

RICHARD STRAUSS SOCIETY



**Extracts from Newsletter No. 62
December 2016**

The Future of the Society

[A letter from the Chairman, Andrew Neill]

When I last wrote to you, the members, the future of the Society looked bleak. You will recall that we felt it essential for the members of the Committee to be given sound reasons to recommend and indeed decide that the Society be continued. In other words, we needed volunteers to offer their services.

I am glad to report that we have had some success as one such volunteer has come forward. Consequently, we feel we can maintain the Society for a while yet. However, this is only the beginning: further volunteers are required.

The Committee met on 21 October and reviewed the position. First, and most importantly, we recognized that we had sufficient funds to maintain our current position and produce a Newsletter three or four times a year. Second, we welcomed the news that Huw Dixon had offered his services to shadow Chris Argent as Editor of the Newsletter with a view to taking over the position when both agreed the time was right for Chris, who has been editing the Newsletter since 2003, to stand down. Huw's qualities are evident from his contributions to this Newsletter (see pp. 4-7 & 16-20). Lastly, I declared that, in view of this initiative, I would continue in the Chair for the time being although I believe we do need a new Chairman to inject fresh ideas into the Society and develop new contacts.

Furthermore, I must add that we do need new blood on the Committee including, vitally, an events organizer...

Also Sprach Zarathustra: Decoding Strauss's Tone Poem

[Marin Alsop]

Richard Strauss's iconic opening to *Also Sprach Zarathustra* evokes a sense of vastness and power. I can't imagine a more stimulating conversation opener than "God is dead." Indeed, this quote by Friedrich Nietzsche sparked heated debate in his time, as it still does today. But how many of us know the writings of this 19th-century philosopher?

I have to confess to feeling doubly intimidated when I first opened the score to Richard Strauss's symphonic take on *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Not only was I faced with trying to find the key to unlock Strauss's motivation for writing this complex work, but I also faced the daunting challenge of getting my mind around Nietzsche's labyrinthine oeuvre, which inspired Strauss's work of the same name.

That said, the opening of Strauss's *Zarathustra* is one of the most recognizable musical excerpts in history. That unto itself always fascinates me: What makes a piece of music resonate with so many people? It can't just be its commercial associations after the fact, because those associations invariably reference the emotional underpinnings of the music itself. I decided to try to analyze what makes this opening so universal...

***Ein Heldenleben*, Cardiff, 5 August 2016**

[Review by Huw Dixon]

2016 has turned out to be a good year for bringing youth into contact with Strauss's Tone poems. The National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain performed *Also Sprach Zarathustra* at the BBC Proms on Saturday 6 August, the last of three public concerts, the others being at the Snape Maltings and Birmingham's Symphony Hall. The conductor was Edward Gardiner. The NYO Wales performed *Ein Heldenleben* at Cardiff's St David's Hall on 5 August, having performed it over the previous two days at St David's Cathedral (Pembrokeshire) and Venue Cymru, Llandudno, with Maestro Carlo Rizzi. These are both showpieces for the symphony orchestra, plus a challenge for the conductor to put it all together.

I was grateful to be able to see the NYO Wales perform *Heldenleben* at Cardiff. As Carlo Rizzi commented: when Strauss wrote *Heldenleben*,

he would never have envisaged it as being played by an orchestra with the oldest members being 21. It is something of a virtuoso piece with demanding parts for most instruments in the orchestra. The piece began with appropriately great vigour, as the orchestra introduced the Hero. Interestingly, Maestro Rizzi almost stopped conducting after the start leaving the orchestra to itself to play through the first section with minimal gestures for a while. After a thundering conclusion, Rizzi resumed his usual coaxing style of conducting and the critics 'entered, cackling and scurrying across the platform'. The tempo for this section differs: Strauss himself took a brisk tempo, whilst others have taken a slower tempo to bring out the grotesqueness of the music. Rizzi took a middle course and allowed the woodwind to shine in this passage. By this time, I was starting to realize that there was barely a note out of place in the performance ...

***Die Liebe der Danae*: Salzburg, 15 August 2016** **[Review by Jonathan Price]**

Background

Richard Strauss and his *Die Liebe der Danae* are closely associated with the Salzburg Festival. Strauss, Frank Schalk, his co-director at the Vienna Staatsoper, together with Max Reinhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal were elected members of the Artistic Committee upon the foundation of the Festival in 1920. In the same year, Hofmannsthal drafted a sketch (*Danae, oder die Vernunftheirat*), which Strauss promptly forgot, but later revived with his final librettist, the librarian Joseph Gregor, as *Die Liebe der Danae*. Strauss completed the full score twenty years later in June 1940.

