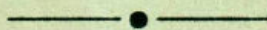


Richard Strauss



HERBERT F. PEYSER



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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK RICHARD STRAUSS ***

Richard Strauss

HERBERT F. PEYSER



Written for and dedicated to
the
RADIO MEMBERS
of
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of NEW YORK

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Richard Strauss at the age of 39

FOREWORD

The writer of a thumb-nail biography of Richard Strauss finds himself confronted with a troublesome assignment. Strauss lived well beyond the scriptural age allotted the average man. He would have been 86 had he reached his next birthday. There was nothing romantic or sensational about his passing, for he died of a complication of the illnesses of old age. There was not much truly spectacular about the course of his life, which was most happily free from the material troubles which bedeviled the existence of so many great masters; and he was not called upon to starve or to struggle to achieve the material rewards of his gifts. He had not to pass through the conflicts which embittered the lives of Wagner or Berlioz, and he was never compelled to suffer like Mozart or Schubert. There is no record of his ever humiliating himself or performing degrading chores for publishers in return for a wretched pittance. He had wealth enough without compromising his art to keep the pot boiling—and for this one can only feel devoutly thankful. What if he was taxed with sensationalism? How many of the masters of music has not had at one time or another to endure this reproach? If “Salome” and “Elektra”, “Ein Heldenleben” and “Till Eulenspiegel” were in their day scandalously “sensational” did not the whirligig of time reveal them as incontestable products of genius, irrespective of inequalities and flaws? However Richard Strauss compares in the last analysis with this or that master he contributed to the language of music idioms, procedures and technical accomplishments typical of the confused years and conflicting ideals out of which they were born. His works are most decidedly of an age, whether or not they are for all time! In a way he was almost as fortunate as Mendelssohn. Need anyone begrudge him this?

H. F. P.

RICHARD STRAUSS

By
HERBERT F. PEYSER

The late spring of 1864 brought two events which, though seemingly unrelated, actually had a kind of mystic kinship and were to stir the surfaces of music. Early in May of that year Richard Wagner was summoned to Munich to become the friend and protégé of the young Bavarian sovereign, Ludwig II, whose real mission on earth was to save the composer for the world. Hardly more than a month later there was born in the same city a boy likewise named Richard who was destined in the fullness of time to become in a sense an heir and continuator of the older master, though by no means a vain copy of his artistic and spiritual lineaments. And long before the span of his days reached its end he had taken an undisputed place in history as a seminal force in music, for all the disagreements and conflicts his art was to engender through a large part of his more than four-score years.

Richard Strauss first saw the light on June 11, 1864, in a house on the Altheimer Eck, Munich, at the center of the town and a stone's throw from the twin steeples of the Frauenkirche. The edifice in which the future composer of *Salome*, *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier* was born forms part of a complex of buildings in which a number of larger and smaller beer halls and restaurants, separated by cobbled courtyards, house the brewery of Georg Pschorr, senior, whose son, Georg Pschorr, junior, enlarged the establishment. Furthermore, he improved the quality of its products till Pschorrbräu beer became, it seemed to many (including the writer of these pages) the most incomparable refreshment this side of heaven, despite the close proximity of the Hofbrauhaus, the Löwenbräu, the Augustiner Bräu and the unnumbered other Munich breweries and affiliated Bierstuben. At this point the writer ought, logically, to confess that he bases his present recollections on what he remembers from his wanderings in the Bavarian capital prior to the Second World War, since which time changes without number may well have changed the picture. But one thing is reasonably certain—if the old house at Altheimer Eck (Number 2) still stands it continues to have affixed to its wall the decorative inscription: “Am 11 Juni 1864 wurde hier Richard Strauss geboren.” (“On June 11, 1864, Richard Strauss was born here.”)

* * *

The Pschorrs apart from being excellent brewers were excellent musicians. One of the four daughters, Josephine, later Richard's mother, a fairly accomplished pianist, taught her son piano in his fifth year. A noted harpist, August Tombo, continued the lessons and by the time the boy was seven he was administered violin instruction. Franz Strauss, Richard's father, was an individual of a fibre as tough as Josephine Pschorr, who became his wife, was mild-mannered and sensitive. But he was an amazingly fine horn player, for the sake of whose virtuosity and musicianship greater men than he put up with his ill manners and incredible tantrums. A venomous reactionary, his particular detestation was Wagner, against whom he never hesitated to exhibit the meanest traits of which he was capable. Even when the author of *Tristan* expressed himself as overjoyed with the sound of the orchestra at a first rehearsal of his work in the little Residenz Theatre Franz Strauss retorted: “That's not true! It sounded like an old tin kettle!” He pronounced Wagner's horn parts “unplayable” so that Wagner had to call upon Hans Richter to try out for him some passages in *Die Meistersinger* in order to demonstrate that they were anything but “impossible”. With the elder Strauss Hans von Bülow was repeatedly at loggerheads. And when he once attempted to thank Bülow for some favor the latter had shown young Richard Strauss Bülow exploded with the words: “You have no right to thank me! I did your son a favor not on your account but only because I consider his talent deserves it!” To the end of his days Franz Strauss remained a cantankerous individual.



Birthplace of Richard Strauss in Munich

Young Richard may not have exhibited the precocity of a Mozart or a Mendelssohn but there could be no doubt that musical impulses stirred in the child. He piled up a considerable quantity of juvenilia, beginning as a six-year-old. In 1871 he turned out a “Schneiderpolka”—a “Tailor's Polka”. There followed dance pieces for piano, “wedding music” for keyboard and children's instruments, some marches and more miscellany of the sort. It was related by his naturally proud relations that the lad could write notes even before he had learned the alphabet. There would be no particular point in detailing these boyish accomplishments, yet when Richard was twelve an uncle paid for the publication by Breitkopf und Härtel of a “Festival March”, which gained the distinction of appearing as “Opus 1”. It need hardly be said that he participated in domestic performances of chamber music with regularity. All the same his school work maintained a high level, even if it did not consume a needless amount of time. He

also found leisure to jot in the pages of his mathematics copybook whole passages of a violin concerto which appears to have been set down during his classroom lessons. According to his biographer, Willy Brandl, the piece was written so rapidly that the student contrived a three-line staff instead of the usual five-line one.

At this period his musical tastes were colored by those of his father. Thus there is no reason for surprise that the compositions he turned out up to the end of his high school days were the customary platitudes of classical and romantic models. Especially Schumann and Mendelssohn were rather colorlessly reflected in the products the youth fashioned. Even considering his father's poisonous detestation of Wagner it still remains hard to grasp how weak was the pressure the creator of *Tristan and Meistersinger* exercised on the son precisely when the Wagnerian idiom was beginning to permeate the language of music. More than that, it took time for the boy Strauss to rid his system of the ludicrous prejudices he parroted for a while. To his friend the composer, Ludwig Thuille, he confided that *Lohengrin* (which he heard at fifteen) was "sweet and sickly, in all but the action"; and after his first exposure to *Siegfried* he lamented that he was "more cruelly bored than I can tell!" Then he concluded with this burst of prophecy: "You can be assured that in ten years nobody will remember who Richard Wagner was!"

Young Strauss was to outlive such heresies by the sensible process of steeping himself in Wagner's scores rather than by viewing inadequate performances as truths of Holy Writ. It is hardly necessary to emphasize the dismay of Franz Strauss as, little by little, he became aware of the turn things were taking. He who had striven to bring up his son in his own Philistine ways was gradually brought face to face with the upsetting fact that the young man might be getting out of hand! Richard was no music school or conservatory pupil, and had presumably none too many academic precepts to unlearn. One advantage of this was that nothing tempted him to cut short other phases of his education; and in the autumn of 1882 he began to attend philosophical, literary and other cultural lectures at the University of Munich, so that there were no serious gaps in his schooling. He continued to compose industriously (a chorus in the *Elektra* of Sophocles was one of his creations in this period); but in after years he warned against "rushing before the public with unripe efforts." Subsequently he visited upon the works of his salad days this judgment: "In them I lost much real freshness and force." So much for those who question even today the soundness of this early verdict.

