

**IN SEARCH OF  
A SECOND  
ROSENKAVALIER**

**KAREN VAN DER WALT**

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Karen van der Walt

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A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
M.Mus (Performing Arts)  
in the Faculty of Human Sciences  
in the Department of Music  
at the University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof. C. Walton

November 2005

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Background of the Study

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was born in Munich. He only had one sibling, a sister, Johanna, who was three years younger than he. Strauss's grandfather was a successful brewer and married his daughter off to Germany's most proficient French horn player, Franz Strauss. This stubborn, idiosyncratic man allowed no music of Wagner to be played in his house, and wherever possible he did whatever he could to annoy Wagner. When Wagner died, the entire Munich orchestra stood in a minute of silent tribute. Franz Strauss remained seated.

Franz Strauss's son was clearly a child prodigy. He started his piano lessons at four, wrote his first composition at seven, and had his first work published at seventeen. When Strauss was twenty years old, he had written two symphonies in addition to many chamber works, piano pieces and songs. Because the young Richard was still very much under his father's control and influence, Strauss's early works are remarkably classical in character. At the age of seventeen, because of his father's dislike of Wagner, he had never heard any of that composer's music. One day he brought the score of *Tristan und Isolde* home and played it on the piano in rebellion against his father's furious disapproval. From that day onwards, Wagner changed the musical attitudes of Strauss, and he continued to be influenced by Wagner for the rest of his life. Strauss thought that opera was essentially at an end as an art form, because Wagner's work was an indomitable peak. 'But', he added, 'I have solved the problem by making a detour around it' (Zweig 1943: 369).

Strauss made his detour by composing in the modern idiom of *Salome* and *Elektra*. Then, starting with *Rosenkavalier*, he turned towards the past. After Strauss made his U-turn with this work in 1909, he continued with *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which was rewritten after an unsuccessful first offering to the public, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Intermezzo*, which is an semi-autobiographical work on the composer's marriage. *Die Ägyptische*

Helena, Arabella, Die schweigsame Frau and Friedenstag followed. Daphne and Die Liebe der Danae were next. The last of Strauss's fifteen operas was the conversation piece Capriccio, which some people regard as his best work for the stage.

When Strauss received Hofmannsthal's draft for the first act of *Der Rosenkavalier*, he wrote to his librettist: 'The opening scene is delightful: it'll set itself to music like oil and melted butter: I am hatching it out already. You're da Ponte and Scribe rolled into one' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 28-29). Hofmannsthal promptly responded, 'As our Elektra has slain her thousands, I look forward to our slaying with this comedy tens of thousands, rather like Saul and David in the Bible, and they just like us had to face the Philistines' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 29). He was correct. *Der Rosenkavalier* became their biggest success.

## 1.2 Formulation of the Research Question

After the success of *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss attempted several times to compose another opera in a similar vein and recapture the earlier work's critical and public acclaim. What were the reasons for *Der Rosenkavalier*'s success? How do the words, plot and music of *Der Rosenkavalier* reverberate in *Arabella*, *Die schweigsame Frau* and *Capriccio*, and how do these works differ from their supposed model?

The purpose of my study is to trace Strauss's operatic development from *Rosenkavalier* through to his final opera *Capriccio*, by examining the manner in which the influences of the earlier work make themselves felt in Strauss's later comedies for the stage.

## 2. DER ROSENKAVALIER

### 2.1 A Brief Synopsis

#### Act One

Der Rosenkavalier is set in eighteenth-century Vienna. As an introduction to the opera, the orchestra plays a passionate prelude which depicts a scene of lovemaking between the Marschallin and her seventeen-year-old lover, Count Octavian Rofrano. The curtain rises on the Marschallin's bedroom. She is still in bed, while Octavian embraces her. Their affectionate words are interrupted by the visit of the Marschallin's cousin, Baron Ochs. Octavian and the Marschallin do not want to be caught in the act, so quickly disguise the boy as a maidservant, Mariandel. Ochs, who has a lusty appetite for young girls, promptly starts making advances towards the seemingly innocent Mariandel. The reason of Ochs's visit is to ask the advice of his wiser city cousin concerning his recent engagement to Sophie, the young daughter of the wealthy, recently ennobled Herr von Faninal. Ochs needs a young nobleman to act as a Cavalier of the Rose, to convey a silver rose as a gift to his bride-to-be. This custom was supposedly observed by the nobility of that time. The Marschallin suggests Octavian for the mission. At once, her room is crowded with people seeking her attention, from a tenor singing the aria *Di rigori armato il seno* to a worried widow with her three children. After a while, everybody has left, and she is alone again. The Marschallin starts thinking about time ticking away, and her lost youth. (*Kann ich an ein Mädel erinnern?*) When Octavian returns and reassures her of his love for her, her mood still cannot be lifted. Even if he has good intentions, as a young boy, his attentions will wander after a while. (*Die Zeit, sie ist ein sonderbar Ding*). Octavian cannot understand her depressed and contemplative mood, and he leaves. The Marschallin sends Mohammed, her little black servant, after him with the silver rose. She sombrely glances at her face once more in the mirror.

#### Act Two

In the Faninal household, Sophie and her maid excitedly await the coming of the Rose Cavalier. Octavian enters, dressed in silver, and presents the rose to Sophie. It is the first

time the two young people have met, but they fall in love at first sight. (Wo war ich schon einmal). The magic of the moment is soon spoiled when Faninal introduces Sophie to her husband-to-be. The bloated and crude nobleman has awful manners, and compared to the attractive and youthful Octavian, Ochs appears even more vulgar and aged. After Ochs has made improper advances to Sophie, he and Faninal go off to discuss business. Alone, Octavian and Sophie declare their love for each other (Mit Ihren Augen voll Tränen). However, Valzacchi and Annina, two Italian intrigue merchants, have been spying on them and now surprise them. They then call the Baron to tell of his fiancée's infidelity. Octavian thereupon defends Sophie's honour with his sword. He lightly scrapes Ochs on the arm, who wails 'Murder!' at the top of his voice and collapses on the sofa. This is followed by another spectacle where Sophie refuses to marry Ochs, even after her father's insistence and ultimatum to either marry whom he says or spend the rest of her life in a convent. After everyone has gone, Ochs is left lying on the couch licking his wounds. Annina gives him a letter from Mariandel/Octavian, asking to meet the Baron later for a private evening of their own. Annina has decided to double-cross him, because of his stinginess. Ochs, who is very pleased to hear that the young Mariandel wants to see him, jumps up, suddenly unaware of his pain, and dances joyously about the room.

### Act Three

Annina and Valzacchi are now working for both Ochs and Octavian. However, they have decided to side with Octavian because he pays better. The two Italians have organised a date for the 'lovers' at a questionable inn near Vienna. As soon as Octavian/Mariandel arrives, Ochs starts making advances towards the young 'girl'. Luckily, Mariandel is able to keep him at arm's length. Heads appear at every window and door to terrify the Baron, as devised by Valzacchi. Annina, dressed as a widow, rushes in, and claims Ochs is the father of her children. The police arrive amidst the chaos and call Faninal, who again calls Sophie to prove that Mariandel is not his daughter, as claimed by Ochs. When Octavian removes his girlish clothes to show that it was only a disguise to trick Ochs, the poor man encounters enemies from all sides. At once, the Marschallin makes her entrance and the comedy is over. She puts everything in order by making amends with the police and telling Ochs to forget about Sophie and leave Vienna. Hab's mir gelobt ihn lieb zu



haben is the trio in which the Marschallin, Octavian and Sophie each sing of their individual feelings. Sophie sings of her love for Octavian, while the Marschallin forsakes her claim on him and gives the two young lovers her blessing. Octavian sings of his love for Sophie, though he is still aware of the pain that he is causing the Marschallin. After the trio has ended, the Marschallin and Faninal leave the stage arm in arm. Octavian and Sophie sing the duet *Ist ein Traum*. After the two lovers have left the stage, all is dark and still for a moment. Mohammed, the Marschallin's little servant, reappears, looks around, picks up Sophie's handkerchief from the floor where she has dropped it, and slips out once more as the curtain falls.

## 2.2 The Background to Der Rosenkavalier

After the première of *Elektra* on 25 January 1909, it was expected that the next opera that Strauss would compose would be yet more perverse and tragic than either *Elektra* or its predecessor, *Salome*. However, Strauss and his librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874 – 1929) had already started planning their next joint project while working on *Elektra*. It was to be a comedy: Strauss was to write his long desired *Figaro*.

It was up to Hofmannsthal to find a suitable subject for their next project. The librettist suggested his comedy *Christinas Heimreise*, but Strauss rejected it. Hofmannsthal considered taking a topic from Molière, but later decided against it. Ten days after the première of *Elektra*, in February 1909, Hofmannsthal travelled to Weimar to visit a friend, Count Harry Kessler. Hofmannsthal mentioned that he was searching for a suitable comic subject. Kessler suggested elaborating on *L'Ingenu libertin*, a play that he had seen in Paris two years before. It took the two friends only three days to concoct a scenario based on that theme. When Hofmannsthal sketched out the plot to Strauss (with the list of characters scrawled on the back of a menu), Strauss replied to Hofmannsthal, 'That's it. Be warned, they will all say that it is, once again, not the long-awaited new comic opera – but we shall enjoy the task' (Wilhelm 1989: 124).

Work on Strauss and Hofmannsthal's new opera progressed rapidly. In just four weeks, by the middle of March 1909, Hofmannsthal had written the text of Act I. On 22 May, Strauss finished composing the first act's music and wanted to start on Act II. Then, halfway through Act II, Strauss decided that the second act needed more comedy. He wrote to his librettist on 20 July 'Don't forget that the audience should also laugh! Laugh, not just smile or grin! I still miss in our work a genuinely comical situation: everything is merely amusing, but not comic!' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 43). He proposed a few alterations that he thought would enliven it. Hofmannsthal hesitated, not agreeing with all of Strauss's suggestions, but in the end, they worked out the final version together.

Strauss was excited when he received first part of the libretto from his librettist. However, Hofmannsthal warned him that 'Not all passages, of course, will be as "good" to set to music as this first, purely lyrical one. There are bound to be sticky patches, too... do try and think of an old Viennese waltz, sweet and yet saucy, which must pervade the whole of the last act' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 29-30). When Strauss read the last of Act I, he aired his concerns that it might be 'a little too delicate for the general mob' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 30). Hofmannsthal did not share Strauss's worries and wrote to him: 'Your apprehension lest the libretto be too "delicate" does not make me nervous. Even the least sophisticated audience cannot help finding the action simple and intelligible: a pompous, fat, and elderly suitor favoured by the father has his nose put out of joint by the young and dashing lover – could anything be plainer? ... true and lasting success depends on the effect on the more sensitive no less than the coarser sections of the public' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 31).

The two authors had the most trouble with Act II. After Strauss received Hofmannsthal's initial draft, he wrote a long letter to him, setting out details for improving its shape and dramatic movement. Hofmannsthal did not discard his ideas and incorporated some of the composer's suggestions into Act II (for example the duel between Octavian and Ochs). However, when Strauss requested his librettist to provide a more passionate duet between Octavian and Sophie, Hofmannsthal replied, 'What I would wish to avoid at all cost is to

see these two young creatures, who have nothing of the Valkyries or Tristan about them, bursting into a Wagnerian kind of erotic screaming' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 49).

Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal in a letter dated 16 May 1909: 'It would be very nice if for the second act you could write a contemplative ensemble passage, to follow the moment when some dramatic bomb has just gone off, when the action is suspended and everybody is lost in contemplation' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 33). Strauss knew that such moments of tranquillity were of utmost importance in opera. He had something in mind similar to the Quintet in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and the beginning of the ensemble at the end of the first act of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Although Strauss did not fulfil Strauss's request for Act II, he did so without fail in Act III, and Strauss responded by composing the trio for three sopranos.

Only by the following spring, on 23 April 1910, did Strauss begin composing Act III, by which time Acts I and II had already been printed. Strauss's mother died shortly after he started working again on his new comedy. He allowed himself a three-week grieving period, and then he set out to work again. He had invented the melody for Sophie and Octavian's final duet in the previous year, and Hofmannsthal now wrote the words to suit the melody. *Der Rosenkavalier* was finished on 26 September 1910. The first performance was given exactly four months later in Dresden, under the baton of Ernst von Schuch.

Margarethe Siems, the Chrysothemis of *Elektra*'s Dresden première, created the character of the Marschallin, while Eva von der Osten was the first to sing Octavian. Minnie Nast sang Sophie at the Dresden première. Strauss's first Kunrad from the Dresden première of *Feuersnot*, Karl Schneidemantel, sang Faninal. Carl Perron created the 'anti-hero' figure of Baron Ochs. (Perron was the baritone who had sung Orestes in *Elektra* in Dresden). The fach of Ochs's could by this time be classified as a buffo bass. Not only was Perron a baritone, but he was tall and slender, as well as very genteel in his stage manner. That was not what Strauss and Hofmannsthal had in mind when they created the figure of the Falstaffian bachelor.

While the first production of *Der Rosenkavalier* was being prepared, it quickly became clear to Strauss and Hofmannsthal that the director, Ernst Toller, did not understand either the music or the libretto, and did not grasp what was required for the production to succeed. Because the inability of Toller put the future of *Der Rosenkavalier* at risk, they asked Max Reinhardt to help with the production. The news, however, leaked to the newspapers. The two authors kept on insisting that Reinhardt, with his natural gift for comedy, be engaged for the première, while Toller was determinedly protected by the Intendant of the Dresden Opera, Count Nikolaus von Seebach. Only after Reinhardt agreed to work in secret and without being paid, was he allowed in the opera house. However, he was still not allowed to set a foot on stage. Strauss tried his best to show the actors how the scenes should be played, while Reinhardt sat and watched. After some time, he started talking to individual singers in whispers. The next day, *Der Rosenkavalier* started to take shape. The singers were getting into their respective characters with the help and knowledge of Reinhardt. For three days, the cast was rehearsed with extreme concentration. Nevertheless, Reinhardt's name did not appear on handbills: that of Toller did. The première, as is well known, was a huge success, and the opera became one of the most successful ever.

Despite *Der Rosenkavalier*'s popularity, this was not the favourite work of the two authors themselves. Both authors thought that they had worked too fast, and that the opera is uneven throughout all three acts. *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* were preferred by both composer and librettist. Yet, according to Wilhelm (1989: 126) 'it may be that *Rosenkavalier*'s success is due in part to the very disparity in the character of each of the three acts'.