Described as 'light-hearted mythology', *Danae* was scheduled for its first performance at the 1944 Salzburg Festival in celebration of Strauss's 80th birthday. Clemens Krauss, artistic director of the Festival since 1941, persuaded Strauss to let him conduct the premiere at Salzburg. However, Strauss's reaction towards Hofmannsthal's draft as ideal 'political satire in late-Grecian garb' was then highly inappropriate. Due to restrictions imposed by Germany's mobilisation

for total war (on 1 August), the destruction of stage materials in Munich by Allied bombs and the danger of transporting other stage items to Salzburg, a dress rehearsal of *Danae* took place before an invited audience on 16 August instead, with no plans for a premiere.

On that occasion, Krauss conducted the Vienna Philharmonic. The opera was produced by Rudolf Hartmann; the stage sets and costumes were designed by Emil Preetorius...

Letters to the Editor

From: Robin Taylor

In Leamington, we have three good amateur orchestras, all of them more likely than professional orchestras to play unusual repertoire.

Recently, in Leamington Town Hall, Strauss's *Duett-Concertino* was in the programme. Over the years, I have heard it several times on Radio Three without ever feeling I would have lost much if Strauss had played Skat instead. I was in no doubt it was too long. But I had never heard it live. This was live, and I've completely changed my mind. The quite large audience – few of whom were likely to have recognized its name – greeted it with terrific enthusiasm...

From: Eric Adler

I write in connection with the threatened demise of the Richard Strauss Society. There is little to say because your readers will have been apprised of this sad matter in reading the pages of this exceptional magazine. However, I note the following.

There are committees which run societies promoting the music of Mahler, Berlioz and others. How is it, I ask, that they flourish while ours has floundered? Their music is often beautiful, but cannot reach the sublime beauty of Richard Strauss's compositions which are exceptional as well as being unique. The exception to this generalization is, of course, Richard Wagner who stands alone. In extolling Richard Strauss whose music is unlike that of any other composer, I acknowledge that the hallmark of great composers is that their compositions are immediately recognizable as well as being individually unique, but Strauss's music has a quality and vibrancy that moves the heart as well as stimulating the grey matter.

It is therefore terribly sad that we lose the Society whose intent has always been to promote Strauss in the UK...

Changing Seasons in *Der Rosenkavalier* **[Professor Richard Rose, FBA]**

For the novice, *Der Rosenkavalier* reaches its climax in the springtime of love that flourishes between Octavian and Sophie in the concluding third act trio. With a little more familiarity, one also notices that the three people on stage are not so much a trio but a duet in the springtime of love and the Marschallin, in the autumn of romance.

Familiarity with the text makes it clear that in her first act monologue the Marschallin was well aware of the passage of time that produces the changing of the seasons, while the youthful Quinquin is living in the present, which he mistakes for eternity. In conventional dramaturgical terms, her recognition may be regarded as a clue planted early in the plot to prepare for the third act or as climax in itself, all the more powerful for being understated, except to those who, through familiarity with the opera, see that der 'Tag kommt' even sooner than the Marschallin expected.

Harry Kupfer's production of the opera, which I saw at La Scala on 14 June, made beautifully clear the deeper meaning of the monologue, a lament that had the inevitability of tragedy. In her personal presence the 33-year-old Marschallin does not appear an ageing figure. But a coup de theatre at the very end of the first act brought the point home with full force. This came not from the quiet music that accompanies the Marschallin's reverie but from the stage set.

A Master Class with Dame Gwyneth Jones, at the Royal College of Music, 21 September 2016

[Peter Howard]

Five young singers studying at the Royal College were selected to participate in a public masterclass with Dame Gwyneth Jones, as part of a few days she spent working with students at the College. Each student was allocated 25-30 minutes to introduce and sing 'through' the pieces they had selected for study. The time was insufficient to work satisfactorily on more than one piece, but the majority had prepared two items, including two lied by Richard Strauss – hence this review.