* * *

One advantage he came early to enjoy—the good will of Hermann Levi, the Munich conductor (or, let us give him his more imposing official title of "Generalmusikdirektor") who first presided in Bayreuth over Wagner's *Parsifal*. In 1881 the outstanding chamber music organization of the Bavarian capital performed a string quartet of young Strauss and very shortly afterwards Levi sponsored the first public hearing of a rather more ambitious effort, a symphony in D minor. Before a capacity audience the noted conductor went so far as to congratulate the high school student. It should be set down to the credit of the scarcely seventeen-year-old composer that he did not for a moment suffer the tribute to turn his head. Next morning the student was back in his classroom, as unconcerned with his triumphs of the preceding evening as if they had all been no more than an agreeable dream. The usually peppery father appears to have been somewhat less balanced than his son and a little earlier took it upon himself to dispatch Richard's *Serenade for Wind Instruments*, Opus 7, to Hans von Bülow. "Not a genius, but at the most a talent of the kind that grows on every bush," shot back the latter after a glimpse at the score of this adolescent production. But Bülow's irritable mood softened before long and he was considerably more flattering about other of the composer's works which came to his attention. All the same Bülow grew to like the *Serenade* well enough to make room for it on one of his programs. Meantime—on November 27, 1882—Franz Wüllner produced it in Dresden. And it was a strange quirk of fate which made of this piece the unexpected vehicle for Richard's first exploit as a conductor! It so happened that Bülow eventually scheduled it (1884) for one of his concerts. At the eleventh hour the older musician, suffering from an indisposition, appealed to his young friend to direct his own work. Trusting to luck Richard suffered a baton to be thrust into his hands, and almost in a dream state, hardly knowing how things would turn out, piloted the players through the score. "All that I realize," he afterwards said, "is that I did not break down!"

Young Strauss was not idling. The products of his energetic young manhood if they do not bulk large in his exploits indicate clearly how carefully he was striving to learn his craft without, at the same time, seeking to blaze trails. One finds him turning out in 1881 five piano pieces as well as the string quartet just mentioned; a piano sonata, a sonata for cello and piano, a concerto for violin and orchestra, *Mood Pictures* for piano, a concerto for horn and orchestra, and a symphony in F minor. This symphony, incidentally, was first produced by Theodore Thomas, on December 13, 1884, at a concert of the New York Philharmonic Society. Perhaps more important, however, were the songs Strauss was writing at this stage. For they have preserved a vitality which Strauss's instrumental products of that early period have long since lost. It is not easy to grasp at this date that it was the early Strauss the world has to thank for such masterpieces of song literature as the incorrigibly popular (one might almost say hackneyed), *Lieder* as "Zueignung", "Die Nacht", "Die Georgine", "Geduld", "Allerseelen", "Ständchen", and a number of other such lyric specimens, many of them in the truest tradition of the German art song. Indeed, the boldness, the diversity, declamatory, rhythmic and melodic features of Strauss's achievements in this field might almost be said to have preceded the more sensational aspects of his orchestral works.

* * *

The songs of Strauss, the earliest specimens of which date from 1882, and which span (though in steadily diminishing numbers), the most fruitful years of his life, aggregate something like 150. If the better known ones are with piano accompaniment, not a few are scored for an orchestral one. A large number long ago became musical household words, along with the *Lieder* of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, though having a physiognomy quite their own. The woman who became his wife, Pauline de Ahna, was an accomplished vocalist and that circumstance goes far to account for the diversity of his efforts in this province. The joint recitals of the pair stimulated for a considerable period the composer's lyric imagination. If his inspiration eventually sought expression in larger frames it must be noted that the slant of his genius habitually ran to larger conceptions. In any event the *Lieder Abende* of Strauss and his betrothed help explain the creative impulses which at this stage found so much of their outlet in song-writing. The composer was later to explain that a new song might be dashed off at any half-way idle moment—might even be scribbled down in the twinkling of an eye between the acts of an opera performance or during a concert intermission. And as spontaneously as Schubert, Richard Strauss busied himself with poems of the most varied character.

* * *

On the young man's twenty-first birthday Hans von Bülow recommended to Duke George of Meiningen "an uncommonly gifted" musician as substitute while he himself went on a journey for his shattered health. Bülow referred to the suggested deputy as "Richard III", since after Richard Wagner, "there could be no Richard II." Strauss arrived in Meiningen in October, 1885. The little ducal capital boasted a high artistic standing. Its theatrical company enjoyed international fame. The town, to be sure, had no opera, but the orchestra, though numbering only 48 instrumentalists, had been so trained by the suffering yet exigent Bülow that it was virtually unrivalled in Germany. The newcomer was encouraged to submit under his mentor's eye to an intensive training. Bülow's rehearsals ran from nine in the morning till one in the afternoon and his disciple from Munich was invariably on hand from the first to the last note. The rest of the day was devoted to score reading and to every subtlety of conductor's technic. The young man was absolutely overwhelmed by "the exhaustive manner in which Bülow sought out the ultimate poetic content of the scores of

Beethoven and Wagner.” And a favorite saying of the older musician was never to be forgotten by his disciple from Munich: “First learn to read the score of a Beethoven symphony with absolute correctness, and you will already have its interpretation.”

* * *

Strauss made other friends and valuable connections in Meiningen. One of the most important and influential of these was an impassioned devotee of Wagner, Alexander Ritter. Like so many apostles of the creator of *Parsifal* at that period, Ritter was a violent opponent of Brahms. Besides he was the composer of a comic opera, “Der faule Hans”, and of a symphonic poem that once enjoyed a vogue in Germany, “Kaiser Rudolfs Ritt zum Grabe”. It was Ritter’s service to familiarize Strauss with some of the deepest secrets of the scores and writings of Wagner as well as of Liszt, and he understood how to fire his young friend with soaring enthusiasm for his own ideals. He also did much to inspire the budding conductor with a taste for the writings of Schopenhauer, an inclination he himself had inherited from Wagner. Ritter’s influence, in short, was one of the luckiest developments at this stage of Strauss’s career.

The first concert the youth from Munich conducted in Meiningen took place on October 18, 1885. It afforded him a chance to exploit his talents as pianist and batonist as well as composer, what with a program that included Beethoven’s *Coriolanus* Overture and Seventh Symphony, Mozart’s C minor Piano Concerto and that F minor Symphony of his own which Theodore Thomas had conducted the previous year in New York. Strauss had every reason to be pleased with the outcome. Bülow speaking of his debut as pianist and conductor had referred to it as “geradezu verblüffend” (“simply stunning”); even the hard-shelled Brahms, who chanced to be on hand, had deigned to encourage him with a cordial “very nice, young man!” When on December 1 of that year Bülow gave up the orchestra’s leadership, Strauss inherited the post, conducted all concerts and had to direct, sometimes on the spur of the moment, almost anything this or that high placed personage might suddenly take a fancy to hear. With the courage of despair he repeatedly attempted compositions he hardly knew or had not directed publicly. Yet he never made a botch of the job, inwardly as he may have quaked.

* * *

To this period belongs a composition which has survived and at intervals turns up on our symphonic programs—the curious *Burleske* for piano and orchestra. The piece is something of a problem but it is one of the most yeasty and original products of its composer’s youth. It possesses a type of wit and bold humor worthy of the subsequent author of *Till Eulenspiegel*. If it still betrays Brahmsian influences some of those dialogues between piano and kettledrums depart sharply from the more flabby romantic effusions of the youth who still clung to the coat tails of Schumann, Mendelssohn and some lesser romantics. Rightly or wrongly the composer always harbored a dislike for the *Burleske* though when he created it his original instinct led him aright, if more or less unconsciously. Not till four years later did the pianist, Eugen d’Albert, give it a public hearing in Eisenach; at that, Strauss himself never brought himself to dignify the *Burleske* with an opus number and insisted he would not have consented to its publication but for his need of funds. Today the saucy little score seems more alive than certain other early efforts which were rather closer to their composer’s heart.

