

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RICHARD AND JOHANN STRAUSS?

If you want to see a hitherto peaceful human face mobilize twenty thousand warlike expressions within one brief and 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?"

He will either walk away, brutally insult you, or start to explain the difference, in which case he will drain the dictionary in twenty-four minutes and go insane in thirty-five. If you do not believe the above seek out that friend of yours who simply dotes 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.

If, at 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, Zenith 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 does, to the musician, the juxtaposition of Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss. In fact, it is a common thing to see wild-eyed highbrows 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, possible police interference—that's what Richard Strauss has always meant. Was it not he who gave us "Also Sprach Zarathustra," which sounds even worse set to music, and "Salome," beside which the orchestral complications of Richard Wagner sound like those five-finger exercises that mother used to make us do?

So that when Richard Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier"—a tuneful comic opera, if you please, filled, mind you, with waltzes—was produced the other day for the first time in Germany, many critics, utterly dumfounded, staggered from the theatre accusing the composer of trying to get rich quick by taking advantage of the "Merry Widow" et al. waltz craze.

Which sounds plausible. Other more friendly critics insisted that Richard Strauss wouldn't do anything so unworthy of a great genius, and told over-and-over

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

again that little thing about Kaiser Wilhelm's saying to the gloomy Richard, after four hours of "Elektra" without cream, sugar, or lemon: "Strauss, why don't you write comic opera?" and Richard's 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 bobbing up, especially as "Der Rosenkavalier" proved a genuinely popular hit.

But now, just as the gibers are most rampant, comes a brand-new apologist for the versatile composer. He gives an explanation of the lightness and airiness of "Der Rosenkavalier" calculated to make music connoisseurs stop, gasp, and listen.

Summed up, it is this: the real Richard Strauss is the Richard Strauss of "Der Rosenkavalier." Aye, he is a merry wag, by no means so remote from his sprightly namesake, Johann the Waltz King; 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, smilingly repentant, to his first and only love.

Whew!

Richard Strauss's champion is Jean Chantavoine, a French musical light, and he advances his theory in the Parisian magazine La Revue. "If anybody is astonished at finding naïve melodiousness, 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 melodious to the verge of silliness, harmonious to the point of banal suavity, so correct that it was boresome. In his later works, even in the most violent and tragic, he has always kept just a little naïveté and a great deal of humor. He has never quite rid himself of a taste for sentimental melody and facile harmony."

In proof of this assertion Chantavoine cites examples picked at random from the very maelstrom of Strauss's works—from "Hill Eulenspiegel," "Zarathustra,"

"The Domestic Symphony," "Don Quixote," even from "Feuersnot," "Salome," and "Elektra." "Feuersnot," according to him, is "popular, naïve, archaic;" even amongst the shudders of "Salome" there is tonal music, melodious and harmonious. In "Elektra," side by side with shrieking discords illustrating anguish, despair, and the worst nightmares imaginable, one hears pleasantly rhythmic passages, "in the honest key of E flat," some of which are sung by the terrific Elektra in person.

"Both in his symphonic poems and in his lyrical dramas," continues the French critic, "these sudden bits of tonal melody, in the midst of furious dissonances, have a mighty effect. The contrast made by them is so striking that one does not think of looking more closely to see whether the melody is at all times of a distinguished sort and the harmony carefully chosen. The first impulse is to find therein a coldly calculated process, wisely employed to produce an unflinching effect. Thus, Mr. Richard Strauss is apparently never less himself than when, as at such junctures, he seems to revert to the art

and, almost, to the style, of his youth.

"But—in criticism, the first impulse is not always the best. Closer examination brings us, in this case, to an entirely different conclusion. If we study the passages where the Richard Strauss of 1885 seems still close to the Richard Strauss of 1905 or 1908 we must quickly note this: on every occasion these reversions to the earlier style occur when the composer ceases to suggest external action, to follow a plot; they occur when, on the contrary, he must express something subjective or intimate; when, to put it a little differently, all he has to do is to follow the dictates of his own emotions, 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 sombre 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."

There is "Weichheit," softness, in Munich, the Bavarian capital, Richard Strauss's home. There is also humor, and Strauss is a humorist. And it is this humorous tendency of his which has caused him, through all the vicissitudes of his musical development, to love the waltz tempo, to harbor the wish of composing, some day, a "Rosenkavalier."

The tendency to inject the one-two-three rhythm dear to Vienna into his work has cropped up long before now, declares the Frenchman. There are waltzes in "Feuersnot," in "Salome"—(part of the famous dance of that opera is a waltz)—in the abstruse symphonic poems, in "Elektra," even. Therefore, given this tendency, why should not Strauss abandon himself finally to the pure joy of waltz-composition, especially when, as in "Der Rosenkavalier," the scene of the action is Vienna, the home of the waltz?

In seeking further to explain Strauss's comic opera, the erudite Chantavoine

evolves something very interesting concerning the general characteristics of modern Germans.

They are trying, he says, in architecture and everything else, to combine gigantic size and "all modern improvements" with the light style of the eighteenth century. The German of A. D. 1911 wants to be both solid and frisky; he desires to blend "geology with rococo." Examples of this are the city halls 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 Mari-vaux built on the lines of the Nibelungen Ring." It is the eighteenth century made 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 common just now in his country," continues the French writer. "I shall carefully refrain from saying that, in doing so, he has followed the example of others; a Strauss gives, rather than follows, examples. But, in his way, 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, naïveté, joyousness, grace, impertinence, and liberty. He has translated that taste with great naturalness, like a good German and a great artist. That is all."

On that account, argues Strauss's apologist, the composer stands acquitted of the charge of desiring to exploit the waltz craze.

"And thus it is," says Chantavoine in conclusion, "that this comic opera, which, at first, so puzzled the Germans, and later so astonished them—this work, where some pretend to recognize neither Strauss nor themselves—is, after all, one of the works in which the composer has revealed himself with the greatest spontaneity; one, moreover, in which, by applying the Colossal-Neo-Rococo style, he has succeeded in expressing, with the greatest truthfulness, the taste of present-day Germany."