### 2.3 The Libretto and Librettist

Strauss had planned his next opera after the manner of Mozart, namely a comedy with a refined eighteenth-century approach. He wanted to write his own *Figaro*, as he told Hofmannsthal in a letter. After Hofmannsthal returned from a stay in Weimar, he wrote to Strauss and told him that he had sketched the scenario for an opera. 'I have spent three

quiet afternoons here drafting the full and entirely original scenario for an opera full of burlesque situations and characters, with lively action, pellucid almost like a pantomime ... it contains two big parts, one for a baritone and another for a graceful girl dressed up as a man à la Farrar or Mary Garden. Period: the old Vienna under the Empress Maria Theresa' (Hammelmann & Osers 1961: 27).

'The buffo, the old man, the young girl, the lady, the Cherubino' (Mann 1964: 98). These were Hofmannsthal and Kessler's first thoughts concerning the different character classifications. However, during the days that Hofmannsthal and Kessler worked out the scenario on paper at Kessler's home, the characters obtained the names of Octavian, Sophie, the Marschallin, Baron Ochs and Faninal respectively. Hofmannsthal dedicated his final libretto to Kessler (perhaps to show his appreciation for Kessler's guidance), while Strauss's score is dedicated to the composer's family on his mother's side, the Pschorrs.

Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, and *Les Amours du Chevalier de Faublas* by Beaumarchais's contemporary Louvet de Couvray give us the names and also some of the action of the characters, outlined in the sketch which Hofmannsthal made in Weimar, and which was found in his papers after his death.

The parallels between Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* and *Der Rosenkavalier* are quite apparent, not only in similarities between the characters, but also in less obvious plot links. The Countess and the Marschallin are both moving, mature female characters. Both Cherubino and Octavian are trouser roles. Moreover, both these characters are young men blinded by love who dress up as women during the course of the plot. Both operas have schemers, Annina and Valzacchi in *Rosenkavalier* and Don Basilio in *Figaro*. A likeness can even be seen between the characters of the lustful Baron Ochs and the self-righteous Count Almaviva. The Count pursues every girl that he sets his eyes on, and considers it his right to do so. In both of these works, the nobleman has an evening rendezvous with a young man disguised as a woman, and his sexual desires are hindered by a masquerade. In the final moments of the opera, he is thwarted by the entrance of a

noblewoman (in *Figaro* it is his wife, in *Rosenkavalier* it is his cousin). Beaumarchais's story is originally set in Spain, whereas *Rosenkavalier* is set in Vienna. In Beaumarchais's play, as well as Mozart's opera, there is also no affair between the older woman and the younger man.

Hofmannsthal obtained the concept of Octavian and his transvestite pranks from the character of Faublas in the 1781 Couvray novel. The librettist also derived smaller situations from the novel such as the incident of the sword left lying in the Feldmarschallin's bedroom while Octavian dresses up as a servant-girl, and the rendezvous during the ride in the Prater. A Viennese rococo comedy by Philip Haffner gave him the idea of the Schadenfreude of the performance in the inn, where the others enjoy Ochs's suffering. The Ochs-Sophie betrothal can be compared to the marriage between Don Pasquale and Norina and the catastrophe that follows it. The hairdresser, the black pageboy, and the singer with the flute obligato have been traced to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. The presentation of the silver rose was a Papal practice of giving a golden rose to noble or talented ladies. Quinquin, Octavian's pet name, was also the name of a Count Esterhazy. Molière's 1669 *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* was the primary source for the figure of Ochs. Other sources were Shakespeare's Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch, Scheridan's Bob Acres, as well as Goldsmith's Tony Lumpkin. In the eighteenth century it was quite common for wealthy bourgeois fathers to marry off their daughters to bankrupt noblemen.

*Der Rosenkavalier* is in several ways a remarkable work. First, Count Octavian Rofrano, the supposed 'hero', is not played by a tenor as one might expect, but by a mezzo-soprano. In fact, there is no principle tenor. According to Jefferson (1975: 72), Strauss disliked tenors, but there is still one tenor aria, sung in Italian (*Di rigori armato il seno*). Octavian's two lovers are also sopranos, so the soprano love-triangle gives the opera a peculiar flavour. Baron Ochs, the 'anti-hero', is a ragged countryman who comes to Vienna to marry Sophie, a young girl whose wealthy father has recently been ennobled. However, Octavian falls in love with Sophie, and sets a trap for Ochs so that his true character is exposed and he has to go back to the country. During this whole escapade,

Octavian has to dress up as a servant-girl, during which ‘he’ becomes an object of seduction for Ochs. (Therefore, the woman who pretends to be a man and now dresses up as a woman is the object of Ochs’s attention – who is of course unaware that she is actually a he!)

Hofmannsthal wrote his libretto as he called, ‘costuming through speech’. Each character has his or her own way of speaking, from Ochs’s country dialect to the formal style of Octavian’s presentation speech. Each character has his or her own way of talking befitting his or her temperament.

When the Saxon authorities saw the beginning of the first act where the Marschallin is in bed with the young Octavian (who is very meagrely dressed), they were shocked. Although the young man is actually sung by a woman, it did not dampen their feelings of displeasure. Seebach, the Intendant of the Dresden Opera, made a few discreet changes. At the première, the Marschallin was not lying in bed, but seated beside it, already dressed in her morning garments. The local authorities found that more agreeable.

When Strauss finished his score in the end of September 1910, the première was planned for a mere four months later, at the beginning of the following year. It was a bigger and grander affair than *Elektra* had been on the same stage. German railways ran special ‘Rosenkavalier trains’ and, within a few days of the first performance, both Strauss and Hofmannsthal had proven themselves as the most successful partnership of the day in European opera. Not even Puccini and his librettists could match their success.

## 2. ARABELLA

### 2.1 A Brief Synopsis

#### Act I

There is no prelude to the opera. The setting is a salon in a hotel in Vienna, which is richly furnished in the taste of the 1860s. Graf Waldner, the father of Arabella, is a gambler, and has been losing a lot of money recently. Their only hope for keeping up appearances is to match Arabella with a rich husband. Zdenka, the younger sister of Arabella, has been brought up as a boy, because Adelaine, Arabella's mother, always desired a son. She also insists that she cannot possibly afford to have two daughters coming out at the same time. While Zdenka wards off creditors at the door, Adelaine listens to a fortune-teller's cryptic card readings of Arabella's destiny. When Arabella returns from her daily walk, she is disappointed when she discovers that the roses waiting for her come from her admirer Matteo, and not from the fur-coated stranger she has seen in the street. Zdenka tells her sister that she would rather forever stay dressed as a boy, than be a cold-hearted flirt like Arabella. Arabella in return explains to her younger sibling that she is waiting for the 'Right One' (Aber der Richtige) – if there is one. However, she does know that it is not Matteo, nor any of the three Counts who are also making regular visits to the Waldner household. Zdenka promises to help Arabella find love and happiness, and a duet is sung between the two sisters. After the duet has ended, Count Elemer calls to Arabella to hear if she would like to go for a drive with him. Arabella sends him down to wait as she gets ready for their outing with Zdenka as her chaperone. In the next scene, Waldner informs his wife that he has sent his daughter's picture to an old, rich, fellow-officer, Mandryka, with the hope of a marriage proposal from him. Mandryka's arrival is now announced. However, he is not Waldner's old Croatian friend, who is dead, but his young and eligible nephew and heir. He quickly wins Waldner's approval and admiration by lending him a large sum of money (Teчек, bedien' dich!). After Waldner and Mandryka have gone their separate ways, Matteo enters, searching for Arabella. Zdenka gives her friend her assurance of another letter tonight at the ball, and hustles him off. Arabella enters, dressed for her drive with Elemer.



When Zdenka refers to him as 'dein Elemer', Arabella repeats the words and thinks that it has a fanciful sound to it. However, her thoughts are still lingering with the fur-coated stranger in the street, and even the idea that he might already be engaged or married to someone else, does not depress her ardour for him.

#### Act Two

When Arabella comes downstairs before the Fiakerball, her parents bring her to meet Mandryka. She immediately recognises the stranger whom she saw in the street. They sing the duet *Und du wirst mein Gebieter sein*. She asks her new fiancée an hour at the ball to say goodbye to the things of her girlhood days. The Fiakermilli brings Arabella a bouquet and sings a coloratura aria for her entertainment. Afterwards, Arabella says farewell to each of her three suitors. Matteo, who still does not know about her engagement, is moping because Arabella has not looked in his direction all evening. Zdenka reassures him, and gives him a letter that contains the key to Arabella's room. If he comes there within fifteen minutes, all his longings will be fulfilled, she promises. Mandryka, who overhears the conversation, is stunned. He starts looking for Arabella, and when he cannot find her, he concludes that she must be indeed fooling around behind his back. Mandryka then orders wine for the whole party, flirts with the Fiakermilli, and as he gets more drunk speaks sarcastically about Arabella's Viennese morals. He and the Waldners go back to the hotel to find out the truth.

#### Act Three

The prelude to Act III depicts the lovemaking between Matteo and Zdenka, whom in the darkness he believes is Arabella. As their passion ends, the curtain opens on the main hall of the hotel. Matteo, ordering his clothes, exits from Zdenka's room, when the porter of the hotel lets Arabella in. She is thinking about her new life stretching out before her with Mandryka. Matteo, who is now really confused, cannot understand why the girl he just slept with is returning from outside in a cloak and a ball-gown, while Arabella is offended by his familiarity. In the midst of their confusion, Arabella's parents and Mandryka arrive, who immediately recognises Matteo as the man he saw receiving the key at the ball. Mandryka is now convinced of the worst and tempers rise quickly, while

Arabella keeps on protesting her innocence. A duel between Mandryka and Matteo is only hindered by the sudden appearance of Zdenka in her negligée, with her hair down and on her way to drown herself in the Danube. While Arabella comforts her little sister, everything becomes clear. Waldner is more relieved than shocked, Matteo is astounded, and Mandryka is overcome with guilt. Matteo and Zdenka discover themselves in love. After everyone has left, Arabella also retreats to her room, only asking that a glass of water must be brought to her. Mandryka muses sadly that he has ruined everything by not trusting the girl he loves. Arabella then enters again, holding the glass of water in her hand, and presents it to him. It symbolises a maiden's betrothal, the village custom that Mandryka had described earlier in Act II. Mandryka drinks the water and then smashes the glass to the ground. The opera ends with their love duet: *Das war sehr gut*, Mandryka, for Arabella knows now that he is the 'Right One' for her.

### 3.2 The Background to Arabella

In September 1922, while he was still composing *Intermezzo*, Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal that he longed to write a 'second *Rosenkavalier*, without its mistakes and longuers! You'll just have to write that for me some day: I haven't spoken my last word yet in that genre' (Hammelman and Osers 1961: 364). The two authors did not think about the 'second *Rosenkavalier*' again until *Die Ägyptische Helena*, their next opera, was almost completed. On 20 September 1927, Strauss lamented in a letter to Hofmannsthal that in a few days he would be finished with work on *Helena* and that he would have nothing to occupy him. '... I have no work: completely cleaned out! So please: write some poetry. It may even be a "second *Rosenkavalier*" if you can't think of anything better' (Hammelman and Osers 1961: 440). Hofmannsthal replied, irritated, to the composer, 'I cannot just dash something off for you, the day when I could do this would be accursed, and your work would not prosper' (Hammelman and Osers 1961: 441). However, he did not disregard Strauss's appeal for some poetry, and in a letter dated two days later, he suggested *Fiaker als Grafas* a suitable subject, a comedy that he had started to write two years ago. He had sketched out a three act-scenario, and then changed his mind about the subject for their next project. However, *Lucidor*, a novella he

had written nearly twenty years previously, and not Fiaker als Graf, formed the foundation of Hofmannsthal's libretto.

The Strauss-Hofmannsthal partnership ended abruptly. Hofmannsthal sent the final revision of Act I to Strauss on 10 July 1929, and Strauss responded on 14 July with a telegram: First act excellent. Many thanks and congratulations (Hammelman & Osers: 1961: 536). The telegram was delivered on the morning of 15 July, but never opened. Hofmannsthal was dressing to attend the funeral of his son Franz who had committed suicide. He suffered a stroke, and died.

Hofmannsthal's sudden death was an incalculable blow to Strauss, who was inconsolable at the news and too upset to attend the funeral. Instead, his wife Pauline and their son Franz represented him. To Hofmannsthal's widow he wrote: "After yesterday's terrible news of the death of your unfortunate son, now this frightful blow to yourself, to your children, to me, and the entire world of art. I still cannot comprehend it or lend words to my grief. It is too terrible! This genius, this great poet, this sensitive collaborator, this kind friend, this unique talent! No musician ever found such a helper and supporter. – No one will ever replace him either for me or for the world of music!" (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 537).

Although Hofmannsthal had not finished giving the second and third acts of *Arabella* their final revision, Strauss wanted to continue work on *Arabella*. He decided to set the text as it was, as a tribute to Hofmannsthal. It took Strauss more than three years to complete the composition of *Arabella*, in between attending to various other tasks and engagements.

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler, the leader of the National Socialist Party, was appointed chancellor by the German president, Hindenberg. By the summer of the same year, Germany had already undergone many political changes. Within a few weeks, the National Socialists had established one-party rule, their excuse being the burning of the Reichstag, the German parliament. The country's widespread anti-Semitism was now

given official endorsement, and over the coming months and years, Jews and many opponents of the new regime, both real and imagined, lost their livelihood. Many went into exile, such as the conductor Otto Klemperer, the producer Max Reinhardt, and the composers Arnold Schönberg, Paul Hindemith and Alexander Zemlinsky. In Dresden, Alfred Reucker, who was Jewish according to Osborne (1986: 157), and Fritz Busch, who was not, were dismissed, and both men went into exile.

After Busch and Reucker were dismissed, Strauss made his best efforts to insist that they be reinstated, and that *Arabella* be conducted by Busch and produced by Reucker. Strauss threatened to withdraw his score unless they both could return to their posts. However, the Dresden Opera pointed out that he had already signed a contract and that if he withdrew his score now, he would break it. The composer complied with what the management of the Dresden Opera said, stipulating only that he must personally approve the artists to be engaged. In the event, Clemens Krauss conducted the Dresden première of *Arabella*, and the conductor's lover, Viorica Ursuleac, sang the title role. (She subsequently became Krauss's second wife.) Alfred Jerger (*Mandryka*), Margit Bokor (*Zdenka*), Martin Kremer (*Matteo*) and Friedrich Plaschke (*Count Waldner*) sang the other principal roles.