Meiningen had been a sort of stepping stone. Strongly against the advice of Hans von Bülow, who detested Munich from the depths of his being, Strauss, nevertheless, accepted a conductor’s post in his native city, where he had the advantage of continuing his stimulating contact with Alexander Ritter, who had followed him to the Bavarian capital. Yet he did not look forward to a Munich position with particular joy. Before entering on his duties he permitted himself a vacation in Naples and Sorrento. In Munich he found the Royal Court Theatre bogged down in a morass of routine. The musical direction of that establishment, though in the capable hands of Hermann Levi, was unfired by real enthusiasm, let alone true inspiration. The first of Strauss’s official assignments was the direction of Boieldieu’s opéra comique, *Jean de Paris*, and a quantity of similar old and harmless pieces. One promised duty which augured well was a production of Wagner’s boyhood opera, *Die Feen*. He would probably never have been promised anything so rewarding had not the conductor for whom it had been intended in the first place fallen ill. But even this unusual prize was in the end snatched from his grasp after he had presided over the rehearsals. At the last moment the direction of the Wagner curio was assigned to a certain Fischer. There was a managerial conference concerning the matter at which, we are told, “Strauss was like a lioness defending her young”; but the Intendant put a stop to the argument by announcing that “he disliked conducting in the Bülow style” and that, moreover, Strauss was becoming intolerable because of his high pretensions “for one of his youth and lack of experience!”

Meanwhile, the composer made the most of leisure he did not really want, by occupying himself with more or less creative work. One of his editorial feats of this period was a new stage version of Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride*, manifestly inspired by Wagner’s treatment of the same master’s *Iphigénie en Aulide*. More important still was his first really large-scale work, *Aus Italien*, to which he gave the subtitle *Symphonic Fantasy for large Orchestra*. He had completed the score in 1886 and on March 2, 1887, he conducted it at the Munich Odeon. To his uncle Horburger he wrote an amusing account of the first performance at which, it appears, moderate applause followed the first three movements and violent hissing competed with handclappings. “There has been much ado here over the performance of my *Fantasy*” Strauss wrote his uncle “and general amazement and wrath because I, too, have begun to go my own way.” And his biographer, Max Steinitzer, told that the composer’s father, outraged by the hisses, hurried to the artist’s room to see his son and found him, far from disturbed, sitting on a table dangling his legs! One detail the composer of this symphonic Italian excursion failed to notice—namely that in utilizing the tune *Funiculi, Funicula* for the movement depicting the colorful life of Naples he was quoting, not as he fancied a genuine Neapolitan folksong, but an only too familiar tune by Luigi Denza, who lived much of his life in a London suburb!

Be all this as it may, Strauss had more to occupy his thoughts than the fortunes of his Italian impressions to which he had given musical shape. In 1886-87 he composed (besides a sonata in E flat for violin and piano and a number of fine *Lieder*—among them the lovely and uplifting “Breit über mein Haupt”) the tone poem, *Macbeth* (least known of them all). He revised it in 1890 and on October 13 of that year conducted it in Weimar. But *Macbeth* has been completely overshadowed by the next tone poem (of earlier opus number but later composition), the glowing, romantic, vibrant *Don Juan* which has a spontaneity and an indestructible freshness that give it a kind of electrical vitality none of the orchestral works of their composer’s early manhood quite rival, unless we except that masterpiece of humor, *Till Eulenspiegel*—itself a different proposition. It had been the powerful impressions made on the composer by some of the Shakespearian productions of the dramatic company in Meiningen which gave the incentive for *Macbeth*. In the case of *Don Juan* the moving impulse was the poem of Nikolaus Lenau (whose real name was Niernbsch von Strahlenau), and who described the hero of his work as “one longing to find one who represented incarnate womanhood” in whom he could enjoy “all the women on earth whom he cannot as individuals possess.” Unable in the nature of things to achieve this tall order Lenau’s *Don Juan* falls prey to “Disgust, and this Disgust is the devil that fetches him.” Strauss gave no definite meanings to specific phases of his music, though he was not to want for interpreters and one of them, Wilhelm Mauke, found it preferable to discard the model supplied by Lenau and to discover in the tone poem the various women who inhabit Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. Be this as it may, the score delighted the first hearers when it was played in Weimar; they tried to have it repeated on the spot. Hans von Bülow wrote that his protégé had, with *Don Juan* had an “almost unheard-of success”; and the young composer might well have seen a good augury in the notorious Eduard Hanslick’s outcries to the effect that the score was chiefly a “tumult of dazzling color daubs” and in his shrieks that Strauss “had a great talent for false music, for the musically ugly.”

It cannot be said that he was truly happy with his Munich experiences and the disappointments which, if the truth were known, seemed for the moment to dog his footsteps. He was, to be sure, adding to his accomplishments as a composer and plans for an opera began to stir in him. Moreover, he had more and more chances to accept guest engagements as a conductor and such opportunities were taking him on more and more tours in Germany. He had striven to do his best in the city of his birth yet few seemed to be grateful for his efforts to clean up drab accumulations of routine. Bülow realized from long and heart-breaking experience what his friend was undergoing. Very few thanked the idealist for his efforts to better the musical standing of his home town.

* * *

At what might be described as a truly psychological moment of his career Strauss was approached by Bülow's old friend, the former Liszt pupil, Hans von Bronsart, with an invitation to transfer his activities to Weimar. He had every reason to look with favor on the project. Weimar was hallowed in his eyes by its earlier literary and musical associations. It had harbored Goethe and Schiller and been sanctified in the young musician's sight by the labors of Liszt. His Munich friend, the tenor Heinrich Zeller, who had coached Wagner roles with him, had settled there, and a young soprano, Pauline de Ahna, the daughter of a Bavarian general with strong musical enthusiasms, soon followed him. In proper course she was to become Richard Strauss's wife. A high-spirited, outspoken lady, never disposed to mince words, a source of innumerable yarns and witticisms, and who saw to it that her celebrated husband carefully toed the mark, Pauline Strauss was in every way a chapter by herself. And when, not very long after his death she followed him to the grave it seemed only a benign provision of fate that she should not too long survive him.

Strauss almost instantly infused a new blood into the artistic life of Weimar, where he settled in 1889 and remained till 1894. The worthy old court Kapellmeister, Eduard Lassen, was sensible enough to allow his energetic new associate complete freedom of action. True, the artistic means at his disposal were relatively modest and at first they might well have given the ambitious newcomer pause. The orchestra then contained only six first violins; there was a painfully superannuated little chorus and most of the leading singers had seen better days. But the conductor from Munich was disturbed by none of these apparent handicaps. In Bayreuth he had already learned the proper way of producing Wagner, and even when the means were limited, he tolerated no concessions; all Wagnerian performances had to be done without cuts or at least with a minimum of curtailments. A wisecrack began to go the rounds: "What is Richard Strauss doing?" to which the reply was: "Strauss is opening cuts!" The moldy old settings were replaced by new ones and once when there were insufficient funds to buy new stage appointments Strauss approached the Grand Duke with a plea that he might lay out of his own pocket a thousand Marks to freshen the settings. To the credit of the ruler it should be told that he refused the offer and disbursed the sum himself. But Strauss's reforms were far from ending there. He once confessed that in his comprehensive job he was not only conductor but "coach, scene painter, stage manager and tailor"—in short, a thoroughgoing Pooh-Bah. He threw himself heart and soul into the job, so much so that in spite of a small stage and limited means he produced, in the presence of none other than Cosima Wagner a *Lohengrin* that deeply gripped her.

