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Overture to *The Gypsy Baron*

JOHANN STRAUSS

Born October 25, 1825, Vienna
Died there June 3, 1899

As a member of a distinguished musical dynasty, Johann Strauss is sometimes listed as Johann Strauss Jr., or Johann Strauss II, but such modifiers are hardly needed, for he was THE Johann Strauss, the Waltz King, no less, and after being taken to the hearts of all Europeans he captured the affections of Americans in a triumphal tour during which he conducted huge choruses and orchestras. He came to music for the stage relatively late in his remarkable life. In 1864 Jacques Offenbach, visiting Vienna for the premiere of his operetta *Die Rheinnixen*, took part in a waltz competition with Strauss: Offenbach's waltz, *Abendblätter* ("Evening Papers"), took the prize over Strauss's *Morgenblätter* ("Morning Papers"), which now is regarded as one of the Waltz King's finest creations, while Offenbach's prize-winning entry is forgotten. In any event, the two composers remained friends, and it is thought that it was Offenbach, who of course made his name with his *operettes*, persuaded Strauss to compose for the stage. If that is true, he certainly deserves the thanks of generations of music-lovers, for Strauss brought the Viennese operetta to such heights that Gustav Mahler, as director of the Vienna Opera, produced *Die Fledermaus* there in 1894, some twenty years after its premiere, as a "comic opera."

While *Fledermaus* remains Strauss's most enduringly popular work for the stage, Der *Zigeunerbaron* ("The Gypsy Baron"), the tenth of his operettas, is without question his most inspired and altogether grandest. *The Gypsy Baron* had its premiere on the eve of Strauss's 60th birthday. A hundred years later, the late Nikolaus Harnoncourt undertook some research that indicated an unsuspected content of social protest in the original version—awareness of which is not likely to cloud anyone's delighted response to the wonderful tunes. The sumptuous *Treasure Waltz*, three polkas, a quadrille, and a march from this splendid score have taken their places in the concert repertory, and the Overture, which opens this evening's concert, is perhaps the grandest of all the excerpts, taking an honored place in the international concert repertory and quite at home in a program that includes one of Beethoven's grandest works for the concert hall.▪

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 61

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn
Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

Beethoven did not compose a full-scale concerto for the violin until he had completed all the concertos he wrote for his own use (the first four of his five piano concertos) and the Triple Concerto, in which the violin shares solo honors with the cello and piano. He did begin sketching the opening movement of a violin concerto in C major in the early 1790s, when he was still resident in Bonn, but he never brought even that single movement to completion. (It was completed, on its own, by Joseph Hellmesberger some 50 years after Beethoven's death, and was published after another half-century went by.) Once in Vienna, he appears to have worked up to the Concerto in D major by way of a series of somewhat more modest concerted works for the violin—first the two Romances (Opp. 40 and 50), composed between 1798 and 1802, and then the Triple Concerto, which he completed in 1805. When the Concerto in D major materialized the following year, those earlier efforts must have seemed irrelevant, for here was a work of unprecedented proportions and depth for its category.

Franz Clement, to whom the premiere of this work was entrusted, was a distinguished musician who took part in several important performances of Beethoven's works in his capacity as concertmaster of the orchestra at the Theater an der Wien, on whose stage he introduced the Concerto at the end of 1806. He was himself the composer of a violin concerto that earned a good deal of admiration in his time. Beethoven referred to his own Violin Concerto humorously as a *"Concerto par clemenza por Clement,"* and was not distressed by having the first movement separated from the last two at the premiere by a sequence of virtuoso stunt pieces, since that was the custom of the day. He wrote the last two movements, however, as he did those of several other major works of this period, so directly connected to each other that they cannot be separated.