Dame Gwyneth listened intently and then worked bar by bar, note by note, phrase by phrase, dissecting each piece with the individual singer. A recurring theme was her emphasis on the importance of breathing correctly and of stance – standing upright rather than being hunched forward. She emphasized the importance of the enunciation of each syllable of each word, of differentiating between vowels and consonants as well as understanding the meaning of the word which she regarded as specially important for non-German singers of lieder...

Strauss, Nietzsche and Christianity

[Essay by Huw Dixon]

When during my stay in Egypt (1892), I became familiar with the works of Nietzsche, whose polemic against Christianity was particularly to my liking, the antipathy which I had always felt against a religion which relieves the faithful of responsibility for their actions (by means of confession) was confirmed and strengthened. (Recollections and Reflections, 1949).

It is clear to me that the German nation will achieve new creative energy only by liberating itself from Christianity. [Private Diary entry, after the death of Mahler (1911)].

Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philologist and philosopher, best known today for his writings from the 1880s, which included *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and *The Antichrist*. His saying “God is dead” has become part of European culture. He was an atheist who viewed belief in a supernatural God as a comfortable delusion. Nietzsche had a particular harsh criticism of Christianity. It was more ‘otherworldly’, rejecting this world more than other religions – for example, Judaism or the religions of Rome and Greece. There have, of course, been atheists throughout human history. What differentiated Nietzsche was that he realized that without God, many other cherished beliefs of mankind, such as reason, rationality and morality were without the divine foundation that generations of philosophers (from Plato to Kant) had built upon. He was a controversial figure in the newly unified Germany at this time: his other ‘untimely’ thoughts were a contempt for German nationalism and the anti-semitism which often accompanied it. Within less than a decade, two composers set his ideas to music: Mahler in his third symphony, and Strauss in his tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, both completed in 1896. Why would any composer be so interested in and inspired by Philosophy?...

***Elektra*, Berlin, 26 June 2016**

[Review from Peter Howard]

After the thrill of five Strauss operas in five days at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, it might seem an indulgence to return to this venue so soon for another *Elektra*. A substantially different cast was the justification, with Euro 2016 in every café, plus high summer weather, the temperature touching 36°C – rather different from April.

The performance reached an equivalent high temperature, built around this magnificent production by the previous intendant, Kirsten Harms. As Patrick Shaw said in his review of this opera in Newsletter No. 61 (p. 28): “If you have not already seen this production, you are missing out – big time!” Absolutely.

The three female leads were to have been the same singers as for the Telecast from the Met. on 30 April; however, Adrienne Pieczonka was indisposed and was replaced, splendidly, by Manuela

Uhl as Chrysothemis repeating her deeply felt impassioned portrayal first seen in April. Nina Stemme had all the power and stamina needed for Elektra; hers was a more passive and resigned character than Evelyn Herlitzius had presented, but the sheer intensity of her singing swept all before it – to reach an overwhelming conclusion.

The Klytämnestra was Waltraud Meier, probably the finest singing actress of her generation, every nuance of the character vivid to the eyes and ears...

A Celebratory Concert in London

On 21 June 2016, Andrew Neill our Chairman chose to celebrate his arrival in the eighth decade of his life with a concert deliberately designed to enhance the coffers of the Joyce and Michael Kennedy Award for the Singing of Strauss as well as indulge his own musical interests. The concert was held at the Royal Overseas League in London and featured Kathryn Rudge (mezzo-soprano) winner of the Award for Singing of Strauss in 2011, and Roderick Williams (baritone) winner in 2015 of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Award in the 'Singer' Category, accompanied by Christopher Glynn (Professor at the Royal Academy of Music).

The programme for the concert was chosen by the birthday boy to reveal his own particular love of German lied and English art songs, but reflecting in many ways the late Michael Kennedy's interests in music and specially of Elgar and Strauss...

The Strauss-Hofmannsthal Operas on DVD: An Update [Review by Michael Fuller]

Past issues of the RSS newsletter have carried comparative reviews of DVD recordings of *Elektra* (no. 49), *Der Rosenkavalier* (no. 50), 'Ariadne auf Naxos' (no. 48), *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (no. 52) and *Arabella* (no. 51). In all cases, further versions of these works have been released (although there is still, regrettably, no DVD version of

Die Ägyptische Helena available). This review is a brief update on these recent releases.

