweet, but never excessive.

Strauss's music glorifies Hofmannsthal's text: his music is cheerful, fluent, and down-to-earth, yet it is saturated with sumptuous effects and profound musical intensity. Strauss's symphonic virtuosity is varied and contrasting, at times chamber-like, and at times interspersed with lush orchestral colors and effects.

Certainly, the orchestration is far from the gargantuan proportions of *Elektra* or *Salome*, nevertheless, it indeed possesses masterly and ingenious strokes; the musical depiction of icicles falling at the end of the Presentation of the Rose seems to remain forever in the ear.

Strauss insisted upon brisk theatrical effects while Hofmannsthal meticulously devoted his energies to delicate details of class and propriety. To capture his imaginative world, Hofmannsthal virtually created a remarkable, untranslatable vernacular that he derived from Viennese and provincial dialects: much of his language includes earthy idioms, antique formal address, and at times, pure linguistic fantasy.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal originally envisioned two major roles in the comedy: a “baritone buffo,” Baron Ochs, a buffoon-type cousin of the Marschallin, and a Cherubino-like character, the young Octavian. The romantic flavor of the comedy was to be provided by the escapades of the ardent young Octavian, who becomes the victor in outwitting the gross, lecherous Ochs for the hand of Sophie. Originally, the Marschallin character was essentially a background character who would act as a neutralizing force in the dispute between Ochs and Octavian: her stature in the scenario was not intended to significantly tilt the balance of the opera.

Ochs is a comic figure plucked out of the *commedie dell’arte* tradition, an arrogant man who is cowardly, vain, lecherous, and deceitful. He is essentially a crude and cruel buffoon, though not so lovable or indeed as old as Shakespeare’s Falstaff. Nevertheless, Ochs is a comic antihero, his gross and brutish behavior provoking a sense of revenge against him: when he is hounded and bullied during the last act of the opera, and of course, loses Sophie to Octavian, his fate seems almost redemptive and cathartic.

Strauss commented about his conception of Baron Ochs: “Ochs must be a rustic beau of thirty-five, who is after all a member of the gentry, if somewhat countrified, and who is capable of behaving properly in the salon of the Marschallin without running the risk of being thrown out by her servants after five minutes. He is at heart a cad, but outwardly still presentable enough so that Faninal does not refuse him at first sight. Especially, Ochs’s first scene in the bedroom must be played with the utmost delicacy and discretion. In other words, Viennese comedy, not Berlin farce.”

Strauss cautioned that he did not want Baron Ochs portrayed as a “disgusting vulgar monster,” conceiving Ochs as possessing a certain degree of dignity so that,

like Falstaff, there remains a sense of sympathy for his foibles as well as his victimization.

From the start, Octavian was conceived as enjoying a liaison with an aristocratic older woman whom he would leave in order to woo Sophie. But as Hofmannsthal drew the Marschallin's character in depth, with Strauss's warm approval, her characterization gradually began to evolve and develop; eventually, the Marschallin's character and actions became the center of gravity of the entire opera story.

The Marschallin became a great female operatic creation who eventually completely overwhelmed the inspirational souls of the opera; without her, *Der Rosenkavalier* would be a musical farce with some good waltzes and a scattering of sentimental songs. Ultimately, the Marschallin has become one of the most lovable characters of all opera: very few operatic characters possess her wit, her mastery of affairs, her nobility, and her understanding of the society surrounding her.

The Marschallin became the central inspiration of the story, and it is incredible that her character evolved by accident and almost as an afterthought. As she developed from the pens of Hofmannsthal and Strauss, her character demands transcended their original conception, and likewise, her stature changed, prompting Hofmannsthal's best prose, and Strauss's most inspired music. It was specifically for the Marschallin that Hofmannsthal all but invented that aristocratic Viennese dialect that she speaks, dignifying her further with the Christian names of the historical empress, Maria Thèrèse, a tactful disguise as if she really were the empress, nevertheless, a name befitting a great lady. And in deference to her, Strauss virtually scaled down his vast orchestra to almost modest Mozartian proportions.

In essence, the very nature of the original *Der Rosenkavalier* scenario transformed to assert the Marschallin's importance, nobility, wisdom, graciousness, and selflessness. She both darkened and illumined the comedy, adding a profound dimension to the story. As she evolved into greater nobility, essentially the focus of the opera shifted from a romantic comedy to affairs of the heart.

The Marschallin character has commanded an almost myth-like adoration from the opera world. Her sense of humanity has come to symbolize Vienna as Hans Sachs symbolized old Nürnberg. Like Hans Sachs, who nobly resigned himself to surrender Eva, the Marschallin acted selflessly, demonstrating that she is woman of profound understanding and transcendental wisdom. The

Marschallin became the soul of *Der Rosenkavalier*, a noble woman possessing a vision of eternity who precipitates moral and spiritual change, and certainly, a resolution of the opera's crises.