* * *

He had symphonic concerts as well as operas to occupy him. At one of the former he transported his hearers with the world premiere of his *Don Juan*. The date deserves to be noted—November 11, 1889. That same year he had composed another tone poem, *Death and Transfiguration*, and on June 21, 1889, he permitted an audience in nearby Eisenach to hear it. The work is program music, if you will; but the idea that it originally set out to illustrate the poem about the man dying in a "necessitous little room" and, after his death struggles, translated to supernal glories, is wrong. Moreover the long accepted notion, that the music is based on lines by Alexander Ritter, is fallacious. For, in the first place the composer did not aim to illustrate his friend's word picture; and in the second, Ritter wrote the poem only *after* becoming acquainted with the score. This is what explains a certain incongruity between Ritter's verses and the tones which, in reality were never conceived in slavish illustration of them. Hanslick, wrong as usual, was to write misleadingly: "Once again a previously printed poem makes it certain that the listener cannot go awry; for the music follows this poetic program step by step, quite as in a ballet scenario." And he spoke of the score as a gruesome combat of dissonances in which the wood-wind howls in runs of chromatic thirds while the brass growls and all the strings rage!

By this time accustomed to such critical nonsense the composer did not suffer himself to be troubled. What disturbed him much more was that his old champion, von Bülow, gave indications of no longer seeing eye to eye with him. At Bülow's suggestion Strauss had revised and newly instrumented *Macbeth* but the piece was to continue a stepchild. Soon he was increasing his output of songs and enriching Liedersingers with such treasures as "Ruhe, meine Seele", "Caecilie", "Heimliche Aufforderung" and "Morgen"; while only a few short years ahead lay "Traum durch die Dämmerung", "Nachtgesang" and "Schlagende Herzen", to delight nearly two generations of recitalists.

* * *

Strauss had always been blessed with a robust health. Unlike Wagner, for instance, he never suffered from exacerbated nerves and violent extremes of unbalanced mood. But at the period of which we speak he did experience one of his rare periods of illness. What between his guest engagements, his rehearsals, the strain of composing, attending to details of publication and myriad other obligations of a traveling conductor and virtuoso, he came down in May, 1891, with a menacing gripe which sent him to bed and threatened serious complications. He was resigned to anything, even if he did confess: "Dying would not be in itself so bad, but first I should like to be able to conduct *Tristan*!" He recovered and had his wish in 1892. But in the summer he was sick once more, this time with pneumonia. Now it looked as if one lung were seriously threatened. He was granted the vacation he requested, from November, 1892, to July of the succeeding year. Taking some works and sketches he started, on the advice of his physicians, for the south.

The convalescent, with a finished opera libretto in his baggage went to repair his health in Italy, Greece and Egypt. In Egypt he recovered completely. In the Anhalter railway station, Berlin, he was to see for the last time the mortally sick von Bülow, likewise journeying to Egypt in a last effort to repair his shattered constitution. Poor Bülow was not to survive the trip. The wiry frame of Strauss helped him over any threat of tuberculosis and not only defied any peril to his lungs but seemed actually to renew his creative powers. The libretto which occupied his attention was that of his opera, *Guntram*, the first and least known of his productions for the lyric stage.

Guntram is without question a "Stiefkind" among Richard Strauss's operas. The average Strauss enthusiast's acquaintance with its music may be said to be confined to the brief phrase from it cited in the section called *The Hero's Works of Peace* in the tone poem *Ein Heldenleben*. Nevertheless, the opera cost the composer six long years of his time. It received a performance in Weimar, July 12, 1894. On October 29, 1940, it was to be heard again, and once more in Weimar. Strauss tells in his little volume, *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, that it had "no more than a *succès d'estime* and that its failure to gain a foothold anywhere (even with generous cuts) took from him all courage to write operas." Efforts were made late in its creator's life to revive it, all of them as good as futile. As recently as June 13, 1942, the Berlin State Opera tried, with the help of the conductor, Robert Heger, to pump life into it. Strauss found not a little of the opera "still vital" ("*lebensfähig*") and felt sure it would produce a fine effect given a large orchestra. He liked particularly in his old age the second half of the second act and the whole of the third. The

book has been described as revealing the influence of Wagner. Guntram, a member of a religious order in the time of the Minnesingers, esteems the ruling duke, but kills himself, after renouncing the duchess, the object of his affection. Despite the dramatic resemblances to *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* Alexander Ritter found in the opera a departure from Wagnerian influences.

Slowly as Strauss labored over the three acts of *Guntram* he spent no such time on the tone poems which now began to follow in rapid succession. After the ill-fated opera and a quantity of fine new *Lieder*, superbly diversified in expressive scope and lyric moods, there followed the tone poem which, apart from *Don Juan* continues even in the present age to address itself most warmly to the public heart—*Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*. Analysts of one sort and another have provided the work with a program, which has long been accepted as standard. The composer himself declined to supply one, maintaining that the listener himself should seek to “crack the hard nut Till, the folk rogue of ancient tradition” had supplied his public. He himself would say nothing to clear up the secrets of the lovable knave, who came to his merited end on the gallows. If Strauss confided to his public the nature of many of Eulenspiegel's various ribaldries and madcap adventures he might, he maintained, easily cause offense. Concertgoers could cudgel their brains all they chose, Richard Strauss would keep his own counsel! Naturally, his work acquired, rightly or wrongly, regiments of “interpreters”. If “nasty, noisome, rollicking Till, with the whirligig scale of a yellow clarinet in his brain,” as the worthy William J. Henderson eventually described him, the irrepressible “Volksnarr” was ultimately to become visualized as a kind of medieval ballet fable sporting all the benefits of story-book scenery and dramatic action. The result actually was not too remote from what Strauss originally intended. Its popular musical elements, such as the fetching polka tune (or “Gassenhauer”), the use of the folk melody (“Ich hatt' einen Kamaraden”) and a good deal else seemed theatrically conceived. The use of the Rondeau form was ideally suited to the idea which the composer strove to formulate. At one period Strauss, conscious of the operatic elements of *Till*, was moved to give the work a thoroughgoing dramatic setting and began to sketch the piece as a sort of lyric drama, or rather a scherzo with staging and action. But he lost interest in the scheme and did not progress beyond plans for a first act. Franz Wüllner conducted the premiere of *Till Eulenspiegel* in Cologne, November 5, 1895.

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It has been pointed out that if the masculine element is idealized in Strauss's tone poems it is rather the feminine which he gives precedence in his operas. Something of an exception to this is exemplified in the next purely orchestral work, the tone poem *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which followed less than a year later and was produced under its composer's direction at one of the Museum concerts in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, November 27, 1896. The score is described as “freely after Nietzsche”. At once there arose protests that Strauss had tried to set Nietzschean philosophy to music! Actually he had aimed to do no such preposterous thing, and *Zarathustra* posed no genuine problems. If the score is the weaker for some of its syrupy and sentimental pages it includes another, such as the magnificent sunrise picture at the beginning, which can only be placed for overpowering effect beside the passage “Let there be Light and there was Light” in Haydn's *Creation*. If ever anything could testify to Strauss's incontestable genius it is this grandiose page! Other portions, it may be conceded, lapse into commonplace, but the close in two keys at once (B and C) offered one of the early examples of polytonality that duly outraged the timid. Today this clash of tonalities has quite lost its power to frighten. In 1898 and for quite some time thereafter, it passed for hardly less than an invention of Satan! Strauss intended this juxtaposition to characterize “two conflicting worlds of ideas”. Possibly it can be made to sound sharply dissonant on the piano; the magic of Strauss's orchestration, however, eliminates all suggestion of crude cacophony.