A more widely remembered musician with a name similar to Clement's came into the picture shortly after the Concerto's premiere: Muzio Clementi, who was by then a music publisher based in London as well as a respected piano virtuoso and composer, persuaded Beethoven to adapt the work as a piano concerto. The piano version was dedicated to the bride of Beethoven's friend Stephan von Breuning, who himself had received the dedication of the Violin Concerto in its original form. For the piano version, which is very seldom performed, Beethoven supplied cadenzas, actually the first he gave out for any of his concertos. He never wrote any for the violin version, but proceeded thereafter to supply his earlier piano concertos with cadenzas, and when he wrote the last (No. 5 in E-flat, known as the "Emperor") he provided it at the outset with cadenzas so integrated that there could be no question of replacing them.

What made Beethoven receptive to Clementi's suggestion was that there was little interest in the Violin Concerto following its premiere, and indeed for the rest of his life. The Concerto appears

not to have been given a second performance until Alois Tomasini, the son of Haydn's Eszterháza concertmaster, played it in 1812. Few other violinists gave the work a nod. Pierre Baillot performed it in 1828, Henri Vieuxtemps ten years after that. It was not until Joseph Joachim played the Concerto in his London debut on May 27, 1844, about a month before his 13th birthday, that the work began to take hold. The conductor on that occasion was the young Joachim's mentor Felix Mendelssohn, who was a popular favorite in London and took his Leipzig Conservatory's prize pupil there to astound his admirers. (Mendelssohn composed his own Violin Concerto in E minor in the same year.)

Joachim was to become the most widely respected violinist of his time, as well as an eminent conductor and pedagogue, and he was for several years virtually the only violinist to perform the Beethoven Concerto with any frequency. His lifelong friend Johannes Brahms composed both his own Violin Concerto and his Double Concerto (violin and cello) for Joachim, who also conducted a Brahms premiere or two. Joachim composed cadenzas for this concerto which are still in use; those performed this evening by Ray Chen, however, were composed by another illustrious violin pedagogue, Leopold Auer, remembered now as the teacher of Jascha Heifetz. Heifetz, in fact, made his own adaptation of the Auer cadenzas, and Mr Chen has taken up the subsequent edition of them by his own renowned teacher at the Curtis Institute of Music, the formidable American virtuoso Aaron Rosand.

While all the piano concertos Beethoven had composed by 1806 can trace their ancestry, in greater or lesser degree, to those of Mozart, the Violin Concerto might be said to have had no models except among Beethoven's own works in other forms. That is not to say, however, that he was without guidance in the specific area of writing for violin and orchestra, which he found in the music of eminent virtuoso-composers as closely identified with the violin as he and Mozart were with the piano. Like most of the great composers, Beethoven had a healthy reverence for earlier masters and a productive interest in his contemporaries. He kept Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier* by his bedside; he urged his piano pupils to study that work, and assigned the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of the aforementioned Clementi. Like Mozart, he also had first-hand knowledge of stringed instruments as a performer on both the violin and the viola. He knew not only Clement's concerto, but those by representatives of the French school of violin playing: its transplanted Italian founder Giovanni Battista Viotti, whose lifetime (1755-1824) spanned those of Mozart and Beethoven, and who composed more than two dozen concertos, some of which are still in circulation; and the two Frenchmen he came to know personally in Vienna and for whom he composed his last violin sonatas: Pierre Rode (1774-1830) and Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831).

For all the thoroughly idiomatic writing for their instrument in Beethoven's Concerto, however, violinists in the first half of the nineteenth century may have been put off by the work's unprecedented proportions as well as the seriousness of its content. This was clearly no mere showpiece for the soloist, but a work that put the whole idea of the concerto in a new light, following what Haydn and (far more emphatically) Beethoven himself had achieved in doing just that for the symphony, and in so doing seizing for the symphony the position formerly held by the concerto as the highest category of concert works. In this light, the Violin Concerto was as revolutionary a work in its genre as the *Eroica* was for the symphony.

