

# R. STRAUSS

Operatic Dances, Suites and Interludes

Salome | Der Rosenkavalier

Daphne | Intermezzo

Sydney Symphony Orchestra • Challender



## RICHARD STRAUSS 1864-1949

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|----------|---|---------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Dance of the Seven Veils</b> from Salome, Op. 54                           | 9'48    |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Der Rosenkavalier Suite, Op. 59</b>  | 23'21   |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Transformation Scene</b> from Daphne, Op. 82<br>Joanna Cole <i>soprano</i> | 10'44   |
|          | <b>Four Symphonic Interludes from Intermezzo, Op. 72</b>                      | [21'42] |
| <b>4</b> | Reisefieber und Walzerszene   | 9'13    |
| <b>5</b> | Träumerei am Kamin  | 6'55    |
| <b>6</b> | Am Spieltisch   | 3'24    |
| <b>7</b> | Fröhlicher Beschluss  | 2'10    |

**Sydney Symphony Orchestra**  
**Stuart Challender *conductor***

Strauss began his third opera, *Salome*, in 1903, taking as his libretto Oscar Wilde's play in a German version by Hedwig Lachmann. Wilde's *Salome* was then little over ten years old (its author, dead barely three) and had yet lost none of its potential for scandal. When Strauss first told Mahler that he was planning to make an opera out of it, Mahler had no hesitation in trying to talk him out of this. He reminded Strauss not only of the moral objection to the 'blasphemous' scenario, but also of its likely effect – censorship.

But as for the opera itself, Mahler was won over when Strauss played it through to him in early 1905. At that stage, though the rest of the opera was complete, the dramatically pivotal **Dance of the Seven Veils** was still missing, as Alma Mahler remembered: "Haven't got that done yet," Strauss said, and played on to the end, leaving this yawning gap. "Isn't it rather risky," Mahler remarked, "simply leaving out the Dance, and then writing it in later when you're in the same mood?" Strauss laughed ... "I'll soon put that right." ' With the completion of the *Dance* on June 20, 1905, the opera itself was finished.

Michael Kennedy has suggested that *Salome* could be called a 'tone poem with vocal interludes'. Certainly, Strauss gives the orchestra a major role in the drama. Even with the voices present, it can be the vehicle for a thematic subplot. And in the *Dance*, when it appears alone, it presents what Norman Del Mar calls a 'super-potpourri' of the opera's main themes. Salome's 'revenge' theme appears in the brass within bars of the beginning and is the natural musical and psychological trigger for the rest of the *Dance*. This falls into three main sections. which gradually increase in intensity from the slow, beguiling music of the first.

Strauss hoped to create a tangible sense of the 'oriental' in the *Dance*. However, it would be hard to dispute Del Mar's view that 'despite the quasi-Orientalism of the opening bars...its flavour is unmistakably – even disconcertingly – Viennese'. This is borne out, particularly, in the second section's unlikely waltz. The manic virtuosity of the third section leads into a coda based on the theme of Salome's lust for Jochanaan (John the Baptist). Finally, Salome throws herself at Herod's feet, demanding her reward – Jochanaan's head.

*Der Rosenkavalier* (The Knight of the Rose), Strauss' fifth opera, was his second in collaboration with the writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This 'Comedy for music' in three acts was written in 1909-1910.

Together, Strauss and Hofmannsthal had planned for an opera 'in the style of Mozart'. On a superficial level, it follows Mozart in setting the Rosenkavalier, Octavian, as a travesti role, based in part on Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Going deeper, Strauss based the musical treatment firmly on the Mozartian principle that 'the crudest situations and the most powerful sentiments must never free music of its obligations to be beautiful'. The opera's 'calling card' theme, signifying the silver rose, fulfils this obligation perfectly. Its musical interest is a combination of a decorative polytonal idiom, and scoring for the distinctive ensemble of flutes, celesta, harps and solo violins. Providing an instant of dreamlike romance, it punctuates the score of this **Rosenkavalier Suite** at a number of points.

As well as being the most beautiful, the 'rose' music is also one of the opera's more 'advanced' features. But this has not been enough to dispel a view of the opera, overall, as a retrograde step, especially after the advanced chromaticism of *Salome*. The preponderance of waltzes and waltz themes in the opera adds to this picture of musical conservatism.