### 3.3 The Libretto and Librettist

The inspiration for *Arabella* can be traced back to 1909, when Hofmannsthal wrote a short novel entitled: *Lucidor – Characters for an Unwritten Comedy*. The novel is about a Frau von Murska who has two daughters, *Arabella* and *Lucile*. Although Frau von Murska is well born, she is now an impoverished widow. She treasures her eldest daughter as the mirror image of her dead husband, 'A proud, discontented and impatient, very handsome creature, quick to disparage, but concealing disparagement in a perfect formality, respected or envied by men, and loved by most women, of a dry temperament. Little *Lucidor* on the other hand was nothing but heart' (Mann 1964:245). Because having two daughters growing up at the same time can be expensive, the eccentric mother chose to pretend to others that her younger daughter *Lucile* was a boy, calling her

Lucidor. However, Lucile falls in love with one of Arabella's many suitors, Wladimir (who, like everyone else, believes her to be a boy). Arabella does not really care for him, and Lucile, adoring him, writes love letters to him, imitating Arabella's handwriting. After a while the love letters turns into lovemaking and in pitch darkness she whispers convincingly to him that she is her sister. Wladimir is of course sworn to secret about their rendezvous at night, and may not show the girl he thinks he is sleeping with any signs of affection. When, at last, on the eve of the family's departure from Vienna, he breaks his promise, Lucidor resolves the misunderstanding by confessing about her dual identity.

Much of the Lucidor plot was transferred into the libretto of Arabella. The character of Frau von Murska is more clearly depicted in the novel, the character of Arabella less so. In the novel, the von Murska family is of Polish-Russian origin, which is not the case in the opera. The real value of the novel lies in the explanation of the cross-dressing of Lucile, who is called Zdenka in the opera. Mann (1964:245) regards the situation of Zdenka and Matteo as unbelievably fake, and says that it is a major obstacle in the plot of Arabella. However, the subplot of Zdenka and Matteo is perhaps the most enticing part of the whole opera. Although it requires a suspension of disbelief, Zdenka kept all her feminine qualities during all those years of growing up and masquerading as a boy.

When Hofmannsthal had originally written Lucidor in 1909, he tried to turn it into a scenario for a play, but without much success, and so abandoned the project. However, after Strauss asked him in July 1916 'for realistic comedy with really interesting people – either like *Der Rosenkavalier* with its splendid Marschallin, or with a burlesque, satirical content, something in the manner of Offenbach's parodies' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 258). Hofmannsthal returned to look to Lucidor for their 'second *Rosenkavalier*'. Although Hofmannsthal was preparing *Die Ägyptische Helena* for Strauss at this time, he replied, "I believe I feel exactly what you mean by 'a second *Rosenkavalier*'. The action would have to be laid in Vienna around 1840 or so, something common-place, good-natured and gay at the same time ... I have some notion of a plot. It takes place among

young people and ends with a multiple wedding. But I must develop it within myself, nurture it, foster it” (Hammelman and Osers 1961:366).

On 1 October 1927, Hofmannsthal wrote to Strauss, ‘Two years ago I occupied myself with a comedy, made notes and drafted a scenario, and then put this work aside again. It was called: The Cabby as Count (Der Fiaker als Graf) ... The whole situation of piece was still entirely true in my youth ... today it would have to be switched back in point of time: I did think of the eighteen-eighties, or even of the eighteen-sixties ... Last night it occurred to me that this comedy might perhaps be done for music, with the text in a light vein, largely in telegram style’ (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 442). Hofmannsthal changed his mind about his subject, discarding *Fiaker als Graf* as too flimsy. However, at this stage he had formed certain ideas from it for a three-act comedy. The female leads, sisters, would ‘stand to each other roughly in the same relation – as characters – as Carmen and Micaela (one extremely dazzling, the other very meek and gentle)’ (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 455).

Hofmannsthal was considering *Lucidor* again in November 1924, and in 1925 he tried to turn it into a vaudeville with a modern setting; Arabella’s suitors would have to be a psychoanalyst, a chiromancer, an astrologer and a physical training instructor; and the scenes would take place in a café-dansant, a beauty salon, and at a spiritualist tea-party. This idea did not long occupy Hofmannsthal and after a short while he discarded it. Before long, the librettist had turned his thoughts back to *Lucidor* and was on his way to Arabella.

Strauss could not have simplified his colleague’s life by his proposal to insert an extravagant Croatian ballet, as well as plenty of traditional songs that Mandryka could sing. A tragic finale in which Mandryka shoots himself and is then handed the famous glass of water was also one of Strauss’s suggestions. Although Hofmannsthal’s friends had generously praised him for his original sketch, he saw that it would have to be drastically reworked and revised.

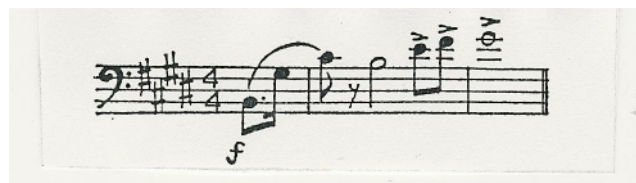
Nevertheless, even after Hofmannsthal had given the revised libretto to Strauss, he was still not happy – he berated the insipidity of Arabella and the tedious and boring behaviour of Mandryka. In desperation, the composer suggested that Mandryka should overhear Matteo’s appointment with the supposed Arabella. Mandryka should then get drunk and flirt with the Fiakermilli. Hofmannsthal eventually included all of this in Act II. Although Hofmannsthal had a bumpy beginning with the first sketches of the opera, the tone of the letters between the two authors had never been more pleasant and their relationship never more good-natured. The result, according to Mann (1964: 246), is that ‘not only is it Strauss at his most effortless, but Hofmannsthal at his most authoritative.’

### 3.4 The Correlation between Arabella and Der Rosenkavalier

The first and foremost similarity between Arabella and Der Rosenkavalier is probably the setting. Both operas are set in Vienna. Der Rosenkavalier takes place in the time of the reign of Maria Theresa (i.e. in the mid-eighteenth century) whereas the plot of Arabella is set a century later, in 1860. Both operas are in three acts.

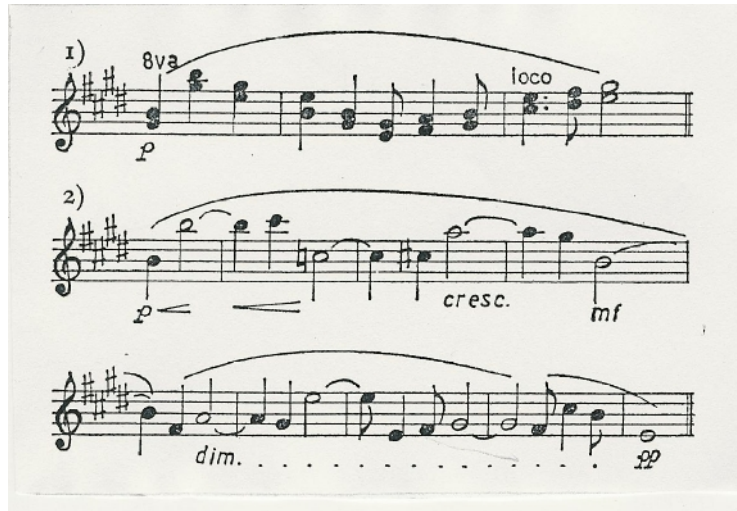
The Introduction to the first act of Der Rosenkavalier as well as the Prelude to the third act of Arabella depict the sexual act. The former, in E major, begins with the motifs of the lovers, a rising masculine phrase on the horns for Octavian (Ex. 1) and a gentler, feminine, falling phrase for the Marschallin (Ex. 2). Many musicologists have interpreted the swiftly climactic upward and downward phrases as either the two lovers’ mutual orgasm or as Octavian’s premature ejaculation.

Example 1



(Mann 1964: 105.)

Example 2



(Mann 1964: 105-106.)

The horn depicts Octavian's sexual climax before the passion subsides. Afterwards, the Introduction slips into a more melancholy mood. Why Strauss wrote the role of the virile young Octavian for a female mezzo-soprano is quite curious, but he probably wanted to emphasise the parallel between his masculine young boy and that of Mozart's Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Anyone unacquainted with the opera might easily mistake the situation at the beginning, and think he is an onlooker to a lesbian relationship. Strauss also killed two birds with one stone by having Octavian sung by a woman: it added an element of sexual perversity that Strauss knew sells tickets, and yet avoided the impossibility of having a man and woman together in bed on stage – which would have been censored at that time.

The third act of *Arabella* opens with an extended prelude, also in E major. It depicts the appointed tryst between Matteo and Zdenka that does not even nearly match the passion and verve of *Rosenkavalier's* Introduction of some twenty-three years earlier. The prelude depicts what is taking place in what the gullible Matteo thinks is Arabella's room. As one will discover later, 'Zdenko' has rushed back to the hotel, thrown off 'his'



male evening wear and transformed ‘himself’ into Zdenka to await Matteo in the dark. Matteo thus has sexual intercourse in a darkened bedroom with Zdenka under the impression that she is Arabella. According to Birkin (1989:30), there are two musical motives that are significant here, the first defining Zdenka’s femininity, while the second, which represents their joint passion, is an agitated motif. Other important motifs that are represented in the score are that of Zdenka and Matteo’s personality motif. Two significant ‘Arabella’ motifs are of psychological significance and they are woven in with Zdenka’s motifs. After their passion has apparently reached orgasm, the prelude dissolves into a lazy waltz.

Leo Wurmser wrote in his essay *Richard Strauss as an Opera Conductor* of how he and Strauss sat and listened to the Prelude to Act III being played during a rehearsal of *Arabella*. Strauss told him what he had had in mind when he wrote the Prelude: ‘... Matteo’s themes were first combined with Arabella’s ... Arabella’s gave way to Zdenka’s ... at the climax Zdenka’s themes triumphed, combined with Matteo’s (“Now he knows it is Zdenka” were his words). This may seem strange in view of the remarks that Matteo addresses to Arabella in the following scene, but a later passage which is often cut, where Matteo says he seems to have guessed from the beginning that it was Zdenka, would seem to provide the clue for Strauss’s conception of the prelude’ (Wurmser 1964:11). Wurmser expresses the notion that, if Hofmannsthal had been alive, Strauss would have got him to alter the libretto of Act III to confirm this.

Beth Hart also mentions the same fact in her essay, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Ideal Woman: a Psychological Perspective*. She says that Matteo denies knowing what he unconsciously knows. The only love he receives and responds to is from a ‘boy’, his friend Zdenko. However, he is so in love with his friend’s sister that he wavers on the border of insanity, wanting to shoot himself. In the third act when Zdenka’s identity is revealed, Matteo exclaims, ‘Du mein Freund! Du meine Freundin!’ ... ‘The room was too dark, I didn’t hear your voice, yet it seems somehow as though I guessed from the very start, dear sweet Zdenko!’ (Hart 1997: 7). According to the author (Hart 1997: 7),

Matteo ‘speaks to a common denominator of psychological insight: one comes to know for the first time what one has already known’.

In both *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Arabella*, there is a long solo scene for the heroine at the end of the first act. The Marschallin ends the first act with *Kann ich an ein Mädel erinnern*, musing on life, and the way the young girl she used to be has been transformed by time into a mature woman. She will, in due course, become *die alte Frau, die alte Marschallin*. Arabella considers her rival suitors, but still finds her thoughts turning to the stranger who, though she has not met him, fascinates her so mysteriously in the aria *Mein Elemer! Das hat so einen sonderbaren Klang ...*

Hofmannsthal had visualised both *Arabella* and *Rosenkavalier* as revolving around a lovers’ encounter, a moment in which the two lovers see each other for the first time and ‘the stars are moved’, according to Birkin (1989: 128). In both plots, family riches are also being secured through a daughter’s marriage. ‘By the utilisation of dramatic disguises, misunderstandings, suspicions and jealousies, both operas may be designated’, according to Birkin (1989: 128), as ‘comedies of intrigue’.

Hofmannsthal wrote to Strauss on 22 December 1927 about *Arabella*, “The central figure must be a woman, and not the baritone nor, for that matter, the bass-buffo ... I have misled you by speaking so warmly of the figure of the baritone, the Croatian country gentleman who interests me as a picturesque and in several ways promising character; consequently you mistook him for the leading figure. In truth he is not, any more than Ochs in *Rosenkavalier*, but just like Ochs this Mandryka is the character who, by his very entrance, by his arrival from the country in an alien world, sets the action going ... The main character is a woman ... this time she is not a woman, but a young girl, a thoroughly mature, wide awake young girl conscious of her strength and of the hazards she runs, completely mistress of the situation – in other words rather like a very young woman and an entirely modern character ... After *Elektra* and the Marschallin, *Ariadne*, the Dyer’s wife and Helen you will have to take it on trust that, once I have placed a female figure in the centre of my action, I shall be able to endow her with distinctive

qualities which make her the focal point of interest ... The Marschallin (almost a small part if measured by bulk alone) is the perfect example ... Coming now to Arabella, all the characters, and the whole action revolve around her. She is the idol of her parents, beloved by Matteo, the tenor (by no means a small part, but a very pretty, proper beau); the younger sister is her humble rival, the Counts are her admirers. She is the queen of the big ball and of the whole piece, and as in a fairy tale, she marries the rich stranger in the end. But what she is like and who she is, only the action can tell. That cannot be put down in black and white any more than [can] the flight of a bird” (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 459).

Strauss reminded his librettist that the key to *Rosenkavalier*'s success was the figure of the Marschallin. She was disappointed early in her young married life and, because her husband is absent so often, she has taken on lovers to entertain and amuse her. The Marschallin worries a lot about time passing and herself ageing. Some people regard her as an older woman of forty or more. However, Strauss already stipulated as early as the rehearsals for the La Scala première for *Der Rosenkavalier* that the Marschallin is about thirty-two years old and has been married half her life. It is because her husband is absent so very often that she feels as if she has aged before her time. Thus, the Marschallin is not a mother figure, but still a young, beautiful woman.

The character of Arabella worried Strauss the most. The composer was of opinion that she was not interesting enough 'and almost unattractive'. On 7 November 1928 he wrote the following to Hofmannsthal, "After a long interval I've had a good look again at the first act of Arabella, and have even tried to compose some of the beginning – but the thing doesn't even begin to come to music and, to be perfectly frank, the characters don't interest me in the least: neither the Croatian, that wealthy and noble companion-piece to the poor and dissolute Ochs, nor above all the principal character Arabella, who does not experience the slightest psychological conflict throughout the three acts" (Hammerman & Osers 1961: 512-513).

