

vitality that belongs only to the eighteenth century. This was a good performance, but not an ideal one, because Pierre Bertin, as the villain, Dr. Bartholo, was such a lovable old curmudgeon that he acted everybody off the stage and became the hero of the play, which should by rights belong to Figaro. Then I noticed again, as I have done at other performances of *Ancien Régime* works, that contemporary French actors haven't always an absolutely sure sense of tone when dealing with pre-revolutionary class attitudes. Dominique Patuél, as Figaro, was full of bounce but just a shade or so too vulgar in accent and mannerisms. Figaro, with his intelligence and rapidity of movement, is literally "mercurial," and he is

diminished if given an obtrusively modern, lower-class flavour. At the same time, Michel Rhul, as Almaviva, should have had a more inherently aristocratic style; to turn the nobleman, however slightly, into a figure of fun is to weaken the aristocratic principle, which Beaumarchais admired and to some extent adopted, although he may also have criticised it. It is wrong, I think, to read this earlier, sunny play in the light of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, where class resentment is present as a genuine emotion and not simply as a joke. The mythic structure of *Le Barbier* demands that Almaviva should be absolutely distinguished and Figaro primarily an embodiment of mischievous energy, like Ariel or Puck.

## A Mountain Land

Broad-plained neighbours suspiciously circle  
Our land of mountain; to whose small eyes  
Our smiling self-sufficiency  
Must speak riches.

One then another,  
Time and again they mass their borders,  
Prepared for resistance we never offer.  
The sortie here, the thrust there,  
Whole armies trampling our countryside,  
We give like air, take to the hills.  
They never stay.

Nothing to plunder,  
No one to conquer, their mettle rusts.  
They leave, arrogant and disdainful  
Of the empty land that rigged their hope.  
And glad always to see their backs,  
To know our immunity proved again,  
We laugh at their crudeness and bafflement.

But our malcontents have a fine scorn  
And a harsh name for the ancient wisdom  
That keeps us free. They resent that fools  
Should think us beggars, feel shame we never  
Have shown the courage to commit our lives  
To the flat valleys, let a nation root  
And bloom a flower of civilisation,  
The being our richer selves a trophy  
Continually to be battled for  
In bloodshed in the mouths of valleys.

*Daniel Huws*

---

# MUSIC

---

## The Rise & Fall of Richard Strauss

By Peter Heyworth

FOR THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS of his long life Richard Strauss enjoyed success on a scale that has been granted to few composers in their youth and middle years. In 1885, at the age of only twenty-one, he was engaged as assistant at Meiningen to the greatest conductor of the day, Hans von Bülow, and from that auspicious start he seemed to float from one favoured position to another with a nonchalance that was only to desert him in Germany's hour of reckoning in 1945. In 1886 he was appointed junior *Kapellmeister* at the Opera of his native city, Munich. By the age of twenty-five he had already conducted at Bayreuth and become a protégé of the formidable Cosima Wagner. By 1897 he had appeared with triumphant success in most of the capitals of Western Europe, and in the following year he was appointed Royal Prussian Court Conductor in Berlin, a position he held until the collapse of the Hohenzollern monarchy in 1918. Measured by standards such as these, the careers of Herbert von Karajan and Leonard Bernstein are tortoise-like.

But Strauss' early development as a composer was even more phenomenal. By the time he was thirty, three symphonic poems, "*Don Juan*," "*Tod und Verklärung*" and "*Till Eulenspiegel*," had brought him world-wide fame, and "*Don Quixote*," "*Also Sprach Zarathustra*" and "*Ein Heldenleben*" followed in quick succession before the turn of the century. Indeed by 1898 the Dutch, a stolid people not given to snap judgments, had erased the name of poor Gounod from the roll of honour on the pillars of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and in its place, alongside the names of Wagner and Liszt, had inscribed that of Strauss. By the turn of the century Strauss was established as the most

recent member of that long illustrious line of composers that reached back to Haydn and Mozart and had for well over a century maintained Austro-German hegemony over the musical world.

Only in his first two operas, *Guntram* and *Feuersnot*, had this flood of success been interrupted. But in 1903 Strauss was astute enough to perceive in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* what had up to this point eluded him: a text whose exotic background and undertow of macabre eroticism were well calculated to reveal the improbable affinity of this solid Bavarian burgher, offspring of a horn player and a brewer's daughter, to *fin de siècle* decadence. The result was a score that weds the worlds of Liszt and Beardsley, and that Strauss himself (who in addition to his other talents was no mean wit) once described as "a scherzo with a fatal conclusion."

His next dip into the literary bran-tub was no less lucky and a good deal more fateful, for in Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* he not only found a text that enabled him to pursue to still more powerful effect the path he had embarked on in *Salome*, but also provided himself with a collaborator who was largely to shape his career over the next twenty years. With Hofmannsthal he went on to write *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), a work that brought him to such a pinnacle of fame that when, thirty-four years later, a group of heavily armed G.I.s appeared at the gate of a large villa in Garmisch, they were routed by the appearance of a very tall old gentleman who confidently advanced towards them and declared, "I am the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*."<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, success on such a scale, especially when combined with a solid financial background, a singularly happy marriage and a maddening impression of effortless ease that was sometimes mistaken for arrogance, provoked caustic comment. Gustav Mahler, to whom Strauss had done many kindnesses at a time when Mahler's status as a composer was still insecure, once referred to him as "the great opportunist." And so he was, in the sense that he was adroit at adjusting himself to circum-

---

<sup>1</sup> In a burst of unwonted sanctimoniousness—for he was a man quite devoid of affectation or pretention—Strauss later described this encounter as a triumph of pure spirit over brute force. But then he always was lucky: whereas he preserved his property intact, poor Anton Webern was shot in error by a panic-stricken G.I. in a remote Alpine village.