A redeeming, modernist feature, perhaps, is the opera's keen sense of parody. In one sense it is a 'neo-classical' work, like that other great 20th-century 'Mozartian' opera, Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. However, Strauss's principal musical model – the waltz – belongs neither to the opera's 18th-century setting nor, strictly, to Strauss's own time. It is a double anachronism, as out of place in a pre-waltz Vienna as it is, at an allegorical level, in pre-World War I Vienna. Ultimately, *Rosenkavalier's* gaiety is that of a society subconsciously on the eve of its demise.

Between its premier and Strauss's death in 1949, *Der Rosenkavalier* spawned many musical offshoots. In the 1920s, Strauss agreed to a new score to be played at screenings of a (silent) film version of Hofmannsthal's story, but left the bulk of the reworking to Otto Singer. In 1934 and 1944, Strauss made his own full orchestral arrangements of the two waltz sequences to supersede another Singer version 'with its clumsy transitions'. Finally, in 1945, Strauss sanctioned the single-movement *Rosenkavalier Suite*, recorded here, though he seems not to have taken an active hand in the arrangement himself.

After Hofmannsthal's death in 1929, Strauss turned to the writer Stefan Zweig. But their one collaboration, *Die schweigsame Frau*, ran into difficulty with the authorities because Zweig was a

Jew. Zweig then suggested that Strauss try out Josef Gregor. Though Strauss never thought much of Gregor's abilities, they wrote three operas together. *Daphne*, a 'Bucolic tragedy in one act' written in 1936-37, was Strauss' thirteenth, and their second.

The **Transformation Scene** which closes the opera was also the last part to be written. A full year after the rest of the opera was finished, Strauss was still trying to find a more satisfactory alternative to Gregor's ending. The answer came when the conductor, Clemens Krauss (who was, ultimately, to be the librettist for Strauss's last opera, *Capriccio*), suggested that the opera, like the myth, should end with the staged transformation of Daphne into a laurel tree, the musical corollary of which would be the gradual transition of the human voice of Daphne into the 'voice of nature'. Working on this advice, Strauss outlined this new scenario: 'After a few steps [Daphne] remains standing as if rooted to the spot. Then – in the moonlight, but fully visible – the miracle of transformation is slowly worked upon her – *only with the orchestra alone.*'

For this new ending, Strauss produced a largely self-contained episode - its music the most contrapuntally complex of any on this recording. When performed outside the context of the opera as a purely orchestral piece, the score remains unchanged but for omission of the 'human' voice of Daphne in the early pages where the vocal part anyway is substantially replicated in the orchestral texture. Only after Daphne's transformation is complete is a voice necessary to realise Strauss' original intention: 'Right at the end, when the tree stands there complete she should sing without words – as a voice of nature.'

Strauss's eighth opera *Intermezzo* is unique with regard to its librettist. Hofmannsthal, probably wisely, had declined to collaborate on this 'Bourgeois comedy' which Strauss wanted to base on an episode from his own married life. In the event, Strauss decided to write the libretto himself .

*Intermezzo* was not Strauss's first autobiographical work. The tone poem *Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life)* of 1898, portrayed Strauss embattled and, finally, with the help of his devoted wife ('the hero's helpmeet'), triumphant over his adversaries, the music critics. In 1903 he revealed a more mundane side of life in the *Sinfonia domestica*.

