These concerts are dedicated to the memory of André Previn (1929-2019), a beloved friend and colleague of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for more than forty years, and whose artistry and warm personality throughout his brilliant, multifaceted career brought joy to countless music lovers worldwide.

ALL-STRAUSS PROGRAM

SEXTET FOR STRINGS FROM THE OPERA “CAPRICCIO,” OPUS 85
TAMARA SMIRNOVA AND HALDAN MARTINSON, VIOLINS
STEVEN ANSELL AND CATHY BASRAK, VIOLAS
BLAISE DÉJARDIN AND ADAM ESBENSEN, CELLOS

MOONLIGHT MUSIC AND CLOSING SCENE FROM THE OPERA “CAPRICCIO,” OPUS 85
RENÉE FLEMING, SOPRANO

English supertitles by Cori Ellison
SuperTitle System courtesy of DIGITAL TECH SERVICES, LLC, Portsmouth, VA
Casey Smith, supertitles technician
Ruth DeSarno, supertitles caller

{INTERMISSION}

“ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA,” TONE POEM FOR LARGE ORCHESTRA, FREE AFTER NIETZSCHE, OPUS 30
Sunrise—Of the Afterworldly—Of the Great Longing—Of Pleasures and Passions—The Tomb Song—Of Science and Learning—The Convalescent—The Dance- Song—The Night Wanderer’s Song

THURSDAY EVENING’S APPEARANCE BY RENÉE FLEMING IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT FROM CATHERINE AND PAUL BUTTENWIESER.
THURSDAY EVENING’S PERFORMANCE OF STRAUSS’S SEXTET, MOONLIGHT MUSIC, AND CLOSING SCENE FROM “CAPRICCIO” IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT IN HONOR OF JOHN P. MEYER, FROM HIS WIFE JO FRANCES MEYER,
SATURDAY EVENING’S APPEARANCE BY RENÉE FLEMING IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT FROM ALAN J. AND SUZANNE W. DWORSKY.

Please note that this week’s performances of the Sextet for Strings and Moonlight Music from Strauss’s opera “Capriccio” and of Strauss’s “Also sprach Zarathustra” are being recorded for future release on compact disc. Your cooperation in keeping noise in Symphony Hall at a minimum is sincerely appreciated.

BANK OF AMERICA AND TAKEDA PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY LIMITED ARE PROUD TO SPONSOR THE BSO’S 2018-19 SEASON.
These concerts will end about 9:50.
Concertmaster Malcolm Lowe performs on a Stradivarius violin, known as the “Lafont,” generously donated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra by the O’Block Family.
First associate concertmaster Tamara Smirnova performs on a 1754 J.B. Guadagnini violin, the “ex-Zazofsky,” and James Cooke performs on a 1778 Nicolò Gagliano violin, both generously donated to the orchestra by Michael L. Nieland, M.D., in loving memory of Mischa Nieland, a member of the cello section from 1943 to 1988.
Steinway & Sons Pianos, selected exclusively for Symphony Hall.
The BSO’s Steinway & Sons pianos were purchased through a generous gift from Gabriella and Leo Beranek.
Special thanks to Fairmont Copley Plaza, Delta Air Lines, and Commonwealth Worldwide Executive Transportation.
Broadcasts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra are heard on 99.5 WCRB.
In consideration of the performers and those around you, please turn off all electronic equipment during the performance, including tablets, cellular phones, pagers, watch alarms, messaging devices of any kind, anything that emits an audible signal, and anything that glows. Thank you for your cooperation.
IN MEMORIAM

Andre Previn
April 6, 1929 – February 28, 2019

The Boston Symphony Orchestra mourns the loss of composer-conductor-pianist André Previn, who passed away in February and would have turned 90 on April 6, a birthday to have been celebrated at Tanglewood this coming summer. Maestro Previn’s connection to the Boston Symphony Orchestra dates back to August 1977 at Tanglewood, on which occasion he conducted the BSO for the first time, initiating a decades-long relationship that continued through his August 2009 Tanglewood appearances conducting the BSO, performing as pianist with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, and playing an evening of jazz favorites with a longtime collaborator, bass player David Finck, followed in October 2010 and August 2011 by further concerts with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. In addition to his subscription-series and Tanglewood concerts with the orchestra—which included numerous performances in the dual role of conductor and piano soloist—he also led the BSO at Carnegie Hall in New York as well as on a 1997 tour to the Canary Islands and Florida. With the BSO he led the world premieres of several works of his own, among them the suite from his first opera, A Streetcar Named Desire (1999); the Violin Concerto, Anne-Sophie (2002), a BSO commission written for Anne-Sophie Mutter; the Double Concerto for Violin, Contrabass, and Orchestra (2004), premiered here at his request; and the BSO-commissioned Owls (2008). He performed, taught regularly, and coached chamber music at the Tanglewood Music Center, and composed his Octet for Eleven (2010) on commission for the Boston Symphony Chamber Players.

In the course of his distinguished and multifaceted career, the much-honored Mr. Previn also held chief artistic posts with the London Symphony Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, and Royal Philharmonic. He appeared regularly in recitals and chamber music, collaborating with such artists as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Janet Baker, Barbara Bonney, the Emerson String Quartet, Renée Fleming—for whom he composed the role of Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire—Yo-Yo Ma, Sylvia McNair, and Gil Shaham, as well as members of the BSO, the London Symphony, the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, and the Vienna Philharmonic.