The length of Beethoven's first movement alone exceeds that of nearly every earlier complete concerto for the violin, and its character is even more strikingly different from that of its predecessors. The opening measures proclaim it as being at once expansive and dramatic, and, while the solo writing is extremely demanding, there is virtually nothing in the way of bravura material in this exalted disquisition.

The slow movement, essentially a romance in modified variation form, reaches far beyond the sweetness of the two independent romances Beethoven composed earlier, to attain a level of sublimity paralleled among his works only in his most intimate chamber music. It leads directly into the concluding rondo, for which the ostensible pattern is the "hunting" music found in the symphonic and chamber-music finales of Mozart and Haydn. In Beethoven's hands the solid, earthy character comes more to the fore, even while taking us to an Olympian level in keeping with the nobility of the two preceding movements.

Beethoven left us no music in which he is more sure of himself, and none in which his humanity is more warmly evident. The unique qualities of this concerto have tended to limit speculation on what sort of work he might have produced if he had composed a second concerto for the violin: this is not the sort of piece to share honors or vie for attention with companion works. No one even tried to compose another violin concerto of similar character and proportions till Brahms produced his, more than 70 years later.▪

Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864, Munich
Died September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

The Bavarian Richard Strauss was not related to Johann Strauss, the Viennese Waltz King, but he admired him profoundly, and their careers overlapped for a dozen years or so at the end of the nineteenth century. Johann Strauss was at the height of his fame at the time the young Richard began to make a name for himself (*Don Juan*, the first of his great tone poems, was given its premiere in the same year as Johann's *Emperor Waltz*, 1889), and *Der Rosenkavalier* would not have come into being if its composer had not known and loved the waltzes of the Viennese Strausses.

There are some intriguing parallels, or near-parallels, to be noted in the careers of Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss. Both turned to writing for the stage only after establishing themselves in the orchestral realm—Johann after being crowned the Waltz King, Richard after producing his remarkable chain of symphonic poems. Both were also conspicuously active as conductors. Johann Strauss did not confine himself exclusively to dance music in that role, but conducted his orchestra in the Viennese premieres of works by Liszt and Wagner when the Establishment either lacked the courage to do so or reneged on a commitment. Richard, too, went far beyond his own compositions in his conducting repertory; he was especially admired for his Mozart, in both the concert hall and the opera house, and it is to that composer, perhaps even more than the Waltz King, that *Der Rosenkavalier* is an affectionate tribute, with *The Marriage of Figaro* as the most likely model. It is significant that Strauss set his opera in the city associated with both Mozart and the Johann Strauss dynasty, and where he himself was to serve for a time as director

of the Vienna Opera. By a happy coincidence, the premiere, in Dresden, fell on the eve of Mozart's 155th birthday.

Such a work, in any event, was just what Strauss needed to reassure his public in the wake of the minor scandals generated by his *Salome* and the fierce drama of his *Elektra*. The latter was his first collaboration with Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the librettist who was to him the kind of collaborator Lorenzo da Ponte had been to Mozart; *Der Rosenkavalier* was their second joint effort, set not in bleak antiquity but in the Vienna of Maria Theresia, the empress who died in 1780, a year before Mozart settled there. The chief character is not the title role but the Marschallin, who is herself named Marie-Thérèse, and who in some respects may remind us of the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Like Cherubino in that opera, Octavian, the young hero (the *Rosenkavalier* himself), is a *Hosenrolle*, a male character portrayed by a female singer. If the Strauss opera is more voluptuous, more opulent, and even more rife with intrigue than Figaro, it is also a bit more indulgent in its view of human weakness in affairs of the heart. Even its cynicism is served up *mit Schlag*, ornamented and sweetened with waltz rhythms which, far from striking us as anachronistic, actually seem to give the work a sort of fairyland timelessness.