Strauss has been considered the twentieth-century's great musical eroticist, a man who dared to take music into the bedroom, and even into his own: in his *Symphonia Domestica* (1903), it is quite clear that Strauss's musical cameras are photographing intimacies in the family bedroom.

Likewise in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss's erotic pen was unabashedly active. In the Introduction (Strauss preferred Introduction rather than Prelude), the composer musically portrays the sexual adroitness of a young man with an experienced older woman: two musical themes express the lover's ecstasy and bliss; the first theme, a rising, masculine phrase on the horns that represents Octavian's youthful ardor; and the second theme, more gentle and feminine phrases that represents the sensual passion of the mature woman who is his lover. In effect, the opera is famous for starting with an orgasm, signaled by whooping horns that most graphically depict the young man's ecstasy, after which, the music subsides, and the mood becomes sad and wistful. (It is arguable if the listener would grasp this meaning if it was not explained.)

Beginning with *Salome* (1905), all of Strauss's operas and lieder songs were written for women: his music seems to capture the female soul, their yearnings, desires, and feelings. His operas present women of many ages, many temperaments and voices, and the music he wrote for them usually follows the long curve leading to female ecstasy and bliss. The most interesting men in his operas are also women, either women in trouser roles like Octavian and the Composer, or in the polymorphous sense, grotesque madmen, like Herod and even Ochs; men, in terms of heroic figures, rarely appear in Strauss's operas.

Likewise, *Der Rosenkavalier* is an opera written for the female voice. The romantic comedy focuses on three sopranos: Octavian (a trouser role) competing with Ochs for the hand of Sophie, and the Marschallin. As the story evolves, the spirit of the Marschallin pervades the entire opera: she dominates the first act, does not appear in the second act, and makes her final appearance at the very end of the third act. Nevertheless, even though she is not present on the stage, she is awaited, thought about, and her reappearance is anticipated so that she can heroically take control of the drama and direct it to its conclusion.

At the end of the first act, Hofmannsthal reserved his

finest verses for the Marschallin; her wisdom and omniscience are overpowering. She is obsessed with aging, and develops an almost uncontrollable fear of Time; a paranoia that makes her want to stop all the clocks. Nevertheless, she knows that Time will keep moving onward, and so must she. Strauss commented that “the Marschallin is a young and beautiful woman of thirty-two, at the most, who, in a bad mood, thinks herself ‘an old woman’ as compared with the seventeen-year old Octavian...” Nevertheless, he added, “Octavian is neither the first nor the last lover of the beautiful Marschallin, nor must the latter play the end (of the third act) with the sentimentality of a tragic farewell to life, but with Viennese grace and lightness half weeping, half smiling.”

The Marschallin possesses an enlightened gift of consciousness and awareness which provides her with a profound understanding of the present, past, and future: Time. Her acute sensibilities enable her to come to terms with herself, and direct the story – its comedy and romances - to their rightful conclusions; to a transcendence that lies beyond Time.

The opera rises to one of its finest moments at the end of Act I when the Marschallin reminisces so poignantly about her declining youth; a contemplative, reflective, and melancholy moment. Octavian returns to deny her thoughts, but she intuitively knows that one day he will leave her for a younger woman, as indeed he should, for the sake of them both. The Marschallin’s sad farewell to her episode with Octavian is enacted with Viennese grace and lightness. Her tears reflect the loss of Octavian, an adventure struggling with Time, but she knows that she can no longer play the mother-substitute, and that Octavian must discover a more positive love relationship.

At the conclusion of the opera, the Marschallin brings order out of chaos as three radiant soprano voices express their inner feelings in a moment of sublime introspection. The Marschallin begins the trio, *Hab’ mir’s gelobt ihn lieb zu haben*, “I made a vow to love him rightly”; time has stopped, the action is halted, and the Marschallin, Octavian, and Sophie, each stand transfixed and lost in contemplation.

Some thoughts can only be expressed through the musical language. Hofmannsthal ceded a career as a lyric poet to become Strauss’s librettist: he believed that words combined with music can express what language alone had exhausted. In the transcendent final trio of *Der Rosenkavalier*, Hofmannsthal’s words combine with Strauss’s most inspired music to express the thoughts of three people who are involved in the most important moment of their lives: at that moment, all have overcome Time, and there is a sense of transcendence in which all the clocks have literally stopped.

Der Rosenkavalier has become something of a phenomenon, probably the most popular opera written in the twentieth century. This Strauss-Hofmannsthal masterpiece has succeeded in becoming one of their most enduring creations; a sublime work whose charm and beauty never fails to seduce the affections of audiences.

The central theme of *Der Rosenkavalier* is love, humanity's most obsessive aspiration. Octavian and Sophie have found each other, enraptured by their newfound happiness and bliss. For the Marschallin, the turn of events, and her sacrifice, become both bitter and sweet: nevertheless, Time, which she feared so much, has endowed her with humility, wisdom, and dignity; it is the nobility of the Marschallin that speaks so profoundly to audiences, and the reason *Der Rosenkavalier* has endured unceasingly for almost a century.