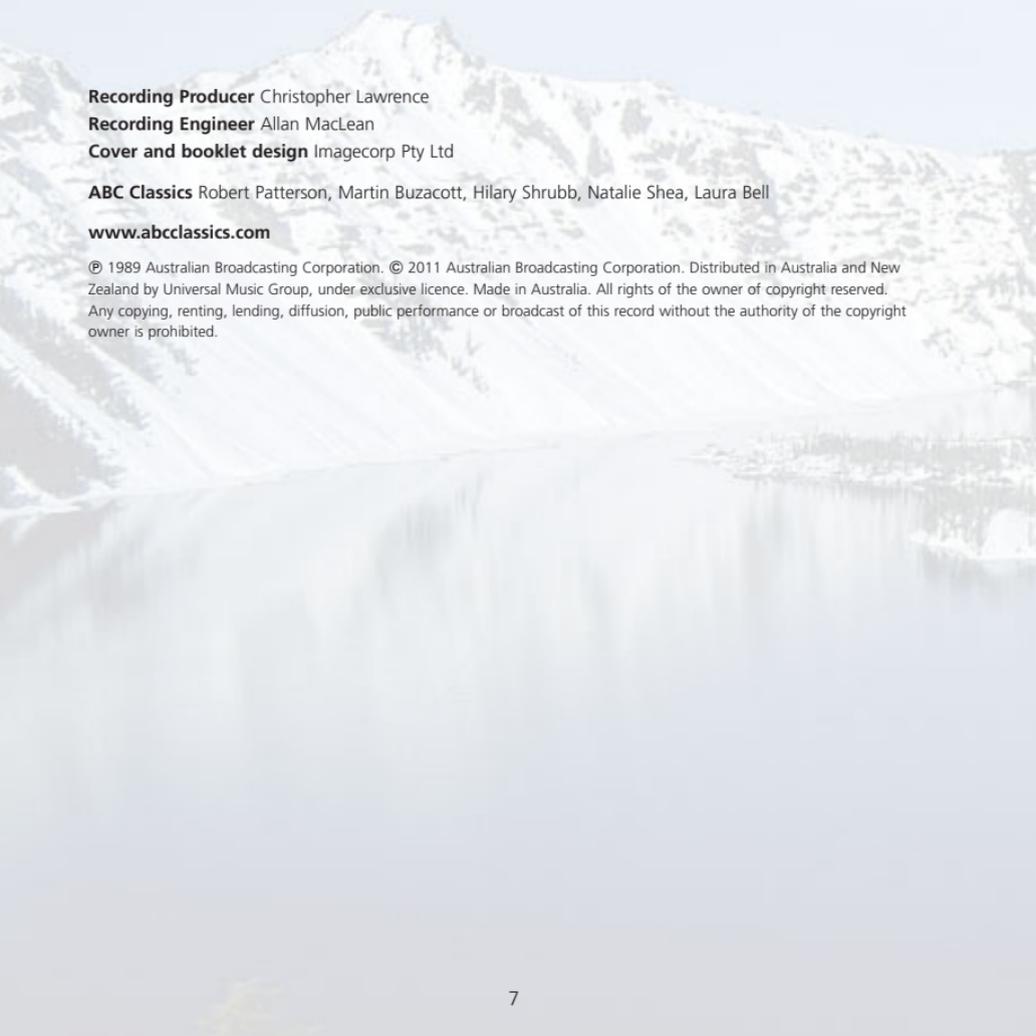
An actual marital crisis triggered the *Intermezzo* scenario – a misunderstanding sparked when his wife, Pauline, opened a compromising note misaddressed to Strauss. Accusations of adultery and

threats of divorce are the subjects of what the composer described as this 'harmless comedy', but in real life his turbulent marriage took Strauss, as he admitted, 'almost to the point of insanity'. The tenor of Pauline's response to his previous opera, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, was typical. Immediately after the first performance she scolded Strauss that it was the most stupid rubbish he had ever written, and refused to be seen walking home with him. (No wonder, then, that Hofmannsthal wanted nothing to do with *Intermezzo*.) Lotte Lehmann, who was coached by Pauline in the role of her operatic 'double', Christine, described Strauss' depiction as 'a monument to her.'

After Strauss's initial enthusiasm was spent on the libretto, the music followed slowly. The score was not finished until August 1923, a full five years after the libretto. As usual for Strauss, the orchestra plays a major role, even in such a 'conversational' piece as *Intermezzo*. Its main task, in eleven linking orchestral interludes, is to flesh out the characters and situations of the eventful sung sections with a deeper 'psychological' interpretation. The score of the **Four Symphonic Interludes**, dating from 1933, ten years after the opera's compilation, is a reworking of a number of these interludes as an independent four-movement 'symphony' for orchestra.

The first interlude, *Reisefieber und Walzerszene* (Travel fever and waltz scene), begins with Christine's preparations for a toboggan ride, and then crosses to a ball for an extended treatment of waltz themes introduced by the piano. The second interlude is a broad slow movement entitled *Träumerei am Kamin* (Reverie by the fireside). The busy chamber-music style of much of the writing in *Intermezzo* is represented in the third interlude, *Am Spieltisch* (At the gaming table), which acts as a short symphonic *scherzo*. The orchestral tutti, *Fröhlicher Beschluss* (Happy ending), from the entr'acte of the opera's finale brings the sequence to a close.

**Graeme Skinner**

A scenic landscape of a lake reflecting snow-capped mountains. The mountains are covered in patches of snow and sparse vegetation. The lake is calm, creating a clear reflection of the mountains and sky. The overall tone is soft and natural.

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