One of these waltzes—the one associated with Baron Ochs—was apparently borrowed by Richard Strauss from the waltz *Geheime Anziehungskräfte* ("Secret Magnetic Forces," known also as *Dynamiden*), by Johann's younger brother Josef Strauss, and the first motif heard in the opera's prelude was apparently adapted from the same composer's waltz *Delirien*. There is a further, extramusical connection with the Waltz King, in the character of Octavian, whose family name is specified as Rofrano, a name taken from the annals of actual Viennese aristocracy and so well known that it was given to a street in Vienna: the Rofranogasse, the very street on which Johann Strauss himself lived for several years.

Such connections and allusions more than intimate that *Der Rosenkavalier* was a labor of love on its composer's part, and Strauss indeed had a special place in his heart for this work to the end of his life. When a group of American soldiers came to his door in Garmisch at the end of the European war in 1945, he greeted them with the simple statement, "I am Dr. Richard Strauss, the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*."

There have been several orchestral suites drawn from *Der Rosenkavalier*. One was prepared by Strauss himself, based on a curious film version of the opera, a silent film made in 1926 and shown with recorded music. Another suite was created by the brilliant conductor Antal Doráti, whose own enthusiasm for the Viennese Strausses is documented in the form of his score for the ballet *Graduation Ball*, based entirely on their dance pieces. The name of the arranger of the very successful suite performed this evening, however, a repertory staple for some seventy years now, does not appear in the score: it is assumed to have been arranged by the conductor Artur Rodzinski, a conductor especially admired for his performances of Strauss's music.

The opera's dominant personality is that of the Marschallin, even though she makes no appearance from the end of Act I to the middle of Act III. In this orchestral suite, however, the emphasis is more on youth and its joys, with little reference to age and its sacrifices. Here we follow the title character, the young Octavian, from the Marschallin's boudoir to his meeting with the young Sophie—to whom he is to present the silver rose as a token of her engagement to his kinsman Baron Ochs. We hear the comic encounters with the Baron himself, the Marschallin's gracious gesture of resignation, and the final ecstatic duet of Sophie and Octavian, "*Ist ein Traum*." The specific portions of the opera represented are the Prelude to Act I, the Presentation of the Silver Rose, the Arrival of Ochs and Waltzes from Act II, and the Trio, Duet and Great Waltz from Act III.■

Waltz, *By the Beautiful Blue Danube*, Op. 314

JOHANN STRAUSS

While the above title is a proper translation for *An der schönen, blauen Donau*, this most beloved of all concert waltzes is more frequently referred to as simply "the Blue Danube Waltz." It is not only the world's best-known work in its genre but may well be the single best-known piece of music ever composed in any form. It was originally a choral waltz, written for the Vienna Men's Choral Association, for which the Waltz King executed several commissions. When he composed this waltz, early in 1867, the defeat his country had suffered at the hands at of the Prussians the previous summer had settled a pall of gloom over the Viennese, and the Choral Association's annual Carnival program took a somewhat subdued form. In that atmosphere, Strauss's boyhood friend Josef Weyl wrote a satirical text, an exhortation to the Viennese to celebrate in the face of adversity and let the dancing lift them out of their distressing but all too real concerns. Nowhere in his jumbled text, by the way, is there any reference to the Danube, let alone its alleged color. Strauss found the title phrase in an earlier and more straightforwardly brooding poem by Carl Isidor Beck, and apparently felt the Viennese would understand the reference.

Strauss himself did not take part in the work's premiere, on February 15, 1867, because he and his orchestra were performing for the Imperial Court Ball that evening; it was the orchestra of the 42nd Regiment of the Imperial Infantry, temporarily stationed in Vienna, that accompanied the men's chorus, conducted by the latter group's director Rudolf Weinwurm, in introducing *The Blue Danube* to the world. The music was a great success from the start, but Weyl's unfortunate text was replaced in 1890 by a more suitable one written by Franz von Gernerth, and of course the piece is seldom performed with its vocal parts now, but the music continues to warm the hearts of its listeners in the world's great cities and the most remote villages: an affectionate international anthem of humanity and the ties that bind it in various forms everywhere.■