WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RICHARD STRAUSS AND JOHANN STRAUSS?

The "Real Richard" and How He Expresses Himself in "Der Rosenkavalier"

If you want to see a hitherto peaceful human face mobilize twenty thousand warlike expressions within one hour, and a crowded moment of glorious life step up to a man with music in his soul and say, "Is there any difference between Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss?"

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He seem to say, "I think I can honestly insinu or explain to you, or start explaining the difference, in which case I will drown the dictionary in twenty-four minutes if I so insinuate in thirty-five. If you do not believe the above seek out friends of yours who simply dote on modern music, hold him firmly by the sleeve so that he can't walk away, invite him to have a drink so that he can't insult you, and then pop the question.

The end of twenty minutes' explanation, his condition (and yours) does not cause you acute concern—why—but it will, don't you worry, it will.

Alpha and Omega, Smith and Nadir, north pole and south pole—not one of those combinations suggests to the average man a greater difference between its component parts than to the musician, the juxtaposition of Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss. In fact, it is a common form of argument to see those running round and round the most select musical circles, vainly inquiring by what cosmic freak the constructor of that tempestuous thing, "Elektra," ever got tagged with the identical name borne by him who gave us "The Blue Danube."

Discord, violence, horrible shrieks in the night. Indeed, the phraseology—that is what Richard Strauss has always meant. Was it not he who gave us "Also Sprach Zarathustra," an even worse idea set to music, and "Salome," beside which the orchestral complications of Richard Wagner seem like the feeblest exertions that mother nature made us to do?

So that Richard Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier" can be taken seriously as a comic opera, if you please, filled, mind you, with waltzes—produced the other day, for the first time in New York—so that many of the critics, utterly dumfounded, staggered from the theater, the more important member of trying to get rich quick by taking advantage of the "Merry Widow" et al. waltzes ease.

In proof of such unfriendly criticisms insisted that Richard Strauss wouldn't do anything so unorthodox of a great genius, and told over and over again that little thing about Kaiser Wilhelm's saying to the gloomy Richard, although he was having hours of mirth at cream, sugar, or lemon: "Strauss, why don't you write comic opera?" and the composer's reassuringly replying: "Take it from me, Your Imperial Majesty, I will!"

Nevertheless and notwithstanding, that gibe about Richard's desire to feather his nest financially by selling his soul to the devil of Viennese waltzes persisted in bобbing up, especially as "Der Rosenkavalier" proved a genuinely popular hit.

"Der Rosenkavalier," just as the gentlest of the most rampant, comes a brand-new apologia for the versatile composer. He gives an explanation of the lightness and airiness of "Der Rosenkavalier" calculated to make music connoisseurs stop, gasp, and say, "Yes, yes, it is just as it is.

Summed up, it is this: the real Richard Strauss is the Richard Strauss of "Der Rosenkavalier." Aye, he is a merry wench, by no means so remote from his sightly namesakes, "Also Sprach Zarathustra," a Richard Strauss who used to love sugary song-composing when a lad, and now, after straying long in the howling wilderness of cacophony, returns, amblingly repentant, to his first and only love.

Wagner, and Richard Strauss's champion is Jean Chantavoine, a French musician who also advances his theory in the Parisian magazine Le Revue. "If anybody is astonishment at finding naive melodic buffoonery, and even waltzes in this new comic opera of Strauss," he says, "it shows a very poor acquaintance with his earlier works. Strauss began, at the age of twenty, by writing music melodically, harmonically to the point of banal suavity, so correct that it was boresome. In his later works, violent and tragic, he has always kept just a little naivete and a great deal of humor. He has never quite rid himself of a taste for sentimental melody and facile harmony."

More recently Chantavoine cites examples picked at random from the very masterpiece of Strauss's works—from "Der Fliegende Hollander," "Die Walkure," "The Dometico Symphony," "Don Quijote," even from "Feuertrum," "Salome," and "Elektra." According to him, there is popular, naive, archaic; even among the shudders of "Salome" there is tonal melody, melodious and harmonious. In "Elektra," side by side with shrieking discordants illustrating anguish, despair, and the worst nightmares imaginable, one hears pleasantly rhythmic passages, the honest key of B flat, some of which are sung by the terrific Elektra.

Both in his symphonic poems and in his lyrical drama, continues the French critic, Strauss has shown the same tactual melody, either by speaking in his own person or by identifying himself with the character who speaks; at a moment, finally, when his music ceases to be picturesque and descriptive in order to become once more music that is purely lyrical.

Thus, in his most famous tone-poems, even in his most convulsive dramatic works, Strauss is never more himself than when he abdicates his virtuosity and abandons himself to an art in which a little of the facile sentimentality of his youth still survives."

The "W'alshheit," softness, in Munich, the Bavarian capital, Richard Strauss's home. There is also no subject which has brought forth so much writing through all the vicissitudes of his musical development, to love the waltts tempo, to harbor the wish of composing one day, a "Rosenkavalier." The tendency to inject the one-two-three rhythm dear to Vienna into his work has continued long before and deep in the Frenchman. There are waltzes in "Feuertrum," in "Salome," (p. 109 of that opera is a waltz)—in the abstruse symphonic poems, in "Elektra." Therefore, given this tendency, why should not Strauss abandon himself finally to the pure joy of waltzes-composition, especially when, as in "Der Rosenkavalier," the scene of the action is Vienna, the home of the waltz?

"In order further to explain Strauss's "comic opera," the erudite Chantavoine evokes something very interesting concerning the general characteristics of modern German music.

They are trying, he says, in architecture and everything else, to combine gigantic scale and small modern improvements with the light style of the eighteenth century. The German A. D. B. will never write a real symphony but will always write his symphonies to blend "geology with rococo." Examples of this are the city hall recently built at Dresden and Cassel, vast piles having, as a basis for their style, some gay little eighteenth century pavilion.

The same is true—mutatis mutandis, of "Der Rosenkavalier," declares M. Chantavoine. "It is a comedy of Marius built on the lines of the Nibelungen Ring. Strauss has over according to the taste, and by means of all the resources, of twentieth century Germany."

"In it Richard Strauss has expressed, through the medium of his art, a feeling very commonly shared—"and continues the French writer. "I shall carefully refrain from saying that is doing, for he has followed the example of others; a Strauss gives, rather than following examples. Even in his waltzes, he has made himself the vehicle and interpreter of a national sentiment. He has felt, as have his fellow-countrymen, a certain taste for the eighteenth century, which, in the Germany of to-day, is tantamount to a longing for elegance, naivety, joyousness, grace, imperiousness, and liberty. He has translated that taste with great naturalness. His work is the work of a great artist. That is all."

"On the other hand, argues Strauss's apostle, the composer stands unacquainted with the charge of desiring to exploit the waltts in his own Germans."

"And thus it is," says Chantavoine in conclusion, "that this comic opera, which, at the first appearance. he has been so astonished with this work, where some pretend to recognize neither Strauss nor another type of work in which the composer has revealed himself with the greatest spontaneity; one, moreover, in which, by applying the Colossai-Neo-Rococo style, he has succeeded in expressing, with the greatest truthfulness, the taste of present-day Germany."