Although both Mandryka and Baron Ochs come from the countryside, that is where the similarity between them ends. Baron Ochs auf Lerchenau is the buffoon of *Der Rosenkavalier*. He comes from the country, and there he is well connected. In Vienna, he also imagines that he cannot do anything wrong, since he is the Marschallin's cousin and is of the nobility. Ochs's insensibility is appalling, but his frankness is actually refreshing – even his boisterous approach to Sophie is so funny that one laughs with him, and not at him. Although he is extremely rough in his manners, and is an inept playboy, his ultimate disgrace in the tavern is so brutally *schadenfreudig* that one does not laugh at him, but rather feels sorry for him.

Mandryka, on the other hand, is a fairy-tale suitor. He is tall, dark, handsome, wealthy and foreign, and his arrival is foretold by the Fortune Teller in the first scene of *Arabella*: 'Here comes a stranger ... from far away, summoned by a letter ... I see a great forest' (Burton 2004: 25). Mandryka is also generous: 'Thirty bottles [of Moët et Chandon] – six for each table, then another thirty all round ... Wake all the florists, fill two cabs with roses and camellias' (Burton 2004: 26). Unlike Waldner, Mandryka does have a lot of money, and owns a great deal of land. He is well presented, and amiable to Arabella and her parents, until the moment when he believes she is being unfaithful to him, when he decides to get very drunk and becomes insulting.

The trouser role (in *Arabella* it is actually a mock trouser role) is also common to the two operas. Although the analogy is perhaps more appropriate to *Rosenkavalier*, it reminds us of Mozart's Figaro. In *Rosenkavalier*, the concept of 'girl as boy as girl' is similar to the role of Cherubino. Octavian dresses up as the maid Mariandel in two of the three acts. In Figaro, Cherubino gets dressed as a girl by Susanna and the Countess as part of their plot to trick the Count. However, in *Arabella* the concept is simpler, and changes to 'girl as boy', when the girl Zdenka is masquerading as the boy Zdenko.

Another similarity is the symbol of betrothal in the two operas. In *Der Rosenkavalier* it is the presentation of the silver rose to the bride-to-be, while in *Arabella* a glass of water is given by the girl to her prospective husband as a token of their betrothal.

In Act I of *Der Rosenkavalier*, Baron Ochs asks the advice of his cousin, the Marschallin, on the choice of a Rose Bearer from among their kinsmen. The Rose Bearer must present a silver rose to the Baron's fiancée, Sophie Faninal, as a symbol of their betrothal. She appoints Octavian to the task. At the beginning of Act II, Octavian steps into the salon in Faninal's house, dressed from head to foot in silver, and carrying the silver rose in his hand to present it to Sophie. At the first sight of each other, the two young people instantly fall in love.

In the second act of *Arabella*, in the duet: *Und du wirst mein Gebieter sein*, Mandryka tells Arabella about the following custom by which the betrothal of lovers is announced: "Thus, the bright still Danube, flowing past my house, has brought you to me, you most beautiful of all woman! And this very evening, if you were a girl from one of my villages, you'd have to go, at dusk, to the spring behind your father's house, and fill a goblet brim-full of clear water, and bring it to me as I stand before the threshold, to affirm, before God and men, that I am your betrothed, most lovely child" (Birkin 1989: 26). At the end of Act III, after Mandryka has realised he was mistaken about the nature of the relationship between Arabella and Matteo, he is aghast at his own stupidity. Arabella asks Welko, Mandryka's servant, to bring her a glass of water, and she retreats to her room. She leaves without giving Mandryka a glance or a word of tenderness; indeed, he reflects that he deserves no better treatment (*Sie gibt mir keinen Blick*). As he muses, Arabella slips quietly onto the top of the stairs, the glass of water still in her hand. Suddenly aware of her presence, Mandryka turns, mesmerised. Arabella addresses him thus:

"It is good to still find you here, Mandryka, it was my pleasure to drink quite alone, banishing this nightmare evening from mind and quietly going to bed, our future put aside until a bright new day dawned over us. Then I sensed your presence in the darkness, and moved, heart deep, by some great power on high. I needed no water to refresh me; no, for the joyful feeling of my soul had yet restored my happiness, therefore this brim full glass I offer to my friend to mark the evening that my girlhood ends" (Birkin 1989: 35-36). She approaches him, the glass in her outstretched hand as the orchestra again recollects the music of the village betrothal. Mandryka takes the glass and drains it in one quick draught, before smashing it to his feet.

Giannandrea Poesio wrote: “It is well-known that when his [Strauss’s] *Der Rosenkavalier* received its Italian première at La Scala, Milan, the work was unjustly derided as an ‘inflated operetta’ because of the recurrence of waltz tunes. *Arabella*, the last of the Hofmannsthal-Strauss collaborations, has long suffered from similar prejudice. Still, the bursting spells of *schneller Walzer* that punctuate the action from the end of Act I onward are anything but mere ornamental devices to provide the opera with appropriate local colour” (Poesio 2004: 37). Much of *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Arabella*’s music is built around the Viennese waltz, which is not the case in either *Die schweigsame Frau* or *Capriccio*.

At the first meeting between Ochs and Sophie, she is understandably horrified when she sets eyes for the first time on her husband-to-be. When Ochs pulls Sophie on to his lap for a risqué conversation with her, she furiously begins to shout at him. Ochs begins to hum an enchanting waltz, which has become one of Strauss’s best-known waltz tunes. William Mann explains to us in his book *Richard Strauss; A Critical Study of the Operas* that there can be no doubt that Strauss plagiarised Josef Strauss’s waltz, *Dynamiden* op. 73. ‘Richard Strauss never acknowledged his debt to the earlier Strauss, brother of Johann, though presumably his excuse for having lifted the tune of Ochs’s waltz from the Viennese composer’s *Dynamiden* would have been that his intention was to parody the idea of the Viennese waltz rather than to write an example of it’ (Mann 1964: 126-127).

Example 3



(Mann 1964: 127.)

The waltz that is heard throughout the second act of *Arabella* is similar to Ochs's waltz in that it is not an 'elegant' waltz. It is set at the Cabbies' Ball on Shrove Tuesday, 'an annual carnival at which servants can interact freely with their masters and their families, where class distinction is completely overlooked – even though for one night only' (Poesio 2004: 38). The waltz calls Arabella away from the new life upon which she is about to embark with Mandryka. When Arabella finally wishes her girlhood farewell with a final waltz, the waltz never erupts on stage. 'Thanks to Strauss's unique sense of theatre narration, the fragmented waltz ends up sounding like an intermittently fading echo of another era, one where serious daily sorrows could easily be drowned in the sensual spiralling of social dance' (Poesio 2004: 39).

*Arabella* was intended to be 'another *Rosenkavalier*'. But when this sixth and last of the Strauss-Hofmannsthal operas was first performed, it was nothing like *Der Rosenkavalier*. 'In earlier operas such as *Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne*, [*Die Frau ohne Schatten*] and [*Die Ägyptische*] *Helena*, the two men had presented, sometimes ironically, sometimes seriously, profound ideas about humanity. In *Arabella* they attempted less: the opera is a simple love story with the usual misunderstanding that threatens but does not displace the happy ending. Its particular charm lies perhaps in the heroine's combination of sensitivity and common sense set against the extravagances of the characters surrounding her' (Martin 1979: 225).

Willi Schuh wrote the following of *Arabella*: "Everything is woven together with such refinement and delicacy, fashioned with such enigmatic lightness of spirit, and imbued with such dramatic effectiveness, that one can speak of Hofmannsthal's *Arabella* as the best comedy for music since *Der Rosenkavalier*. Of course, neither *Arabella*, nor *Zdenka*, *Mandryka* or *Waldner* approaches the heights of a *Marschallin*, an *Octavian*, or an *Ochs von Lerchenau*, and certainly the action is not so original, poetic and sublime as in *Rosenkavalier*, but the simple straightforward libretto comes much closer in spirit to the uncomplicated thoughts of the composer – never had Hofmannsthal adjusted so clearly and so directly to the needs of his partner as here ... *Arabella* is not new Strauss in the way that *Falstaff* was new Verdi, but rather a regeneration, a rejuvenation ... The music

flows from a full heart, it is his warmest since *Rosenkavalier*, and the most delicately conceived since *Ariadne*” (Translation by Birkin, in Birkin 1989: 122-123).

The following review is from the first performance at Covent Garden, and was published on 18 May 1934. Neville Cardus wrote: ‘Up to a point *Arabella* is charming enough with instrumentation as stylish and more light-fingered than anything Strauss has ever done before. The tissue is often beautifully woven; there are taste and poise in the orchestra, and plenty of lovely sounds. *Arabella* is proof that Strauss is still the best composer of a Strauss opera’ (Birkin 1989: 117).



## 4. DIE SCHWEIGSAME FRAU

### 4.1 A Brief Synopsis

#### Act One

The overture, entitled Potpourri, presents the audience with most of the opera's central themes. The curtain rises on Act I to show a room in Sir Morosus's house. It is untidy, and the bric-a-brac about the room indicates that it belongs to a former seaman. The housekeeper tells the barber, Schneidebart, that what the house needs, what Morosus needs, is a good wife, meaning herself. Schneidebart disagrees, and their arguing summons Morosus to find out who is making all the noise. While Morosus is being shaved, he launches forth into a tirade against the perpetrators of the noise by which he is surrounded and from which he cannot find any means of escape. He sings sadly of his loneliness. Could he only find someone to care for him, his life would acquire the purpose that it lacks. The barber suggests he should marry a young and silent wife, and, when told that there is no such thing, he offers to find one (*Mädchen nur, die nichts erfahren*). They are interrupted by the arrival of Morosus' nephew Henry, long believed dead. Morosus is overjoyed. Now he has an heir – no need now for a wife! However, Henry has brought with him from Italy a company of singers, and he is one of them! Having insulted the singers, Morosus disinherits Henry and storms from the room, promising to marry a silent woman the following day. The company – Aminta (Henry's wife), Isotta, Carlotta, Morbio, Vanuzzi and Farfallo are indignant. The barber urges them not to judge Morosus too harshly: he is hypersensitive to noise because a shipboard explosion damaged his eardrums. Suddenly Schneidebart has an idea: why should Aminta, Isotta and Carlotta not be dressed up and produced as candidates for Morosus's wife the next morning? It will be a mock marriage to a silent woman who turns out to be a shrew. Then, when freed from his wife, Morosus will turn to Henry in relief. The curtain falls as they make their plans.

## Act Two

The same room, the afternoon of the next day. Morosus is warned by his housekeeper that some sort of intrigue is brewing, but he will not listen to her, and continues to dress himself in his smartest clothes. The barber comes in to say that he has brought three girls with him, and takes the opportunity of warning the old man that he should not be too ardent with them (*Nur das Eine lasst euch bitten*). When they present themselves for Morosus's inspection, the three girls impersonate three quite different types: Carlotta is a country girl, Isotta is an intellectual, fashionable dressed lady, and Aminta, now known as Timidia, a poor, but well bred gentlewoman. After listening to Timidia, who tells Morosus in the arietta *Ach, Herr, dass ich es offen sag* that her favourite pursuit is to sit quietly, sewing, Aminta/Timidia wins the old man's heart immediately. Morosus tells Schneidebart that she is the one for him. When they are left alone, Morosus pours out his heart, revealing his gentleness, and her conscience begins to nag her. They are married with Vanuzzi and Morbio as the parson and the notary. All invited by Morosus to remain for a small wedding breakfast. Suddenly a gang of sailors (*Farfallo* and others of the troupe) burst in, claiming to be old shipmates who come to celebrate the wedding. They call the neighbours and create such a racket, that when Morosus finally succeeds in evicting them, he is near collapse. Now it is Aminta's turn. She acts the shrew, kicking, yelling, and throwing the furniture about. Henry appears, throttles her with a neck hold and sends her wailing to her room. Morosus begs to be free from Timidia, and Henry promises to obtain an annulment the next day. The act ends after a short scene between Henry and Aminta, in which she tells him how she disliked ill-treating the old man. However, she consoles herself with the thought that it was all done for her husband's sake.

## Act Three

The next morning, Aminta, still acting as Timidia, directs workmen (members of the opera company) in redecorating the room. Despite the housekeeper's pleas for less noise, they make as much as possible, and in the midst of the uproar Henry, disguised as a singing teacher, arrives to give Timidia her lesson. Morosus is despondent, but his hopes rise when the barber announces the arrival of the Chancellor of Diocece (*Vanuzzi*) and

Assessors (Morbio and Farfallo) to consider the petition for annulment. The barber proposes to produce witnesses that Aminta has lived with a man other than her husband. She denies it, and after much testimony and play with Latin words, the petition is dismissed. Morosus nears the end of his tether and threatens to commit suicide if he cannot obtain his freedom. In his misery, he throws himself on his bed, and, at a signal from the barber, Henry and Aminta go up to him and explain the truth: it has all been a hoax. At first, he is bewildered, then he is furious, and then he bursts out laughing: he may have been close to suicide, but it cannot be denied they put on a wonderful show! He is willing to hear all their operas if their can make him laugh as much as he has laughed today. The rejoicing is general, and when he, Aminta and Henry are alone, Morosus sings happily of the peace that he has at last found: how beautiful is music, when it has ended; how wonderful is a silent woman, married to someone else.

#### 4.2 The Background to Die schweigsame Frau

After the death of Hofmannsthal, as Strauss neared the completion of *Arabella*, he became convinced that his career as an opera composer was finished. The composer thought he would never again find another decent librettist. In October 1931, Anton Kippenberg, of the Insel-Verlag publishing house, urged Strauss to talk to Stefan Zweig. After a fleeting conversation, Strauss realised that he had found his new librettist. The composer attempted to arouse his new librettist's fascination in a theme from which Hofmannsthal had always made sure to steer clear: an intrigue à la Scribe, with a grand dame as spy or a con artist. Again, his idea was shot down, but Zweig had a proposal of his own: Ben Jonson's comedy *Epicœne*, or *The Silent Woman*.

Both Strauss and Zweig planned to continue their collaboration, and had already started working on ideas for their second project. However, in January 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany. At first, both men made an effort to overlook the political circumstances of the time. In a letter dated April 1933, Zweig wrote to Strauss that 'Politics pass, the arts live on, hence we should strive for that which is permanent and leave propaganda to those who find it fulfilling and satisfying' (Osborne 1988: 172).