On March 18, 1898, Cologne heard under the baton of Franz Wüllner, a work of rather different order, *Don Quixote*, Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character. It is a set of orchestral variations on two themes, the one heard in the solo cello and characterizing the Knight of the Rueful Countenance, the second (solo viola) picturing his squire, Sancho Panza. As a feat of individualizing these variations are a thing apart. The tone painting is unrivalled in its composer's achievements up to that time. A number of special effects, which long invited attention over and above their real musical worth called forth considerably more astonishment than they really deserved. The pitiful bleatings of a flock of sheep, violently scattered by the lance of the crack-brained Don, his attacks on a company of itinerant monks, his ride through the air (amid the whistlings of a “wind machine”)—these and other effects of the sort are actually only minor phases of the score. Its memorable qualities, aside from striking pictorial conceits, are rather to be found in the moving and tender pages portraying the passing of Don Quixote as the mists clear from his poor addled brain. There are episodes of a melting tenderness in these which rank among the most eloquent utterances Strauss has attained.

Still another tone poem was to succeed—*A Hero's Life (Ein Heldenleben)* performed under the composer's direction in Frankfurt. The work is autobiographical with the composer himself as its hero and his helpmate, (obviously Frau Pauline, his “better half” as she was to be called). For a long time *Ein Heldenleben* passed as the prize horror among Strauss's creations, especially its fierce and rambunctious battle scene, which some critics considered a kind of bugaboo with which to frighten the wits out of grown-up concertgoers! For its day *A Hero's Life* was unquestionably strong meat. If people were horrified by the racket and cacophony of the battle scene they were no less disposed to irritation at the cackling sounds with which Strauss pilloried his benighted foes who resented his aims and accomplishments. And they were displeased by the immodesty with which he exhibited himself as a real and misprized hero by the citation of fragments from his own works. Some, among them as staunch a Strauss admirer as Romain Rolland, were disturbed not because the composer talked in his works “about himself” but “because of the way in which he talked about himself.” All the same Strauss was to boast no truer champion throughout his career than the sympathetic and keenly understanding author of *Jean-Christophe*.

Ein Heldenleben was the last but one of the series of tone poems which were to lead to a new phase of Richard Strauss's career. The last of this series, the *Symphonia Domestica*, was completed in Charlottenburg, Berlin, on December 31, 1903. Its first public hearing took place under the composer's direction in Carnegie Hall, New York, March 21, 1904. The *Domestic Symphony*, “dedicated to my dear wife and our boy” is in “one movement and three subdivisions. After an introduction and scherzo there follow without break an *Adagio*, then a tumultuous double fugue and finale.” The reviewers discovered all manner of programmatic connotations in this depiction of a day in Strauss's family life though he was eventually to tell a New York reviewer that he “wanted the work to be taken as music” pure and simple and not as an elaboration of a specific program. He maintained his belief “that the anxious search on the part of the public for the exactly corresponding passages in the music and the program, the guessing as to significance of this or that, the distraction of following a train of thought exterior to the music are destructive to the musical enjoyment.” And he forbade the publication of what he sought to express till after the concert.



Richard Strauss and Family

He might as well have saved himself the trouble! There is no room here to point out even a small fraction of what the critics heard in the work, encouraged by a casual note or two the conductor found it necessary to set down at certain stages of the score. The youngster's aunts are supposed to remark that the infant is "just like his father", the uncles "just like his mother". A glockenspiel announces that the time, at one point is seven in the morning. The child gets his bath and the ablutions are accompanied by shrieks and squeals. Husband and wife discuss the future of the baby and there is a lively domestic argument which ends happily. Ernest Newman, irritated like numerous other reviewers by the torrents of vain talk the piece called forth, was to complain that "Strauss behaved as foolishly over the *Domestica* as he might have been expected to do after his previous exploits in the same line"...

The first organization to perform the work was the orchestra of Hermann Hans Wetzler, in New York, and it took several months longer for the music to reach Germany. Mr. Newman had found the texture of the whole is "less interesting than in any other of Strauss's works; the short and snappy thematic fragments out of which the composer builds contrasting badly with the great sweeping themes of the earlier symphonic poems ... the realistic effects in the score are at once so atrociously ugly and so pitifully foolish that one listens to them with regret that a composer of genius should ever have fallen so low."



A page from the original score of "Elektra"

More than a decade was to elapse before Strauss was to concern himself again with problems of symphonic music. Opera and ballet were to be the chief business of those activities which one may look upon as the middle period of his creative life. One may be permitted a short backward glance to account for some of his previous creations. Songs (a number of the best of them), an "Enoch Arden" setting (declamation with piano accompaniment) occupy the late years of the 19th Century and the dawn of the 20th, not to mention the choral ballad for mixed chorus and orchestra *Tailleur*. More important, however, is a second operatic venture. This opera in one act, called *Feuersnot*, is a setting of a text by the noted Ernst von Wolzogen, who was associated with the vogue of the so-called "Ueberbrett", a sort of up-to-date vaudeville, an "arty" movement typical of the period. *Feuersnot* is a picture of a "fire famine" brought about by an irate sorcerer in revenge for the act of a maiden who scorned his love. Thereby all the fires of the town are extinguished! The piece is rather too long for a short opera and too short for a full-length one. But the text is rich in word play, punning satire, double meanings and topical allusions, interlarded with biting reflections on the manner in which Munich had once turned against Wagner and on the trouble the benighted burghers would have in similarly ridding themselves of the troublesome Strauss! There is not a little of the real Strauss in the music, though at that, less than one might expect from the composer of *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Ein Heldenleben* which already lay some distance in the past. *Feuersnot* was first staged at the Dresden Opera on November 21, 1901, under the leadership of Ernst von Schuch. And the consequence was that for years to come Strauss's operatic premieres took place in that gracious city.

We now come into view of a milestone of modern music drama. In 1902 Strauss attended a performance of Oscar Wilde's play, "Salome", at Max Reinhardt's Kleines Theater in Berlin. Gertrude Eysoldt had the title role. The Swiss musicologist, Willy Schuh, relates that the composer, after the performance was accosted by his friend, Heinrich Grünfeld, who remarked: "Strauss, this would be an operatic subject for you!" "I am already composing it," was the reply. And the composer went on to tell: "The Viennese writer, Anton Lindner, had already sent me the play and offered to make an opera text of it for me. Upon my agreement he sent me some cleverly versified opening scenes which did not, however, inspire me with an urge to composition; till one day the question shaped itself in my mind: 'Why do I not compose at once, without further preliminaries: Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!' From then on it was not difficult to cleanse the piece of 'literature', so that it has become a thoroughly fine libretto!

"Necessity gave me a really exotic scheme of harmony, which, showed itself especially in odd, heterogeneous cadences having the effect of changeable silk. It was the desire for the sharpest kind of individual characterization that led me to bitonality. One can look upon this as a solitary experiment as applied in a special case but not recommend it for imitation."

Difficulties began with von Schuch's first piano rehearsals. A number of singers sought to give back their parts till Karl Burrian shamed them by answering, when asked how he was progressing with the role of Herod: "I already know it by heart!" A little later the Salome, Frau Wittich, threatened to go on strike because of the taxing part and the massive orchestra. Soon, too, she began to rail against "perversity and impiety of the opera, refused to do this or that 'because I am a decent woman'," and drove the stage manager almost frantic. Strauss remarked that her figure was 'not really suited to the 16-year-old Princess with the Isolde voice' and complained that in subsequent performances her dance and her actions with Jochanaan's head overstepped all bounds of propriety and taste."