Elektra

2013: Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, c. Esa-Pekka Salonen, p. Patrice Chéreau. BelAir Classiques BAC110

2014: Norrlandsoperan, c. Rumon Gamba, p. La Fura dels Baus. CMajor 731808

The 2013 Aix-en-Provence staging of *Elektra* has subsequently travelled quite widely, being seen also in Milan, Berlin and Barcelona. Sadly, it marks the final opera production of Patrice Chéreau...

Der Rosenkavalier

2010: Opera Australia, c. Andrew Litton, p. Brian FitzGerald. Opera Australia OPOZ56026DVD

2014: Glyndebourne Festival, c. Robin Ticciati, p. Richard Jones. Opus Arte OA1170D

2014: Salzburg Festival, c. Franz Welser-Most, p. Harry Kupfer. CMajor 710308

Brian FitzGerald's production is quite venerable, having originated with Welsh National Opera in 1990, and being first performed by Opera Australia in 1991 before being recorded 19 years later. It is a straightforward staging, which doesn't look its age. Sets are simple, the Marschallin's boudoir being equipped with period furniture and rendered intimate through a profusion of painted screens, while Faninal's house is characterised by monumental square pillars and red-panelled walls, and the Act 3 set is a plainer and shabbier parody of that for Act 1...

Ariadne auf Naxos

2012: Salzburg Festival, c. Daniel Harding, p. Sven-Eric Bechtolf. Sony 8843005749

2012: Baden-Baden Festival, c. Christian Thielemann, p. Philippe Arlaud. Decca 074 3809

2013: Glyndebourne Festival, c. Vladimir Jurowski, p. Katharina Thoma. Opus Arte OA1135D

To mark the centenary of the original 1912 version of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, as an evening entertainment in which the opera plays as the conclusion of Hofmannsthal's translation of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (for which Strauss supplied incidental music), Salzburg staged a new version by Sven-Eric Bechtolf. Here, the opera is preceded by a play which combines themes from the Molière original and from Hofmannsthal's 1916 *Ariadne* prelude, the whole being framed by a device featuring Hofmannsthal himself and a Countess whom he is attempting to cheer up, following the ending of a love affair, by sharing his ideas about a 'work in progress' which he has devised (these characters then become Dorante and Dorimène in the scenario of the play)...

Die Frau ohne Schatten

2011: Mariinsky Theatre, c. Valery Gergiev, p. Jonathan Kent. Mariinsky MAR0543

Jonathan Kent's production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* for the Mariinsky Theatre was brought by them to the Edinburgh Festival in 2011 (at which point it was reviewed in issue no. 46 of this newsletter). This DVD recording was made back in St Petersburg later that same year, with substantially the same cast. The result is a musical and visual treat (though, inevitably, not all the projections used in the production register as well on video as they did in the theatre). Gergiev propels a full-blooded account of the score...

Arabella

2014: Salzburg Festival, c. Christian Thielemann, p. Florentine Klepper.
CMajor 717208

Thielemann conducts a well-paced, dynamic account of *Arabella* from the Salzburg Easter Festival. Florentine Klepper's penny-plain sets (a bisected stage in Act 1, showing a drawing room and an adjacent bedroom: a smart lobby-area serving for both Act 2 and Act 3) and a lot of close-camera work, allow a detailed focus on the soloists who, for the most part, repay such scrutiny. Renée Fleming is perhaps not quite as fresh-voiced as in her earlier DVD recording of this role, but still fully encompasses it. Thomas Hampson likewise shows signs of strain as Mandryka, but turns in an impassioned performance nonetheless. Hannah-Elisabeth Müller and Daniel Behle are both truly affecting as Zdenka and Matteo...

***Der Rosenkavalier*, München, 17 July 2016 [Review from Peter Howard]**

It was rewarding after so long finally to see the justly revered Otto Schenk production of *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Bayerische Staatsoper. New in 1972, its original cast which included Fassbänder, Jones, Popp and Jungwirth with Carlos Kleiber in the pit, is familiar from the 1978 recording. Another version of this production, also available on DVD, is ever present at the Staatsoper Wien (and was reviewed by Patrick Shaw in NL 48 in 2012). A third version can still be seen in the repertoire of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Düsseldorf/Duisberg.

The performance under review was well rehearsed, allowing all the subtle detail of the staging to be appreciated – nothing jarred. The minor characters, servants, noble orphans, milliner, hairdresser, animal handler, etc, were all excellent. The sets looked splendid if a little less opulent in the first act compared to the impression gained from the DVD, but I was sitting in the front stalls!