In March of the same year, the National Socialists began a boycott against all Jews. Because the government implemented the anti-Semitic policies in stages, it began with most of the Jewish people who were working for the government, including the opera house staff, losing their jobs. Josef Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, personally issued a charge against Stefan Zweig. It was supported by quotations taken mistakenly from the works of Arnold Zweig, an expressionist author who had written a novel investigating the psychological meaning of homosexuality (*De Vriendt kehrt heim*, 1933). Arnold Zweig also unwaveringly spoke out opposing militarism, bureaucracy and intolerance. However, Stefan Zweig was able to dispute the charges.

Many expected that the Nazis would soon bankrupt Germany and consequently lose power. Hence, few of them emigrated. Jews had been prohibited from government employment in Germany; the Nuremberg race laws of September 1935 would forbid marriage between 'Aryans' and Jews. In 1939, Jews would be forbidden to take part in public or economic life.

In his autobiography, *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig wrote the following about his relationship with Strauss:

“In January 1933, when Hitler came into power, the piano score of our opera *Die schweigsame Frau* was as good as finished, and the first act practically orchestrated. A few weeks later, a strict order was issued to German theatres not to produce any works by non-Aryans or even any work in which a Jew had merely participated. This comprehensive ban reached even to the dead, and to the indignation of music lovers everywhere the statue of Mendelssohn, in front of the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, was removed. For me this order seemed to seal the fate of our opera. It went without saying that Richard Strauss would abandon further work on it and begin another with someone else. Instead, he wrote me letter after letter asking what had got into me; he wanted me to work on the text of his next opera. He would not think of letting anybody forbid his collaboration with me, and I have to admit that he kept faith with me throughout this whole affair as long as it was possible for him to do so. To be sure, he simultaneously took steps which I liked less: he approached the men in power, met frequently with

Hitler, Goering and Goebbels, and at a time when even Furtwängler was still in mutiny, allowed himself to be made President of the Nazi Chamber of Music (Reichsmusikkammer)” (Zweig 1943: 372 – 373).

“To be particularly co-operative with the National Socialists was furthermore of vital interest to him, because in the National Socialist sense he was very much in the red. His son married a Jewess and thus he feared that his grandchildren whom he loved above everything else would be excluded as scum from the schools; his new opera was tainted through me, and his earlier operas through the half-Jew Hugo von Hofmannsthal; his publisher was a Jew. Therefore it seemed to him more and more imperative to create some support and security for himself, and he did it most perseveringly. He conducted wherever the new masters wanted him to; he set a hymn to music for the Olympic Games. In truth, in the sacro egoism of the artist he only cared for one thing: to keep his work alive, and above all for a production of his new opera which lay particularly close to his heart” (Zweig 1943: 373 – 374).

The composer seemed to have no uneasiness about what was happening in his country at the time. The German-Jewish conductor Otto Klemperer writes in his memoirs: “He was Richard Strauss, famous throughout the whole world, and if he had left Germany, then people would have realised that the outlook there was black. But no, he stayed. And why? Because in Germany there were fifty-six opera houses and in America only two – New York and San Francisco. He said it himself. ‘That would have reduced my income’ ...” (Osborne 1988: 173).

One day in July 1934, when Strauss was conducting Parsifal at Bayreuth and staying at the Villa Wahnfried, the Wagner family residence, Josef Goebbels came to express the government’s embarrassment about Strauss’s partnership with a Jewish librettist. He insisted that it went against everything that the Nazi regime stood for. The composer guaranteed Goebbels that he did not want to annoy Hitler and that he was willing to withdraw his opera. Nevertheless, it was up to the Führer to make the ultimate decision. After Hitler read Zweig’s libretto, he could not find anything that could offend German

patriotism. The opera is, after all, set in England, and makes fun of the English. So Hitler gave permission to proceed with the opera.

A letter that the Gestapo intercepted ultimately determined the future of *Die schweigsame Frau*. On 15 June 1935, Zweig had written to Strauss stating his reasons why their working relationship would not be able to proceed, owing to the political circumstances of that time. The librettist was constantly careful not to do or say anything that might put Strauss in an awkward position or in any danger. However, now that Strauss was appointed President of the Reichsmusikkammer, Zweig felt that he was collaborating with a representative of the Nazis, and therefore betraying all his fellow Jews.

Strauss responded passionately on receiving his librettist's letter. On 17 June, he posted his response to Zweig, who was in Switzerland at that time. The Gestapo intercepted it, however, and sent it to Hitler. It read:

“Your letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> is driving me to distraction! This Jewish obstinacy! Enough to make an anti-Semite of a man! This pride of a race, this feeling of solidarity! Do you believe that I am ever, in any of my actions, guided by the thought that I am “German” (perhaps *qui le sait*)? Do you think that Mozart deliberately composed in an Aryan manner? For me there are only two categories of human beings: the talented and the untalented. And for me the populace only exists from the moment when it becomes an audience. It is all the same whether they are Chinese, Upper Bavarians, New Zealanders or Berliners, so long as they've paid the pull price at the box-office ... Who told you that I have exposed myself politically? Because I have conducted a concert in the place of the greasy rascal Bruno Walter? That I did for the orchestra's sake. Because I substituted for that other “non-Aryan” Toscanini? That I did for the sake of Bayreuth. That has nothing to do with politics. It is none of my business how the gutter press interprets what I do, and it should not concern you either. Because I act the part of the president of the Reich Music Chamber? That I only do for good purposes and to prevent great disasters!” (Wilhelm 1989: 228-229).

Although Strauss had the best of musical intentions, he did his moral prestige no good after he accepted engagements refused by Toscanini, Fritz Busch and Bruno Walter on political grounds, not to mention accepting the Presidency of the Reichsmusikkammer.

In June 1935, two days before the première of *Die schweigsame Frau*, during the middle of a game of skat, Strauss abruptly asked to look at the playbill of the opera. After some hesitation, the playbill was brought to him. When he saw it, he exploded with anger. Zweig's name has been excluded, and was now reinstated by Strauss (clearly, somebody had informed him about the situation beforehand). Then Strauss demanded that the posters be printed again and that Zweig's name must be the same size as Hofmannsthal's had been on the posters of *Rosenkavalier*. If the posters were not altered, Strauss said, he would leave and the première could continue without him. It was done as he asked. However, the Gestapo found out about the incident and informed Hitler. Both Hitler and Goebbels were absent from the première.

Strauss was very pleased with the première of *Die schweigsame Frau* on 24 June 1935. 'Your libretto is perfect, if only for the 21<sup>st</sup> century', he had written to Zweig (Jefferson 1975: 94). Not only did the audience receive the opera with delight, but also most of the critics wrote favourable reviews. Even in the Nazi newspapers, Zweig's libretto was complimented on the same level as Strauss's music. Three performances followed, then, in the middle of July, the opera was abruptly banned from performance in Germany.

Hitler's order that *Die schweigsame Frau* be taken off the Dresden stage was the result of the authorities' opinion that the composer had insulted the state in his letter to Zweig. By working with a Jew, he has apparently taken advantage of his position as President of the Reichsmusikkammer. On 6 July 1935, after Strauss had returned to Garmisch, one of Goebbels's members of staff came to his house and notified him that his office of President must be ended 'on grounds of ill health'. Strauss immediately complied with their demand.

On July 1935, in notes made only for his own use, Strauss wrote: ‘I have been slandered as a servile, selfish anti-Semite, whereas in truth I have always stressed at every opportunity that I consider the Streicher-Goebbels Jew-baiting as a disgrace to German honour, as evidence of incompetence, the basest weapon of the untalented, lazy mediocrity against a higher intelligence and greater talent. I openly testify that I have received so much support, so much self-sacrificing friendship, so much generous help and intellectual inspiration from Jews that it would be a crime not to acknowledge it with all gratitude’ (Wilhelm 1989: 230). William Mann is of opinion that not everyone gives Strauss enough credit for the spirit and defiance he showed towards the Nazis. ‘His defence of Zweig was nevertheless primarily selfish, secondarily artistic, and not at all political. Strauss was prepared to tolerate any regime that facilitated the production of his music’ (Mann 1964: 276).

In her essay ‘Strauss and the National Socialists: The Debate and Its Relevance’, Pamela M. Potter addresses the fact that many Strauss scholars attempt to answer the question: ‘Was he or was he not a Nazi collaborator?’ (Potter 1992: 93). Sixty years have passed since the end of the Second World War, but there is still much speculation and uncertainty about the relationship between Strauss and the National Socialist government. Many believe that Strauss could have acted differently. Strauss, according to George Marek, in his book *Richard Strauss: The Life of a Non-Hero*, could see what was going on with the burning of the Reichstag, the vandalism of Jewish property, and the Reichskristallnacht. Yet, he just ignored the obvious facts and looked the other way; he conducted in the place of Bruno Walter and Toscanini and approved Goebbels for his criticism of Hindemith. Michael Kennedy has said that Strauss was often envied for his success, particularly financial; that he was entirely absorbed in his music; and that, unlike Thomas Mann, he was ‘not a deep thinker’ and ‘not cut out for heroics’. Allan Jefferson is not of the opinion that Strauss was of feeble character, but just did what he thought was best for his family and his art.

At the time, many professional musicians and artists welcomed the new structure of arts administration proposed by the Nazi government. The aftermath of the First World War



had brought much unemployment as well as budget cuts for all cultural establishments and companies. Therefore, when the Nazis offered to organise and regulate all cultural life under the wing of their Propaganda Ministry, many, including Strauss, welcomed the reforms as a new opportunity for job protection. The Reich Chamber of Culture, of which the Music Chamber was a subdivision, ‘gave cultural professionals opportunities to achieve long-standing professional goals, to expand and to regulate the cultural marketplace, and to set up a social insurance system’ (Potter 1992: 110). The Reich Chamber of Culture’s first interest was not, as many have thought, the banishment of non-Aryans from the Reich or censoring anything that seemed to display anything remotely anti-German. Strauss, who had always been a fierce defender of the copyright of German composers, did not criticise the government’s new policies. He rather greeted them with optimism and enthusiasm, and saw them as a chance to improve working conditions for musicians.

Potter maintains that “placed in the difficult position of interpreting the Third Reich with the knowledge of Auschwitz, historians need to overcome this hurdle and consider the material advantages and the promise of a bright future that the Nazis offered the average German in the early years. Each German who chose not to emigrate was certainly faced at one point with the problem of rationalising material advantages with distasteful ideological extremes” (Potter 1992: 110).

Although Strauss has received much criticism of his politics during World War II, he never supported or yielded to the Nazis’ values and beliefs. While the composer did have feelings of patriotism, he did not care about politics. In fact, Jefferson (1975: 89) gives a very perceptive summary of Strauss’s relationship with the National Socialist Government. ‘He lived and worked for music and music alone, and always exerted himself to promote the well being of his country’s music. Sometimes this involved him unwittingly or externally in politics or politicians and while his sheer naivety about the Nazis is sometimes culpable, it was by no means unique in Germany’.

### 4.3 The Libretto and Librettist

Zweig wrote of his and Strauss's first meeting, in a Munich hotel in November 1931, "It was a pleasant surprise to see how quickly, how clear-sightedly Strauss responded to my suggestions. I had not suspected in him so alert an understanding of art, so astounding a knowledge of dramaturgy ... Strauss frankly admitted to me in the first hour of our meeting that he knew at seventy the composer's musical inspiration no longer possesses its pristine power. He could hardly succeed in composing symphonic works like *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Tod und Verklärung* because pure music requires an extreme measure of creative freshness. However, the word could still inspire him ... hence he had been devoting himself exclusively to opera in his later years" (Zweig 1943: 368 – 369).

Zweig sketched two scenarios for Strauss. The first scenario was a ballet, but the composer found it too arduous. The second, a version of Ben Jonson's *Epicœne*, based on Tieck's translation, was immediately identified by Strauss as an ideal subject for his next opera. *Epicœne* had already been used by Salieri in 1800 for the libretto of *Angiolina, ossia Il Matrimonio per Susurro*, as well as by Mark Lothar for *Lord Spleen* in 1930.

Jonson's *Epicœne* is about an old man, Morose, who cannot stand any noise or loud sound. He plans to marry a silent wife and consequently his nephew will be disinherited. The nephew then decides to trick Morose into marrying a very attractive looking young lady who turns out to be a shrew just after the wedding. In desperation, the old man offers his nephew an unstinting salary as well as his inheritance if he will only take this extremely unsilent woman away from him. Morose's nephew does just as he asks and removes the bride's wig. She turns out to be a boy, whom he, the nephew, had carefully trained and hired for tricking Morose. Zweig's adaptation of Jonson's play does not make use of a boy bride, but of a real woman, who turns out to be already married to his nephew. The action also moves forward more than a century and a half to around 1780 and, like Johnson's play, it is set in London. Jonson's title, *Epicœne*, was not suited to Zweig's adaptation, so the two authors decided to use the play's sub-title, *The Silent Woman*.

Zweig could not start working on the text of their next opera before having completed his biography Marie Antoinette. Strauss orchestrated *Arabella* while he waited for Zweig to finish the libretto. In October 1932, Strauss received the first act of *Die schweigsame Frau*. Acts II and III followed in December and January 1933. There were a few small changes in the text, a tightening of the action in Act II, and when Strauss could not decide whether to make use of recitative or spoken dialogue between the different numbers, Zweig gave the composer some useful pointers. 'I consider prose dialogue for the less important passages to be the most natural form', he wrote, 'yet I feel that the music should not be wholly eliminated from prose dialogue but should be sprinkled over it from time to time with an ironic, illustrative spark – otherwise the entry of each instrument will sound like the beginning of an aria ... the audience should at all times be aware of the orchestra's presence – but merely calling, teasing and chatting during the spoken passages on the stage, and only afterwards dominating the scene again fully and in earnest' (Osborne 1988: 171-172).

By November 1933, the short score of *Die schweigsame Frau* was completed. During most of the following year, Strauss worked on the orchestration of the opera and on 20 October 1934, the full score of *Die schweigsame Frau* was finished. Strauss composed the overture later (on 17 January 1935) on themes from the opera, and which he described as a potpourri. Strauss wrote in his memorandum of 3 July 1935: 'None of my earlier operas was so easy to compose, or gave me such light-hearted pleasure' (Wilhelm 1984: 225). Strauss's family was of the opinion that only Bavarian stubbornness kept him loyal to Zweig. Strauss maintained, however, that his new librettist was just as flawless and perfectionistic as Hofmannsthal.