In Berlin, according to Strauss, the Kaiser would permit the performance of the work, only after Intendant von Hülsen had the idea of "indicating at the close by a sudden shining of the morning star the coming of the Three Holy Kings." Nevertheless, Wilhelm II remarked to Hülsen: "I am sorry that Strauss composed this *Salome*. I like him, but he is going to do himself terrible harm with it!" At the dress rehearsal the famous high B flat of the double basses so filled Count Seebach with the fear of an outbreak of hilarity, that he prevailed upon the player of the English horn to mitigate the effect, somewhat, "by means of a sustained B flat on that instrument." Strauss's own father, hearing his son play a portion of the opera on the piano, exclaimed a short time before his death: "My God, this nervous music! It is as if beetles were crawling about in one's clothing!" And Cosima Wagner declared after listening to the closing scene: "This is madness!" The clergy, too, was up in arms and the first performance at the Vienna State Opera in October, 1918, took place only after an agitated exchange of letters with Archbishop Piffl. The orchestra of *Salome* in all numbers 112 players. Strauss, however eventually arranged the opera for fewer players and Willy Schuh tells of the composer having conducted it in Innsbruck with an orchestra of only 56 players, winds in twos but highly efficient solo instrumentalists.

At all events, Strauss has been described as an inimitable conductor of *Salome*. Willy Schuh (whom Strauss designated late in his life as his "official" biographer, when the time came to prepare his "standard" life story) alludes to Strauss as an "allegro composer", whose direction of *Salome* was of altogether remarkable "tranquillity" and finds that the real secret of his direction of this music drama was to be sought in the "restfulness" and creative aspects of his interpretation, "which avoids every excess of whipped up, overheated effects and sensationalism." It is, therefore, illuminating to consider the modifications the years have wrought on the interpretative treatment proper to the work. Little by little the legend of the decadent, hysterical, hyper-sensual work was replaced by the assurance of its almost classical character; and the truth of Oscar Wilde's declaration to Sarah Bernhardt when the play was new: "I aimed only to create something curious and sensual" has at length come to the fore.

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There is scarcely any need to recount in any detail the early difficulties of *Salome* in America, when the scandalized cries that arose after the work received a single representation at the Metropolitan Opera House, in New York, only to be shelved as "detrimental to the best interests of the institution" after a solitary representation still ranks among the notorious and less creditable legends of the American stage. Strauss soon after this taste of the operations of American puritanism accused Americans of "hypocrisy, the most loathsome of all vices." He was handsomely avenged, however, when on January 28, 1909, Oscar Hammerstein revived the work (with Mary Garden as Salome) at his Manhattan Opera House and started it on a triumphant American career, which confounded all the ludicrous prognostications and horrified shouts with which it has been greeted only a short time earlier.

The work which followed *Salome* was *Elektra*, the text of which was the creation of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Here began a collaboration between poet and musician which was to last with fruitful results until the latter's death, and to mark some of the high points of Strauss's achievements. The story of their joint labors is detailed in a priceless series of letters, brought out in 1925 under the editorial supervision of the composer's son, Dr. Franz Strauss. These letters afford glimpses into the workshop of librettist and composer which rank with some of the most illuminating exchanges of the sort the history of music supplies. From them we learn that before settling on the tragedy of the house of Agamemnon the collaborators seriously pondered as operatic material Calderon's *Daughter of the Air* and also *Semiramis*. Then, early in 1908, they seem to have agreed on *Elektra*. Hofmannsthal's version of the Greek legend (based on Sophocles) had been acted in Berlin (again with Gertrude Eysolt in the title role); and no sooner had Strauss witnessed the production than he concluded that the tragedy in this form was virtually made to order for his music.

On July 6, 1908, the composer wrote to Hofmannsthal: "*Elektra* progresses and is going well; I hope to hurry up the premiere for the end of January at the latest." Strauss was as good as his word. The first performance of *Elektra* took place January 25, 1909, at the Dresden opera, Ernst von Schuch conducting, with Anni Krull in the name part, Ernestine Schumann-Heink as Klytemnestra and Carl Perron as Orestes. If Strauss would have preferred to write a comic opera after *Salome* the pull of the *genre* of "horror opera" was still strong upon him and he was not yet ready to loose himself from its grip. *Elektra* was, if one chooses, gorier than *Salome* and perhaps more genuinely psychopathic but less susceptible to provocations of outraged morality. Its instrumental requirements are rather larger than those of Strauss's previous opera and the whole more nightmarish in its sensational atmosphere. One had the impression, however, that with *Elektra* the composer had reached the end of a path. He could hardly repeat himself with impunity along similar lines. A turn of the road or something similar must come next unless Strauss's achievements were to run up against a stone wall or lead him into a blind alley.

This was not fated to happen. What the pair were now to achieve was what was to prove their most abiding triumph—*Der Rosenkavalier*, of all the operas of Richard Strauss the most lastingly popular and if not the indisputable best at all events the most loved and, peradventure, the most viable—and, if you will, the healthiest. If the piece is in some respects sprawling and over-written it does contain a piece of moving character-drawing which stands with the most memorable things the literature of musical drama affords. In her musical and dramatic lineaments the aristocratic Marschallin, whose common sense leads her, on the threshold of middle age to renounce the calf love of the 17-year-old "Rose Bearer", Octavian, offers one of the finest and most convincing figures to be found in modern opera—a creation not unworthy to stand by the side of Wagner's Hans Sachs. The Baron Ochs, an outright vulgarian, if the music accorded him does not lie, is a figure who might have stepped out of the pages of Rabelais; Sophie, Faninal and all the rest of the characters who enliven this canvas inhabited by almost photographic types of 18th Century Vienna add up to a truly memorable gallery with which Hofmannsthal and Strauss have brought to life an era and a culture. Strauss's score has indisputable prolixities and commonplaces. But these traits may pass as defects of the opera's qualities and, as such, they can take their place in the vastly colorful pageant of Hofmannsthal's comedy of manners.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that a piece as earthy as *Der Rosenkavalier* should pass without provoking dissent. The German Kaiser, who had small use for Strauss's operas, yielded to the urging of the Crown Prince so far as to attend a performance, then left the theatre with the words: "Det is keene Musik für mich!" ("That's no music for me!") To spare the feelings of the straight-laced Kaiserin it was arranged to place the Marschallin's bed in an adjoining alcove instead of in high visibility on the stage when the curtain rose. Nor were these the only objections. And, of course, there were the usual exclamations about the length of the piece, no end of suggestions were advanced about the best ways to shorten the work. Strauss, in protest against some of the cuts von Schuch had practised in Dresden, once insisted he had overlooked one of the most important possible abbreviations! Why not omit the trio in the last act, which only holds up the action! It should be explained that

the great trio is the brightest gem of the act, perhaps, indeed, the lyric climax of the whole score! As for the various waltzes which fill so many pages of the third act (and to some degree of the second) it may be admitted that, for all the skill of their instrumentation they are by no means the highest melodic flights of Strauss's fancy, some of them being merely successions of rather trifling sequences.

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It was assumed after *Der Rosenkavalier* that the success of the opera indicated that the composer, in a mood for concessions, had tried to meet the public half-way and had renounced the violence, the cacophonies and the dissonances and sensational traits supposed to be his stock-in-trade. The comedy was assumed to be a proof of this. The real truth was that Strauss had not changed his ideals and methods in the least. It was, rather, *that the public, converted by force of habit, was itself catching up with Strauss and that the idiom of the composer was quickly becoming the musical language of the hour.* Sometimes it took even a few idiosyncrasies of the musician for granted. One did not always inquire too closely into just what he meant. There is one case when Strauss even went to the length of *writing music* to the words “diskret, vertraulich” (“discreetly, confidentially”) when Hofmannsthal had written them as *stage directions* to be followed *not* as part of a text to be sung! All the same Strauss usually kept an eagle eye on the dramatic action he composed. With regard to the libretto of *Der Rosenkavalier* he wrote to the poet “the first act is excellent, the second lacks certain essential contrasts which it is impossible to put off till the third. With only a feeble success for the second act, the opera is doomed.” Be this as it may, *Der Rosenkavalier* was anything but “doomed”. It was, in point of fact, the work which Strauss had in mind when, at the close of the first *Elektra* performance he remarked to some friends: “Now I intend to write a Mozart opera!” Whether or not “Der Rosenkavalier” really meets the prescriptions of a “Mozart opera” we feel rather more certain that his next work, *Ariadne auf Naxos* comes closer to filling that bill.

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The development of this work hangs together with production in Stuttgart, October 25, 1912, of a German adaptation by Hofmannsthal of Molière's comedy *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who has made money, induces a certain charming widow, the Marquise Dorimène, to come to a dinner he gives in her honor. A reprobate noble, Count Dorantes, tells the Marquise that the soirée at Jourdain's home is really intended as a gesture of admiration for her. M. Jourdain has engaged two companies of singers who are supposed to perform a serious opera, *Ariadne on Naxos*, and a burlesque, *The Unfaithful Zerbinetta and Her Four Lovers*. Both pieces are supposed to have been composed by a protégé of M. Jourdain. During a dinner scene Strauss has recourse to bits of musical quotation—a fragment of Wagner's *Rheingold* when Rhine salmon is served and several bars of the bleating sheep music from *Don Quixote* when servants bring in roast mutton. The banquet is interrupted and Jourdain finds it necessary to curtail the scheduled program. As a result the young author is commanded by Jourdain to combine his two works as best he can!

Hofmannsthal's Molière adaptation (in which the operatic part takes the place of the French poet's original “Turkish ceremony”) was a clumsy, indeed an impractical distortion. But Strauss had no intention of sacrificing his composition without at least an attempt to salvage something from the wreck. The *Ariadne* portion as well as the *Zerbinetta* companion piece were preserved but carefully detached from the Molière comedy. In place of this Strauss and Hofmannsthal supplied a sort of explanatory prologue whereby arrangements are made for better or worse to combine the stylized *opera seria* about Ariadne and her rescue on a desert island by the god Bacchus, with the comic doings of Zerbinetta and her *commedia del arte* companions. In this shape the piece has succeeded in surviving and actually makes an engaging entertainment, with the young composer (a trousered soprano) reminding one of a lesser Octavian.

There is considerable charming music in what is left of the originally involved and over lengthy entertainment. First of all, Strauss was suddenly to renounce the huge, overloaded orchestra of *Salome*, *Elektra* and *Rosenkavalier* and to supplant it by a much smaller one designed for a transparent texture of chamber music. In any case, the definitive *Ariadne auf Naxos* is a real achievement and stands among Strauss's better and more memorable accomplishments. In the estimation of the present writer the tenderer romantic portions of the piece excel the comic pages associated with Zerbinetta and her merry crew. In writing these the composer aimed to be Mozartean (or, if one prefers, Rossinian) by assigning the colorature soprano a florid rondo of incredible difficulties—so mercilessly exacting, indeed, that it first moved Hofmannsthal to discreet protest. Eventually, the composer took steps to modify some of the cruel problems of Zerbinetta's solo and it is in this amended form that one generally hears this air today, when it is sung as a concert number.

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It would not be altogether excessive to claim that *Ariadne auf Naxos* marks a midpoint in Strauss's career. He still had a long and fruitful life ahead of him and, as it was to prove, he was almost incorrigibly prolific not hesitating to experiment with one type of composition as well as another. On the eve of the First World War he became interested in Diaghilew's Russian Ballet and the various types of choreographic and scenic art which it was to engender. Hofmannsthal wanted him to occupy his imagination and “to let the vision of one of the grandest episodes of antique tragedy, namely the subject of Orestes and the Furies, inspire you to write a symphonic poem, which might be a synthesis, of your symphonies and your two tragic operas!” And the poet adjured him to think of Orestes as represented by Nijinsky, “the greatest mimic genius on the stage today!” But apparently Strauss had had his fill of the *Elektra* tragedy at this stage and had no stomach for more of this sort of thing, whether symphonic or operatic. So he remained unmoved by Hofmannsthal's urgings. Yet the Russian Ballet gave him a new idea. He thought of a pantomimic ballet conceived in the shapes and the colors of the epoch of Paolo Veronese.

From this conception, based on a scenario by a Count Harry Kessler and von Hofmannsthal dealing with the story of Joseph and Potiphar's Wife, there grew the *Legend of Joseph*, first produced in Paris with extraordinary scenic and decorative accouterments on May 14, 1914. The staging was a pictorial triumph which, though the ballet was several times performed elsewhere, appears never to have been anything like the visual feast it was at its first showing. The score seems to have missed fire and has never been reckoned among the composer's major exploits. None the less the effect of the music in its proper frame and context is compelling. What if much of it sounds like discarded leavings from “Salome”? Strauss confessed that from the first the pious Joseph bored him, “and I have difficulty in finding music for whatever bores me” (“was mich mopst”). To “his dear da Ponte”, as he came to call Hofmannsthal, he gave hope and said frankly that though the virtuous Biblical youth tried his patience, in the end some “holy” strain might perhaps occur to him. The present writer has always felt that the *Josefslegende* is a far too maligned work and that it would repay a conductor to disentomb the grossly slandered score, which when properly presented is striking “theatre”.

On October 28, 1915, there was heard in Berlin, under the composer's direction, the first symphony (in contradiction to “tone poem”) Richard Strauss had written since 1886. Like *Aus Italien* it was again outspokenly pictorial. The composer himself wrote titles into the divisions of the score (which he is said to have begun to sketch in 1911, though the music was set down to the final double bar four years later). Some spoke of the *Alpensymphonie* as a work which “a child could understand”. And the various scenic divisions of this Alpine panorama, distended as it undoubtedly is, can be described as plainly pictorial. The orchestra depicts successively “Night”, “Sunrise”, the “Ascent”, “Entrance into the

Forest”, “Wandering besides the Brook”, “At the Waterfall”, “Apparition”, “On Flowery Meadows”, “On the Alm”, “Lost in the Thicket”, “On the Glacier”, “Dangerous Moment”, “On the Summit”, “Mists Rise”, “The Sun is gradually hidden”, “Elegy”, “Calm before the Storm”, “Thunderstorm”, “The Descent”, “Sunset”, “Night”.

On account of its length the “Alpine Symphony” has never been a favorite among Strauss’s achievements of tone painting. Indeed, it may be questioned whether its sunrise scene can be compared for suggestiveness and purely musical thrill to the glorious opening picture of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

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Strauss’s symphonic excursion in the Alps was succeeded by a return to opera. Between 1914 and 1917 (which is to say during the most poignant years of the First War) he busied himself with a work which was to become a child of sorrow to him but which to a number of his staunchest worshippers often passes as one of his very finest achievements—*Die Frau ohne Schatten* (*The Woman Without a Shadow*), first performed under Frank Schalk in Vienna, October 10, 1919. For all the enthusiasm it evokes in some of the inner Straussian circles this opera, which combines length, breadth and thickness, is a real problem. The writer of these lines, who has been exposed to the work fully half a dozen times always with a firm resolve to enjoy it, has never succeeded in his ambition. Though Strauss and Hofmannsthal discussed the plans for the piece in 1912 and once more in 1914 the first act was not finished till that year; and war held up the completion of the opera three years more.

It has been maintained that in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* marks “the combination of a recitative style with the forms of the older opera” and that in it Strauss has yielded to a mystical tendency. Willy Brandl claims that Hofmannsthal’s libretto attracted the composer and stimulated him “precisely because of its obscurity”; that he saw in it a series of problems to be “clarified, not to say unveiled, in their complexities precisely through the agency of music.” The question of motherhood lies at the root of the opera. Hofmannsthal saw in his poem a “kind of continuation of *The Magic Flute*. On one hand we have the superterrestrial worlds, on another the realistic scenes of the human world bound together by the demonic figure of the Nurse. And a new element is to be sensed in the score—the powerful, hymn-like character of the music overpoweringly disclosed in the music, a new feature in Strauss’s compositions.”