When Zweig decided to cease being Strauss's librettist, it was a great blow to the composer. Strauss could not see why he could not compose librettos written by Zweig in secret, but Zweig knew that it was unworthy as well as impractical of Germany's greatest living composer to write in this method. The worldly-wise and refined poet would not change his mind. In 1934, Zweig suggested the names of several other writers to Strauss as his new librettist, until in despondency and hopelessness, Strauss agreed to the

proposal of Joseph Gregor, a historian of the theatre, who was then to write the libretti of his next three operas, *Friedenstag*, *Daphne*, and *Die Liebe der Danae*. In the autumn of 1935, Strauss and Zweig corresponded for the last time, using the pseudonyms of ‘Storch’ and ‘Morosus’. After the Anschluss of Austria with Germany, Zweig joined many other Jews in exile, in England, France, Holland and finally Brazil, where he committed suicide together with his second wife, in 1942. He left a last message: ‘I salute all my friends! May it be granted them yet to see the dawn after the long night! I, all too impatient, go on before’ (Zweig 1943: 437).

*Die schweigsame Frau* was premièred at the Sächsische Staatsoper, Dresden, on 24 June 1935, with Maria Cebotari (Aminta), Friedrich Plaschke (Sir Morosus), Matthieu Ahlsmeyer (The Barber) and Martin Kremer (Henry Morosus) under the baton of Karl Böhm. It was soon after performed in Graz, Milan, Zurich, Prague and Rome, but then disappeared from the stage for ten years, until 1947.

#### 4.4 The Correlation between *Die schweigsame Frau* and *Der Rosenkavalier*

*Die schweigsame Frau* and *Der Rosenkavalier* take place around the same time – both operas are set around the middle of the eighteenth-century. However, the setting of the two operas differs, for the former is set in England, whereas the latter takes place in Vienna.

The structure of the *Die schweigsame Frau* is conventional, and much of it is set in numbers, arias, duets and sextets, connected by spoken dialogue – in contrast to *Rosenkavalier* and *Arabella*. Much of the character of Rossini’s opera buffa can be heard in Strauss’s manner of composing *Die schweigsame Frau*. However, he used spoken dialogue instead of recitativo secco. When Strauss was still a young man, after the appearance of Verdi’s last opera *Falstaff* he had written a letter of admiration to the great master. Charles Osborne is of opinion that with *Die schweigsame Frau*, Strauss strove to acquire not only some of the structure of *Falstaff*, but also some of its nature and mood.

He also sees a resemblance between Verdi's Sir John Falstaff and Morosus, as well as between Rossini's barber, Figaro, and Strauss's Schneidebart. The orchestra is relatively small, and the orchestration is light and clear. Unlike in most of Strauss's operas, men's voices predominate and the tenor (Henry) has a significant role.

The duet of Morosus and Aminta in Act II shares a resemblance to the duet of Arabella and Mandryka in Act I of Strauss's previous opera. The themes are simpler (though two or three are similar to those in Arabella), the vocal timbres of the singers are also different and the texture as a whole is lighter and more open.

The tenor aria of *Der Rosenkavalier* is without doubt the most famous reference to Italian opera in all of Strauss's fifteen operas. Strauss here achieves a sense of irony through exaggeration. The composer overplays the traditional *espressivo* of a typical nineteenth-century Italian tenor aria (where the voice is *espressivo* and the accompaniment is more neutral). Strauss specifically designates 'espr.' in most cases. The melody is decorated with parallel thirds or sixths, in which way Strauss intensifies the melodic line. A sketchbook of *Der Rosenkavalier* specifically links this procedure with Strauss's sense of 'Italianizing'. In a sketchbook at the Richard-Strauss-Archiv in Garmisch, Strauss labelled a motive in parallel sixths 'Italienisierendes Liebesduett'. In the printed score this motive appears for the first time in the Prelude. The singer's part typifies everything that we identify with Italian opera: the high notes that are shaped in the most brilliant way and then sustained with excessive *fermati*, *portamenti* that are overstated, and the end of the phrase that is expressed by a sighing melisma on 'Ah!'

Strauss did not hide his feelings about Italian music in his letters. The young composer of twenty-two years once exclaimed to his father: 'I shall never become a convert to Italian music, it is such trash. Even the Barber of Seville can only be enjoyed in an outstanding performance' (Schlötterer 1992: 79). Strauss later changed his mind and, at the age of seventy-eight, he affirmed his approval of two of Italy's 'indestructible' operas: 'Long live *Tiefland*, *Trovatore*, [and] *Tosca*!' (Schlötterer 1992: 79). Nevertheless, Strauss made his three qualms about Italian opera clear: the fact the singer is 'supposedly' given

too much attention, often at the expense of the work; the inattentive and thoughtless setting of music to words – or words to music, and the fact that the part of the singer is given preference over the orchestral line.

Die schweigsame Frau invites comparison with Donizetti's Don Pasquale, and to the latter's advantage. Don Pasquale tells the story of an elderly bachelor, Pasquale who is about to marry. Though determined to have a wife, he is very angry with his nephew Ernesto for wishing to do the same, and threatens to disinherit him on that account. Ernesto is greatly disturbed by these threats, and so is his girlfriend, the sprightly young widow Norina, when he reports them to her. Pasquale is awaiting the arrival of his physician Malatesta, who is both unable to dissuade his friend from marriage and to bring him to allow his nephew to marry the girl he loves. Malatesta proposes that his 'sister' – a timid, naïve, ingenuous girl – be the girl that the old man marries. (Pasquale has no one particular in mind) She is, however, none other than Norina. Malatesta and Norina rehearse how they shall behave in front of Don Pasquale. After a mock marriage ceremony between Pasquale and Norina, she turns into a complete shrew. Pasquale's house has become crowded with servants; Norina has invested in an expensive wardrobe and indulged in other extravagances. She tells Pasquale that she is going to the theatre and when he tries to stop her, she slaps him. On her way out, she carefully drops a letter from Ernesto arranging a meeting that night in the garden. In the garden, Ernesto serenades his beloved. Pasquale traps the lovers, who, together with Malatesta, explain the plot to the old man. Pasquale is by now only too pleased to agree to the marriage of the young couple.

The plot of Don Pasquale and Die schweigsame Frau is in essence the same. Donizetti handles a section of the plot with more sensitivity than Strauss. A plot where an old man is deceived by a young couple can appear malicious. Strauss's eight people against one old man, instead of Donizetti's three, is too many, and seems to take the joke too far at times. Donizetti's old man also does not have a hearing disability. In Strauss's opera, the line between humour and cruelty is crossed in the end when Morosus threatens to commit suicide.

Strauss makes use of many quotations from his own and other composer's works in *Die schweigsame Frau*. In Act I, when the Barber shaves Sir Morosus and the latter complains about the terrible noise in the vicinity, Strauss quotes from Gounod's *Faust waltz*, Papageno's 'Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja' and Wagner's *Meistersinger Overture* (drums only). Later, when Morosus has found out that Henry is a singer in an opera company, Strauss supplies anachronistic references to 'Bella figlia dell'amore' and 'La donna è mobile' from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and his own 'Mir anvertraut' from *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. In Act II, Strauss quotes Tchaikovsky's *Italian Caprice* when Morosus chooses Timidia as his bride. At the wedding scene, there is a straightforward orchestral transcription of an anonymous *Almain*, No. XIV from the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. Not long afterwards, an *Almain* by Martin Peerson (*Fitzwilliam Book*, No. XC, transposed a tone lower) is quoted by Strauss. At the end of the act, as Aminta and Henry conclude their love duet, we hear the voice of Morosus from his bedroom calling to Henry as watchdog (it is almost a parody of Alberich and Hagen in Act II of *Götterdämmerung*). When the singing lesson in Act III ensues, Timidia is delighted when her Singing Master (Henry in disguise) asks her to sing an aria from Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. The 'aria' that Timidia must sing is 'Sento un certo', and it is very much adapted by Strauss from the *Intermezzo for Damigella and Valetto* in Monteverdi's opera. In Strauss's version, only the first four notes are identical to Monteverdi's. The piece is in a different key and is now sung by a lady instead of a man, therefore most of the piece is actually Strauss's own creation. Example 1 shows Strauss's version, (the piece was first composed in A major, but later Strauss decided it was uncomfortably high and so transposed it down into G major) and Monteverdi's original in C minor below it.

## Example 1

Sen-to un cer-to non so che - , che mi piz-zi-cae di - let-ta.

Sen-to un cer-to non so che, che mi piz-zi - cae di-let-ta.

(Mann 1964: 292.)

Strauss's version as sung by Aminta/Timidia grows increasingly showy and embellished, until Henry finally joins her in a duet. As she sings out a top E, Morosus comes out of his bedroom, begging for some peace and quiet. The two young lovers immediately start singing a new duet, this time from Legrenzi's *Eteocle e Polinice*. The duet turns into a quartet with Morosus and the housekeeper. When Vanuzzi, Morbio and Farfallo enter to begin the divorce proceedings, disguised in full legal attire, an *In Nomine* by John Bull is heard (from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, XXXVII), transposed and set for bassoons, horns and trombones.

In Act I of *Die schweigsame Frau*, while the Barber is shaving Morosus and they are speculating about his future and the possibility of his marrying, a noisy altercation is suddenly heard outside the door, between the housekeeper and a visitor who insists on seeing Morosus. Finally, the visitor (who turns out to be Morosus's nephew, Henry) manages to force his way into the room. This situation exhibits similarities to that of Act I of *Rosenkavalier* when Ochs forces his way into the Marschallin's boudoir. Both of these characters initiate the action from the moment of their arrival.

William Mann (1964: 289) reminds us that Strauss loved *Die schweigsame Frau* particularly because he could identify with Morosus. Morosus is not a buffoon (as Ochs



is in *Rosenkavalier*), but an old man winning the affection of a young girl because of his gentleness and courtesy. He is very much the hero of the opera; one almost feels sorry for him because he is just a grumpy old man with a hearing disability. He is being tricked and made to look like a fool by his young nephew, only to get at his money. All the best music is his, in the dialogue with Schneidebart (*Ja, das wär schön*), in his duet with Aminata/Timidia, and later in the closing scene of the opera.

In his comedy *Epicœne*, it was Ben Jonson's intention to mock men who claim falsely to have slept with women. There, two pompous men swear in a court of law that they had an amorous affair with Morosus's wife, *Epicœne*, though to their embarrassment, she is then revealed to be a young boy instead.

Jonson's most ardent followers might be of opinion that in Zweig's libretto, the essence and a lot of the vital action were lost from the original. However, Zweig supplied Strauss with a truly comical and animated libretto, though perhaps without the intensity of feeling and expressiveness of Hofmannsthal's comedies.

## 5. CAPRICCIO

### 5.1 A Brief Synopsis

There is not really an intricate plot to *Capriccio*, for the characters merely talk and argue about art, theatre and opera. However, there is a minor love plot between the Count and Clairon. ‘The essence of *Capriccio* lies in the conversation and the music to which it is set’ (Martin 1979: 246).

*Capriccio* is set in a chateau just outside Paris in about 1775, when Gluck was making his operatic reforms. The opera begins with a string sextet that acts an overture. Part of the opera’s cleverness is that it features a play within a play. The string sextet is actually a rehearsal for a programme to be played on the Countess’s birthday a few days hence. While the Countess watches the rehearsal, the musician (Flamand) and poet (Olivier) are watching her. The director (La Roche) is sleeping in a chair. As the poet and musician are watching the Countess, they realise that they are both in love with her. However, each of them is convinced that she favours his own art, and therefore the artist too. ‘Wort oder Ton?’ asks Olivier; ‘She will decide’ answers Flamand. ‘Prima le parole – dopo la musica!’ says Olivier. ‘Prima la musica – dopo la parole!’ responds Flamand. This diverse attitude is displayed throughout the opera in the relationships between the characters. When the sextet finishes its rehearsal offstage, La Roche awakens. As the poet, musician, and director argue about opera, they go offstage.

The Count and Countess enter and tease each other about their respective love interests. La Roche, Flamand and Olivier return and announce the final programme for the Countess’s birthday. An actress from Paris, Clairon, joins the others, and the Count and the actress begin to recite their lines from Olivier’s sonnet. The director then hurries the two of them off to a rehearsal in the theatre. Olivier declares his love for the Countess by way of reciting the verses of the sonnet. Flamand, who was improvising at the spinet, abruptly leaps up, grabs the copy of the sonnet from the Countess and dashes from the

room. After Olivier has declared his love for the Countess, Flamand re-enters with the sonnet composed to music. At the spinet, the composer sings the sonnet and a trio develops. La Roche enters, requesting Olivier's presence at a rehearsal of his play. Once alone with the Countess, Flamand too declares his love for her. He describes softly how he sat one day in the library watching her. He closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, she was gone. Afterwards he picked up the book that she was reading, 'In love, silence is better than speech...' Flamand desperately wants the Countess to tell him if his love is requited or not, even if only in a single word or gesture. She replies that she will meet him in the library tomorrow morning at eleven. As Flamand leaves, he kisses the Countess on the arm. The Countess is left standing, thinking. However, after a while the noise and laughter from the theatre bring her back to the present. She rings and tells the Major-domo that: 'We will have chocolate here in the salon'. When the opera is given in two acts, the interval is made here.

The Count quickly enters from the theatre. Brother and sister speak about which is more important, Wort oder Ton, and the Countess remarks that her choice is difficult because the sonnet has united Poet and Musician. When asked what his preference is, the Count answers Wort. Everyone gathers for chocolate, and La Roche summons from the theatre a dancer and a trio of musicians (violin, cello and harpsichord). Strauss imitates three graceful dances in the style of Couperin here. La Roche discusses the dancer with the Count during the first dance, the passepied. During the gigue, Olivier tries to flirt with Clairon, but she rejects him on the spot. Only during the gavotte does the dancer enjoy the full attention of her audience. When the dance has finished, Flamand and the Count enter into a discussion. The Count is adamant that music has a subordinate part in the art of dance. Flamand disagrees, 'without music, no one will lift a leg'. The whole circle of guests start expressing their individual opinions in a fugal discussion, entitled Wort oder Ton. However, after a while, the argument narrows down to the positive and negative aspects of opera. La Roche prophesies the death of bel canto. The Countess asks if the company can hear the singers before the art form dies. Two Italian singers enter, a soprano and a tenor, in order to sing a duet to words by Metastasio. After this, La Roche starts to describe the scenario of his azione teatrale in two parts, the first of which is

called *The Birth of Pallas Athene*. The other guests, however, continually interrupt him with obscene remarks. The director tries to proceed with his story of the birth of a goddess out of the head of Zeus, but no one cares to hear Greek myths. A few sarcastic comments are made, and the company starts singing an octet that is named a *Lachensemble* ('laughing ensemble'). After the company has regained its composure, the Countess asks the topic of the director's work. When La Roche starts describing his scenario of *The Fall of Carthage*, Olivier and Flamand become enraged. This leads to the second part of the octet, which is entitled *Streitensemble* ('arguing ensemble'). Suddenly, La Roche bursts out, summarising himself and his art as the authentic protector and inspiration of the theatre. He narrates the honourable eulogy that will be written on his grave and ends with a sober 'Amen'. The Countess gets an idea that the Poet, Musician, and Director must each contribute their efforts and talents to create a new opera. After *Ariadne auf Naxos* ('Too often done before', says Flamand) and *Daphne* ('but what a problem in the staging', says Olivier) have been rejected as ideas for possible operas, it is suggested by the Count that they must 'Write of yourselves. Take the happenings of this afternoon – all that occurred here today – write it and then compose it, and perform it as opera' (Krauss & Strauss 1963: 56-57). An animated ensemble now takes place and the concept of an opera about themselves is nervously teased out. Olivier agrees to write the text, Flamand to compose the music, and La Roche to stage the result.

Chocolate hour is over, and the company disperses. After everyone has left, the servants enter and set the dining room table. They gossip about the Count, Countess, and their guests. After they have set the table for supper, they can have the evening off. Monsieur Taupe, who has been left behind because he has fallen asleep in his prompter's box, enters from the theatre. He is a diminutive, unimportant looking man and carries a book under his arm. After he has told about his life in the prompter's box, a place from which he rarely emerges, the Major-domo promises him a coach to return him to Paris, and takes him off to the kitchen for a meal.

The stage is clear and dim while the orchestra plays the *Mondscheinmusik* ('Moonlight music'). The Countess enters for dinner, dressed in evening wear. She moves to the rear

balcony, opens the door, and stands in the moonlight. While the servants come into the dining room with candles, the Major-domo delivers two messages to the Countess. The Count has escorted Clairon to Paris and will not be home for dinner. Olivier will be waiting for the Countess in the library tomorrow morning at eleven to learn how the opera should end. The Countess thinks it quite amusing that her two rivals in love will encounter each other in the library instead of her. She starts reflecting on opera and on her feelings for Flamand and Olivier. Which is moving her more strongly, words or music? She starts singing the sonnet, accompanying herself on the harp. Then, after the first eight lines she pauses, exclaiming that she cannot make a choice between Olivier with his powerful temperament and passion, and Flamand with his beautiful eyes and great spirit. She sees her reflection in the mirror, and requests it to make the choice for her, but it just stares back in silence. ‘Oh, Madeleine’, she cries to her reflection. How can the opera end? Can there be an ending that is not trivial? The Major-domo enters to announce supper. Then the Countess smiles flirtatiously at her image in the mirror, shakes her fan and curtsies deep before withdrawing. She then goes to dinner in the best of moods while humming the sonnet. The Major-domo looks in confusion at the mirror before following the Countess to dinner.

## 5.2 The Background to Capriccio

In August 1934, Zweig was trying to resign as Strauss’s librettist because of the rising tide of National Socialism in the German-speaking world. He was considering leaving his native Austria in order to live elsewhere. Zweig suggested his friend Joseph Gregor (1888-1961) as his successor. Although Strauss wanted to continue their collaboration in secret, Zweig rejected this idea. Gregor was subsequently the librettist of Strauss’s next three operas, *Friedenstag*, *Daphne*, and *Die Liebe der Danae*.

Besides Clemens Krauss and Strauss, who are given final credit for the libretto on the title page of the score, numerous others, alive and dead, contributed to the writing of the opera, among them Mozart, Da Ponte, Giovanni Battista de Casti, Stefan Zweig, Joseph Gregor, Hans Swarowsky and Rudolf Hartmann.

Antonio Salieri was one of two composers – the other was Mozart – commissioned to write one-act pieces for a special occasion at the court of the Austrian Emperor Joseph II at the palace of Schönbrunn. The Emperor had ordered an operatic double-bill for 7 February 1786 during Carnival time, in honour of the Governor-General of the Netherlands. Both of these operas had a central theme: putting on an opera. They were Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor*, which is about an impresario's difficulties with two of his leading ladies, and Salieri's *Prima le musica e poi le parole*, to a libretto by Abbé Giovanni Battista de Casti. Casti (1724 – 1803) was an Italian poet and librettist who was Lorenzo da Ponte's biggest rival during the year he spent in Vienna. Mozart's *Schauspieldirektor* stayed part of the regular operatic repertoire, but Salieri's opera received no further recognition after its first performance.

Stefan Zweig originally came up with the idea of using the Casti for Strauss's next libretto. After Zweig had finished writing the libretto for *Die schweigsame Frau* in January 1934, Strauss started pressing his librettist to think of an idea for their next joint opera. A while later, Zweig announced that during his forthcoming visit to London he would read all the libretti of Casti in the British Museum. In August 1934, Zweig wrote excitedly about the possibilities of adopting Casti's *Prima la musica e poi le parole* for a scenario.

On 4 April 1934, Strauss expressly asked Zweig not to let Gregor get involved with the Casti piece. However, Zweig and Gregor met at Whitsun, and sketched out a plot derived from Casti's title and his two main characters. After Clemens Krauss started helping with the dialogue and Strauss subsequently decided to dismiss Gregor from the project, the scenario turned into his one act opera, *Capriccio*.

Strauss wanted to stage the première of *Capriccio* at the 1942 Salzburg Festival, but Krauss disagreed, for he wished to produce it in Munich in June. Because of lack of transportation owing to the war, the Strauss Festival that Krauss had planned for that month had to be postponed. The baritone Hans Hotter, whom both Strauss and Krauss wanted to sing the first Olivier, was also afflicted with hay fever every June. So the

première, conducted in Munich by Krauss himself, was moved to 28 October 1942. The cast was as follows: Viorica Ursuleac (The Countess), Walter Hofermeyer (The Count), Horst Taubmann (Flamand), Hans Hotter (Olivier), Georg Hann (La Roche) and Hildegard Ranczak (Clairon). The role of Clairon was transposed for a soprano for the Munich premiere.

The first performance of Strauss's last opera was an immense success. *Capriccio* was performed numerous times in Munich until the opera house was destroyed in an air raid in October 1943. On 1 March 1944, the Viennese public heard *Capriccio* for the first time. Later that same year, Karl Böhm conducted the opera in Zurich. Until the Hamburg premiere in 1957, the opera was always presented in its original one-act version (it runs for one hundred and thirty minutes). However, Rudolf Hartmann and Joseph Keilberth arranged the opera into two acts with an interval. They repeated ten bars when the Countess says 'We will take chocolate in the drawing room.' The two-act version is today performed more often than the original. Although *Capriccio* is not amongst Strauss's two or three most often stage operas, it is regularly performed in the German-speaking countries.

### 5.3 The Libretto and Librettist

William Mann summarises Casti's libretto as follows: 'The action of Casti's libretto takes place in the composer's house. The unseen Master of Ceremonies is one Count Ospizio who is the amorous protector of Donna Eleonora, and also the patron of the Poet and Composer' (Mann 1964: 363). Tonina (who is Donna Eleonora's maid) and the Poet are having an affair. Ospizio has commissioned a duet scene written by the Composer and Poet. It is to be sung by a soprano (Donna Eleonora) and a castrato. The Poet expresses his disgust at writing a love scene between a soprano and a castrato. However, the Musician quickly sketches a plot, writes half the libretto, and then convinces the Poet to complete it. The Musician then also writes the music for their scene. Tonina takes the place of the castrato and practices it with her mistress. A quartet, in which the Poet and Musician declare their contentment with their work, concludes the scene.

After Zweig had fled to England in March 1939, Strauss realised that Casti's libretto was too out of date for him to use. At that time the composer was busy composing *Die Liebe der Danae*, but was already beginning to plan its successor. Strauss wrote to Gregor and reminded him of the subject of *Prima la musica e poi le parole*. However, it was now named *Erst die Worte, dann die Musik*, in exact contrast to Casti's title. Discarding the 1935 scenario, Gregor wrote a new draft, which he sent to Strauss in May 1939. This was not, however, what the composer wanted for his final opera. He tried to impart his thoughts and notions to his librettist:

“Your de Casti draft was a disappointment ... nothing like what I had in mind – an ingenious dramatic paraphrase on the subject of

First the words, then the music (Wagner)

or First the music, then the words (Verdi)

or Words alone, no music (Goethe)

or Music alone, no words (Mozart)

to jot down only a few headings.

In between, there are of course many half-tones and ways of doing it, all of them presented in various light-hearted figures, which overlap and are projected into light-hearted comedy figures – that's what I have in mind ... Take, for example, the love duet in Act II of *Tristan*: the beginning, “O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe”, doesn't require any words. The music says all there is to express here, and so too does the B major finale ...” (Osborne 1988: 228-229).

Strauss began to plan a framework for the action, sketched scenes, and wrote passages of dialogue himself while Gregor was still delivering verses Strauss could not use. At the same time, Strauss was still writing long letters to Gregor while he was himself writing his own libretto. Gregor, who felt anxiety and confusion, kept on writing verses in the only fashion he was familiar with, and invariably strayed further and further from Strauss's ideas.

At this same time, in October 1939, Clemens Krauss also began to have his share in the genesis of *Capriccio*. After Gregor had read his draft aloud for Krauss, he advised the



author to keep the duration of the work within forty-five minutes – Strauss was planning it as a curtain raiser for *Friedenstag* or *Daphne*. Strauss admitted that Gregor's scenario was not what he had in mind for his last opera. The composer then wrote to his librettist and proposed that it must be the Count and Countess's birthday (They should be twins, like words and music) for which the poet arrives with his poem, the musician with his string quartet (ultimately a sextet), and the director with his two Italian singers. The opera must also not close with a happy end, but rather with a question mark.

In the early stages of the *Capriccio* libretto, Krauss's role was merely to help Strauss with the concept of the opera, as well as to be his stern critic. He exposed the first three scenes of Strauss's dialogue to a review and cleansed them of grammatical and aesthetic imperfections. Subsequently, Gregor was released from the project, and Krauss and Strauss started working more closely together on the libretto.

On 26 October 1939, Krauss started searching for an elegant love-poem that dated from the period, a piece that the Count and Clairon could recite, and some Metastasio for the duet of the two Italian opera singers. In early November 1939, Strauss was unwell and the doctor had forbidden him to write or smoke. Krauss therefore continued with the text himself. Rudolf Hartmann gave advice on the set design. The quest to find the sonnet was undertaken by the conductor Hans Swarowsky. After Swarowsky had done some research in Zurich, he came to the realisation that, except for the poetry of Andrea Chenier, who was in essence a Revolutionary poet, as well as some folk poetry, love-poetry was non-existent in late eighteenth century France. He had nevertheless researched further back into history and translated one of Pierre Ronsard's (1515-1585) love-poems, *Je ne sçaurois aimer autre que vous*. Both Strauss and Krauss approved the translation at once.

The characters, which were in the beginning only rough outlines, had at this time been given names. The Countess became 'Madeleine'. The theatre director, whose character is modelled after the director Max Reinhardt, was named La Roche. The musician was named 'Flamand' and the poet 'Olivier'. The actress was named 'Clairon' – after the

French actress Claire Legris de Latude, known as Mme Clairon. Only the Count's name we never learn.

The libretto began to assume its final form. The two authors had decided to call their new opera *Capriccio*, having discarded *Wort oder Ton* as well as numerous other titles. By July 1940, Strauss was able to start composing the music. The libretto was finally completed on 18 January 1941, and a month later Strauss had finished his vocal score. The next few months were spent on the orchestration of the opera, which was finished on 3 August 1941.

#### 5.4 The Correlation between *Capriccio* and *Der Rosenkavalier*

*Capriccio* is set in France in 1777, at a time when Gluck was introducing his reforms into opera. The opera is set in a different country from *Der Rosenkavalier*, though both take place around the same time.

As previously mentioned, *Der Rosenkavalier* consists of three acts. *Capriccio* was originally intended as a forty-five minute curtain raiser for *Friedenstag* or *Daphne*. When Strauss had finished writing the opera, it was three times that in length, nearing two and a quarter hours. He intended it to be played without intermission, and there is no change of scene. *Capriccio*'s overture is an independent work, in contrast to most of the composer's other overtures. At times the overture is passionate, other times it is more refined, intended to evoke the period in which the opera is set.

A typically grand Strauss orchestra is required for *Capriccio*. However, the instruments are more to enhance the timbre than for the volume. Although the same number of instruments is used as in Strauss's other operas, the sound of a chamber ensemble dominates throughout the opera and the general timbre differs greatly from in his other operas.

Rosenkavalier is virtually through-composed, while Capriccio is essentially a number opera. The octet, which is divided into two parts, the first of which is called the ‘Laughing Ensemble’ (Lachensemble) and the second the ‘Quarrel Ensemble’ (Streitensemble), shows no similarity to any of the set pieces in Der Rosenkavalier. The six members of the party contribute in character, whereas the two Italian singers comment excitedly on the quality of their meal. A large ensemble piece in Rosenkavalier is the entertaining levée scene, where the Marschallin’s morning is being interrupted by a notary, a chef, a widow with three children, a tenor asking for her patronage, accompanied by a flute, two Italian intriguers, a hairdresser, a scholar, a milliner, and a pet-seller with some animals.

At the end of Capriccio, there is a sixteen-minute solo scene for the Countess in D flat major. The Countess cannot decide which is more important in opera, the words or the music? Whom must she choose to be her lover? The poet or the musician? The trio near the end of act three of Rosenkavalier is also in D flat major. Rosenkavalier’s heroine, the Marschallin, also has a long solo scene at the end of the first Act, where she muses on love, the passing of time, and the fact that Octavian will eventually leave her for somebody younger.

The Marschallin is a poignant character who is disappointed early in her married life. She has married young, and her husband, the Feldmarschall, is away often. She has taken on lovers to amuse and entertain herself. However, she still worries a lot about the passing of time and ageing, and about the likelihood of her lover eventually leaving her for someone younger and more beautiful than she is. Capriccio’s Countess is an intelligent, eligible widow. Both Flamand and Olivier are in love with her, and she cannot decide how to choose between the two of them.