It may be questioned whether Strauss was truly content with the bloodless symbolism which fills *The Woman Without a Shadow*. In any case at this juncture he began to long for something new. Somehow Hofmannsthal did not at that moment appear to be reacting sympathetically to the dramatic demands which just then seemed to be filling Strauss’s mind. He informed Hofmannsthal that he longed for something to compose like Schnitzler’s *Liebeleien* or Scribe’s *Glass of Water*. He asked for “characters inviting composition—characters like the Marschallin, Ochs or Barak (in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*).” And so, when Hofmannsthal did not “respond” promptly he took up the pen to work out his own salvation. The consequence was *Intermezzo*, a domestic comedy in one act with symphonic interludes. It was produced at the Dresden Opera, November 4, 1924, under Fritz Busch. Two years before that Strauss had presented in Vienna a two act Viennese ballet, *Schlagobers* (*Whipped Cream*) which can be dismissed as one of his outspoken failures. As for *Intermezzo* it had biographical vibrations in that it pictured a domestic episode in Strauss’s own experiences. It had to do with a conductor, *Robert Storch*, and thus Strauss could make amusing stage use of the unmistakable initials “R.S.” and make various allusions to the game of skat, which had for years been a favorite diversion of his. The music of *Intermezzo* has never been acclaimed a product of the greater Strauss. And yet Alfred Lorenz, famous for his series of eviscerating studies of the structural problems of Wagner’s music dramas, has made it clear that the Wagnerian form problems are likewise the principles which underlie such a relatively tenuous Straussian score as *Intermezzo*.

In spite of the dubious fortunes which were to dog the steps of an opera like *The Woman Without a Shadow* the composer once again allowed himself to be seduced by a work of relatively similar character, *Egyptian Helen*, a somewhat tortured mythical tale, based on a rather far-fetched “magic” fiction by von Hofmannsthal, relating to a phase of the Trojan war, in which Helen is shown as wholly innocent of the ancient struggle. Magic befuddlements, potions capable of changing the characteristics of people, draughts which rob this or that personage of his memory, an “omniscient shell” which launches oracular pronouncements and a good deal more of the sort lend a singular character to the strange fantasy, in which some have chosen to discern a kind of take-off on the various drinks of forgetfulness and such in *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung*. *Egyptian Helen* is the only sample of this strange stage of the Strauss who was reaching the frontiers of old age which American music lovers had the opportunity to know. It would be excessive to claim that, either in Europe or in the western hemisphere, the work was a noticeable addition to the enduring accomplishments of the master. More than one began to obtain the impression that, for all the splendors of his technic Strauss seemed to be going to seed.

* * *

In the summer of 1929 Hofmannsthal suddenly died. Some time before he had written a short novel, *Lucidor*, about an impoverished family with two marriageable daughters for whom an attempt is made to secure wealthy husbands. To facilitate the marital stratagem one of the daughters is dressed in boy’s clothes. The disguised girl falls in love with a suitor of her sister, Arabella, to whom one Mandryka, a romantic Balkan youth of great wealth, pays court. The period is the year 1860, the scene Vienna.

Inevitably, *Arabella* turned out to be something of a throwback into the scene, if not the glamorous period or milieu, of *Der Rosenkavalier*. Almost inevitably, the lyric comedy—the final product of the Strauss-Hofmannsthal partnership—is filled with scenes, characters and analogies to the more famous work. In truth, *Arabella* is a kind of little sister of *Rosenkavalier*. At the same time the texture of the score and the character of the orchestral treatment has a transparency and a delicate charm which Strauss rarely equalled, even if the melodic invention and the instrumentation suggest a kind of chamber music on a large scale. As in *Ariadne auf Naxos* the composer does not hesitate to make use of a florid soprano to introduce scintillating samples of ornate vocalism. One feels, however, that *Arabella* is a semi-finished product. The second half of the work does not sustain the level of the first. Many things might have been worked out more expertly if the librettist had been spared to supervise work, which as things stand is far from a really satisfactory or unified piece. But the score contains some of the older Strauss’s most enamoring lyric pages and it is easy to feel that his heart was in the better portions of the opera. The score of *Arabella* benefits by the introduction of folk-songs influence—in this instance of a number of South Slavic melodies, which are among its genuine treasures.

Lacking his faithful Hofmannsthal Strauss turned to Stefan Zweig, who had made for him an operatic adaptation of Ben Jonson’s play, “Epicoene, or The Silent Woman”. On June 24, 1935, it was produced under Karl Böhm at the Dresden Opera. At once trouble arose. Hitler and the Nazis had come into power and Zweig, as a Jew, was automatically an outcast. After the very first performances the piece was forbidden, not to be revived till after Hitler’s end (and then in Munich and in Wiesbaden). It is actually a question whether the temporary loss of *Die Schweigsame Frau* must be accounted a serious deprivation. *The Silent Woman* is a rowdy, cruel farce about the tricks played on a wretched old man, unable to endure noise and subjected to all manner of torments in order that he be compelled to renounce a young woman, who to assure a lover a monetary settlement, plays the shrew so successfully that the old man is only too willing to pay any amount of his wealth to be rid of her. It is much

like the story of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* and the dramatic consequences are to all intents the same. There is, in reality, nothing serious or genuinely based on musical *inspiration* in the opera, the best features of which are certain set pieces (some rather adroitly polyphonic) and a charmingly orchestrated overture described in the score as a "potpourri". A tenderer note is struck only at the point where, as evening falls, the old man drops off to sleep.

As librettist for his next two operas, *Friedenstag* and *Daphne*, Strauss sought the aid of Joseph Gregor. The first named work (in one act) was performed on July 7, 1938, in Munich, under Clemens Krauss. Ironically enough this work that aimed to glorify the coming of peace after conflict, was first performed with the political troubles which heralded the outbreak of the Second World War, visibly shaping themselves. *Daphne*, bucolic tragedy in a single act, also from the pen of Gregor, was heard in Dresden, October 15, 1938. And Gregor, too, supplied the aging composer, with the book of *Die Liebe der Danae*, a "merry mythological tale" in three acts. To date its sole production to date seems to have been in Salzburg, as a "dress rehearsal", August 16, 1944.

Strauss's last opera (produced under Clemens Krauss in Munich on October 28, 1942), was *Capriccio*, "a conversation piece for music", in one act. Krauss and the composer collaborating on the book. The "conversation" is a discussion of certain aesthetic problems underlying the musical treatment of operatic texts. It was the final work of operatic character Strauss was to attempt. This did not mean, however, that he had written his last score. Far from it! At 81 he was to complete several, the real value of which may be left to the judgment of posterity. They include some songs, a duet-concertino for clarinet and bassoon with strings, a concerto for oboe and orchestra, a still unperformed concert fragment for orchestra from the *Legend of Joseph*. More important, unquestionably, is *Metamorphoses*, a "study for 23 solo strings", first played in Zurich, January 25, 1946 under the direction of Paul Sacher. This work, despite its length, is music of suave, beautiful texture; a certain nobly nostalgic quality of farewell which seems to sum up the composer's life work, with all its ups and downs. We may allow it to go at this and to spare further enumeration of the innumerable odds and ends he was to assemble from his boyhood to the patriarchal age of more than 85 years; or even to allude to his gross derangement of Mozart's "Idomeneo", done in 1930 at Munich.

Having lived through a lively young manhood and endured the bitter experience of two world wars Richard Strauss in the end performed the miracle of actually dying of old age! One might almost have looked for convulsions of nature, for signs and portents at his eventual passing. But his going was to be accompanied by no such things. His death in Garmisch, September 8, 1949, was brought about by the illnesses of the flesh at more than four score and five. He died of a complication of heart, liver and kidney troubles—and he died in his bed! A Heldenleben, if you will! And a death and transfiguration played against the loveliest conceivable background—an incomparable stage setting of Alpine lakes and heights, with streams and gleaming summits furnishing a glorious backdrop for his resting place!

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