Both of these passionate women have a long solo scene in each of the respective operas. In his essay Strauss’s last opera, Robin Holloway writes as follows about the Countess’s finale in Capriccio: ‘The last scene, however, restores symphonic flow to build the most perfect of his [Strauss’s] monologues. The end of Rosenkavalier Act I surpasses it in

richness and intensity of content, but such “red corpuscles” (Strauss’s own phrase) would be out of place in *Capriccio*, whose essence is that it presents everything diluted and muted. The familiar sentimental treatment of time passing, beauty fading, the mirror, the uncertain heart and the great lady in the rococo décor are here given a final exquisite refinement’ (Holloway 2003:147).

*Der Rosenkavalier* and *Capriccio* are similar in that each has a love triangle, with Ochs and Octavian rivals for Sophie’s love in the former, and where Olivier and Flamand are both in love with the Countess. Sophie finds Ochs vulgar, especially next to the young and dashing Octavian. However, Ochs is still prepared to put up a fight (maybe more for his honour than for his love of Sophie), and he draws his sword on this young lover of hers after the two Italians have found them in an embrace. In the beginning of *Capriccio*, Olivier and Flamand realise that they are rivals for the Countess’s love.

‘Flamand: “That means that we are-

Olivier: “We’re rival suitors.”

Flamand: “Friendly opponents.”

Olivier: “Words against music!”

Flamand: “Hers is the decision!”

Olivier: “Prima le parole – dopo la musica”

Flamand: “Prima la musica – dopo la parole”

Olivier: “Time and words...”

Flamand: “ – are like brother and sister.”

Olivier: “The comparison is bold!”” (Krauss & Strauss 1963: 6).

The opera ends with the Countess asking how can she choose between words and music, and she starts to sing the sonnet while accompanying herself on the harp. She then waves cheerfully to her reflection in the mirror, curtsies to it, and leaves the stage humming the sonnet.

Strauss repeats his strategy of composing an Italian aria like the one he did in *Rosenkavalier*. However, now he makes use of a duet sung by a soprano and tenor. Strauss composed this duet to words by Metastasio, and musical commentary is supplied

on the appropriate cues of the libretto. Letters between Strauss and Krauss divulge that Strauss wanted ‘to find a tune which absolutely does not fit the words’, and he describes the duet as an ‘Addio with the wrong music’ (Schlötterer 1992: 80). Strauss also deliberately clouded the metrical accent. As one looks at the beginning of the duet, it will be seen that two metres prevalent in bel canto, according to Schlötterer (1992: 80), the 6/8 and 3/4 metre, are concurrently articulated in the different parts. Usually, in bel canto music, the orchestra plays a restrained, sympathetic part, however, in the duet the orchestra does not conform to these norms. Reinhold Schlötterer alleges in his essay *The Musical Comedies of Richard Strauss* that: ‘This element has been consigned to the bassoon part, and nearly every time it is restricted to the second half of the 6/8 measure – a clever and distorted allusion to a well known tradition. Later, in the second part of the duet, Strauss shifts to the “normal” procedure of this tradition in the strings, but with a subtle difference: the secondary strong beat (beat four) remains silent in the cellos and bass. The bassoons continue their distorted “oom-pah-pahs”’ (Schlötterer 1992: 81-83). For a discussion of the tenor aria in *Der Rosenkavalier*, see p. 45 above.

In *Capriccio*, just as in *Die schweigsame Frau*, Strauss composed short citations mocking Italian opera. When La Roche says ‘for the high notes of the beloved tenor’, the solo cello (marked *Appassionato*) imitates the Italian singer, playing a high A. Later, La Roche alleges that: ‘Nothing excels Italian opera!’ Olivier counters: ‘With its bad text?’ Director: ‘With its good music! One listens full of emotion to the magic of the aria.’ This excerpt is composed after the manner of Rossini, with its simulated suspensions and parallel sixths. The accompaniment is in a typical street-organ fashion, without the orchestral support that Strauss usually uses.

Strauss’s quotations from other operas, as well as from his own works, is a technique that he used in *Capriccio* as well as *Die schweigsame Frau*. When La Roche, Flamand and Olivier argue about the virtues of Italian opera, the orchestra quotes the overture to Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Aulide* at the mention of Gluck. A brief while later, two themes by Piccini, Gluck’s primary rival in the so-called *Guerre des bouffons* in Paris, are cited. When the Count and Countess tease each other about their respective love-interests, the

Countess avoids a direct answer. Instead, she speaks of her love for the music of Couperin, and singing three bars of a little-known Italian air by Rameau (*Fra le pupille di vaghe belle*). After the dancer has finished dancing, a fugal discussion on the topic of ‘words or music’ begins. The theme that Strauss uses for this fugal discussion is taken from his satirical song-cycle *Krämerspiegel* (‘Tradesmen’s mirror’), ‘where it represented the pure inspiration that the music publishers prostituted for their own gain’ (Mann 1964: 377). This theme is used in two songs of the cycle, and the composer also used it again in *Capriccio*. However, only a fragment is quoted here. Later, it is heard again in its complete form. When the servants discuss the Count, the Countess and their guests, and what they are planning for the Countess for her birthday, the orchestra plays ‘*Die Dame gibt mit trübem Sinn*’ from *Ariadne auf Naxos*. During the onset of the Countess’s solo scene, the theme from *Krämerspiegel* can be heard once more. Strauss uses it in a more extended and comprehensive form that he did during the fugal discussion earlier in the opera.

When the Countess suggests that Flamand and Olivier collaborate on writing an opera, Strauss’s first intention was that their result should be *Daphne*. Strauss wanted *Capriccio* to be a prelude to one of his larger works like *Daphne* or *Friedenstag*, as in the case of the *Vorspiel* to *Ariadne auf Naxos*. However, Krauss convinced the composer that their work was now much more than just a curtain-raiser. Strauss therefore proposed that the Count suggest that they write an opera ‘about the happenings of this afternoon’: a play within a play. In his book *Richard Strauss and his World*, Kennedy postulates that it ‘could have been the word “mirror” that gave Strauss the idea for the most inspired self-quotations in all his works?’ (Kennedy 1992:331). In 1918, when Strauss composed the song cycle *Krämerspiegel*, as an introduction to the eighth song, in the piano, he had composed an extended melody. The melody is repeated anew at the completion of the twelfth and last song. There is an anecdote (Kennedy 1992: 332), that Strauss has forgotten the melody that he had written in 1918, and that Franz Strauss, his son, reminded him of it. One finds it hard to assume that this story is true, because Strauss had an exceptional talent for remembering his own and other composer’s music. As the Countess says ‘the theatre unveils for us the secret of reality. In its magic mirror

(Zauberspiegel), we discover ourselves’, the melody can be heard in the orchestra for the first time. However, it does not fully emerge until later when the Count remarks that ‘an opera is an absurdity.’ He goes on to ridicule operatic customs, ‘a murder plot is hatched in song ... a suicide takes place to music.’ Here, a parallel can be drawn with *Krämerspiegel* itself. In the eighth song, the melody introduces and accompanies the following words: ‘Art is threatened by businessmen, that is the trouble. They bring death to the music and transfiguration to themselves.’ The melody is heard again in the last song at the word *Eulenspiegel* (Owl-mirror). The question is posed: who can prevent the corrupt practices of the businessmen? and then it is answered that: ‘one man found a jester’s way to do it – Till Eulenspiegel’

The French setting of *Capriccio* differs from *Rosenkavalier*’s Vienna. There are also many French elements in the opera. The action takes place in a chateau just outside of Paris, two of the characters are a French actress *Mlle Clairon* and *Monsieur Taupe* (which is French for ‘mole’). In the text there are also references to Pascal and Voltaire. *Flamand* tells the Countess that when he first fell in love with her, she was reading in the library. After she had gone, he picked up the book that she had left lying there: Pascal’s *Pensées*. He read: ‘Silence speaks more eloquently when one is in love’. She answers him with another quote from the *Pensées*: ‘the happiness of an undeclared love is thorny but sweet’. *Clairon* has a performance of Voltaire’s *Tancred* the next day. There are also references to Gluck, Piccini, Rameau and Couperin (Strauss imitates the style of this composer in the three elegant dances of the ballet dancer.)

There is quite a big difference between the two operas in the sense of comedy. *Rosenkavalier* is full of slapstick comedy, ranging from the first act where *Octavian* dresses up as a girl and the *Baron* makes advances towards him, to the third act where the *Baron* is unmasked for the rake that he really is. With *Capriccio*, Strauss had something completely different in mind. After *Gregor* had written yet another draft that was not to the composer’s liking, Strauss asked *Krauss*’s opinion on the draft. *Krauss* was acrimonious in his criticism. Strauss thought *Gregor*’s draft was ‘too lyrical and poetical.’ He required ‘intellectual theatre, dry wit. Really I don’t want to write any more operas

but I'd like to make something really special out of the Casti, give it a dramaturgic treatment, a theatrical fugue (even good old Verdi resorted to a fugue at the end of Falstaff!) Think of Beethoven's quartet fugue [the original finale of Op. 130] – these are the sort of things old men amuse themselves with' (Kennedy 1992: 325).

A further parallel between the two operas is that they both end with a question mark. After the trio in D flat major towards the end of Rosenkavalier, Sophie and Octavian proclaim their love to one another in the duet *Ist's ein Traum?* As the duet ends, Faninal makes his exit with the Marschallin. Octavian kisses Sophie, and as they dash off the stage, her handkerchief falls to the ground. The black pageboy, Mohammed, comes in and looks around. He sees Sophie's handkerchief, picks it up and dances off the stage with it. Do Octavian and Sophie stay in love? Whom does the Marschallin take as her next lover? The handkerchief that Sophie has dropped is a traditional symbol of infidelity to come; will it be fulfilled, and what is the meaning behind Mohammed's last appearance?

In the last scene of *Capriccio*, the Countess looks into the mirror as she tries to solve her dilemma: 'What says your heart? ... You, mirror, showing me a lovelorn Madeleine – ah, please advise me, help me to find the ending for our opera – can I find one that is not trivial?' Ironically, the last words in the opera could not be more insignificant: 'My lady, your supper is served.' The opera is thus a mirror image of itself. Robin Holloway remarks: 'And of course, the famous trivial ending as she yearns for an ending which will not be trivial ... the most successful joke is the central one, that of making the events we see into the work that we are seeing' (Holloway 2003: 148). So the question remains: is it Strauss's or Flament's opera that we are watching? On the other hand, maybe both are being performed at once? Will the question of which is more important in opera, music or words, ever be answered? Whom will the Countess choose as her next beau? According to Rodney Milnes, it is more probable that 'she will not be in the library at eleven o'clock tomorrow, she will be down at the bottom of the garden cutting back a rampaging viburnum' (Kennedy 1992: 333).



## 6. CONCLUSION

After the vulgarity of *Salome* and *Elektra*, Strauss made a direct U-turn with his next opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*. Instead of writing what the public expected, a drama on a more magnificent and epic scale than his previous two operas, he turned to Molière for inspiration. His next opera was in the style of a Mozartian comedy.

The biggest reason for *Der Rosenkavalier*'s success is firstly the characters. Hofmannsthal created human characters with which the audience can relate. Men can certainly see themselves in the fertile, young Octavian, or even Ochs, who although is ageing, still thinks of himself as dashing and charming as the young Octavian. Every woman was once a young, naïve girl like Sophie. The heartfelt figure of the Marschallin expresses every woman's doubts and fears.

A second reason for the opera's success is the Introduction to Act I. Before the curtain lifts, the listener is being swept away into a wave of passionate music. As the curtain raises, and one observes a young boy in bed with a much older woman, one is immediately amused. What adds to this amusement or intrigue is that the young boy is sung by a mezzo-soprano. So is one witnessing a lesbian relationship or an affair between an older woman and a much younger boy? Either way, from the first note is heard from the orchestra pit, the audience is intrigued.

Set pieces like the Marschallin's scene at the end of Act I as well as the trio between Octavian, Sophie and the Marschallin near the end of Act III also contributed to *Rosenkavalier*'s success.

*Der Rosenkavalier* was begun in 1909, the première being in early 1911. Special 'Rosenkavalier trains' were run by German railways for the première. *Rosenkavalier* was the last of the 'grand' operas. The atmosphere in pre-war Europe was far different from that after the First and during the Second World War when *Arabella*, *Die schweigsame*

Frau, and Capriccio were written. Although Strauss tried to create the same atmosphere in Arabella with the Viennese waltzes and setting, he did not quite succeed.

As with the Introduction of the first act of Rosenkavalier, the Introduction to the third act of Arabella also depicts the sexual act. However, Strauss was now in his late sixties, and the unconvincing music for the latter suggests that he had lost some of the passion and vigour he had had in his youth for such depiction in music.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal tried to create a ‘second Rosenkavalier, without its mistakes and longuers! You’ll just have to write that for me some day: I haven’t spoken my last word yet in that genre’ (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 364). However, they did not succeed. There are beautiful moments in Arabella, but none of the characters are so human and touching as either Ochs, Octavian or the Marschallin.

Die schweigsame Frau is set in England and is in an opera buffo style. It was banned in Germany after only a few performances, and is more remembered for Strauss’s collaboration with a Jewish librettist while he was President of the Nazi Chamber of Music than for the actual content of the opera.

Capriccio, Strauss’s last work for the stage, is completely different from all his other operas in its sense of style and comedy. It has a French setting, and instead of Strauss’s sometimes crude humour, its comedy here is drier. The character of Countess Madeleine is one of Strauss’s most successful and interesting depictions of woman. Just as in Rosenkavalier, the opera ends with a question mark. While some believe that Capriccio is the best opera that Strauss had written, it is not a view shared by the majority.

On 5 May 1916, Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal, ‘I’m the only composer nowadays with some real humour and a sense of fun and a marked gift for parody. Indeed, I feel downright called upon to become the Offenbach of the 20th century, and you will and must be my poet ... Our road starts from Rosenkavalier: its success is evidence enough, and it is also this genre (sentimentality and parody are the sensations to which my talents

respond most forcefully and productively) that I happen to be keenest on' (Hammelman & Osers 1961: 250-251).

To what extent does *Rosenkavalier* recreate itself in Strauss's later works? Strauss repeated several elements of *Rosenkavalier* in his other operas, however, he never managed to capture the mood and pith of his earlier opera again. Neither *Arabella*, *Die schweigsame Frau* nor *Capriccio* brought Strauss the same amount of fame or riches that he achieved with *Rosenkavalier*. Nevertheless, in their own right, each of these operas has a charm and ardency of its own.

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