André Previn seems always to have been part of our musical landscape, meaning not just the landscape of “classical music,” but music in general. Born in Berlin, he had already studied at that city’s Hochschule für Musik and briefly at the Paris Conservatoire before settling with his family in Los Angeles and then becoming an American citizen in 1943. At the MGM film studios, he worked first as an orchestrator, then as a full-fledged composer, which in turn meant conducting his own scores. His award-winning film score arrangements included Gigi, Porgy and Bess, Irma La Douce, and My Fair Lady. Continuing to make a name for himself as a jazz pianist in clubs and on recordings, he also took composition lessons and led classical repertoire with studio musicians, at which point the idea of becoming a “real” conductor first took hold. Service in the Army brought an unexpected opportunity: stationed in San Francisco, he was able to take lessons with Pierre Monteux, who was then conductor of the San Francisco Symphony.

In the late 1960s, defying skeptics prone to pigeonholing him as a “Hollywood type,” he began winning posts with important orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic—which didn’t stop him from pursuing his work as a classical and jazz pianist, and as a stage composer for both Broadway (including the musical Coco starring Katherine Hepburn as the designer Coco Chanel) and London (where he collaborated with playwright Tom Stoppard). He also became, given his inviting personality and gifts as raconteur, one of television’s most compelling music educators, on the BBC and, in the United States, particularly with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Considering his varied “musical lives,” it was also unsurprising that his wide-ranging affinities in the classical realm encompassed such key British composers as Vaughan Williams, Walton, and Elgar; the great French colorists Debussy, Ravel, and Dutilleux; and significant 20th-century Russians like Prokofiev and Shostakovich. He also continued to compose steadily, which followed naturally from his work as conductor and pianist with some of the world’s most important orchestras, singers, and instrumentalists.

A decade ago, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, André Previn observed how proud and happy he was to be not just a composer, not just a conductor, not just a pianist, but a musician—a part of what he called “the best profession in the world,” noting how grateful he was to be in it. Countless music lovers around the world remain equally grateful that he was.

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Richard Strauss, the Anti-Modernist Innovator
by Thomas May
On his all-Richard Strauss program this week, Andris Nelsons juxtaposes music by the young firebrand (Strauss’s orchestral tone poem “Also sprach Zarathustra”) with excerpts from the composer’s final opera, “Capriccio” (here featuring Renée Fleming)—compositions separated by nearly half a century. The narrative of Modernist progress could make little sense of the long arc of Strauss’s career and so wrote much of it off as “reactionary”; but such short-sightedness, which once prevailed, has since given way to a more balanced assessment, one more aligned with contemporary sensibilities.

“The destruction was horrific,” wrote one of Vienna’s music critics when Also sprach Zarathustra was first heard there in March 1897, several months after Richard Strauss had conducted the tone poem’s world premiere in Frankfurt. Resorting to vivid metaphors of the composer exploding his “anarchic music bomb,” the reviewer admitted to “sparks of genius that fly out in the midst of this musical blasting operation” but warned that “art must protect itself”—else “the way is free for the rule of the street.”

So far, so good: anticipating the notorious “scandal premieres” involving both Stravinsky and Schoenberg’s circle by a good sixteen years, Strauss was accruing impressive credentials as the prototypical Modernist enfant terrible. Indeed, Strauss’s timing seemed impeccably synchronized with the mixture of hope and angst that greeted the dawn of a new century. At one point, he even weighed giving his score the subtitle “Symphonic Optimism in fin-de-siècle form, dedicated to the 20th century.” That, more or less, is what the young Belá Bartók seems to have taken from his first experience with this music in 1902, when he was still only twenty. The Hungarian composer later recalled that Zarathustra, “[though] received with shudders by musicians [in Budapest], stimulated the greatest enthusiasm in me; at last I saw the way that lay before me.”

A few years after Bartók’s epiphany, Strauss was still making news as a depraved avant-gardist. After the failure of his first two operas, the one-act Salome (premiered in 1905) provided his breakthrough to stage success. Salome became an international sensation but provoked such outrage when unveiled at the Metropolitan Opera in 1907 that the production was closed after a single performance. Expectations ahead of the premiere in 1909 of his subsequent opera, Elektra, were positively feverish, information about the score being strictly embargoed. A kind of period trigger warning, one cartoon of the era (reproduced above) depicts a victim strapped to an “Elektric chair” and being tormented by a trumpet-wielding Strauss. (The linkage between modern music and murderous assault seems to have become a trope: when Walter Damrosch led the premiere of the young Aaron Copland’s First Symphony in 1925, he turned to the audience and declared that if an artist is capable of writing such music at age twenty-three, “within five years he will be ready to commit murder.”)

In short: from the premiere in 1889 of Don Juan—the tone poem in which he first achieved a real breakthrough to his signature style—through the first decade of the 20th century, Richard Strauss commanded a reputation as a formidable revolutionary, a spearhead of Europe’s musical avant-garde. Even Schoenberg fell under his influence during this period, learning tricks of the trade from Don Juan and expressing astonished admiration at the originality of Salome’s score: “Perhaps in another twenty years, someone will manage to explain the theory behind these harmonic progressions,” he remarked. Elektra came to represent a Rubicon the revolutionary dared not venture across. With regard to how far he had stretched himself in this score, Strauss himself, looking back from the distance of many years, observed: “I went to the utmost limits of harmony, psychological polyphony (Klytämenstra’s dream), and the capacity of today’s ears to take in what they hear.” Having used all twelve notes of the chromatic scale as the subject of a fugue in Zarathustra’s “Science” section, here the composer edged past super-saturated late Romanticism, touching on the disturbing new potential of free (a)tonality. Following Elektra, when he was in his mid-forties, Strauss and his Modernist peers continued along paths that soon diverged dramatically. Many of the latter came to disparage Strauss’s prolific oeuvre post-Elektra as an embarrassing anachronism out of tune with the times. And this bias held sway through much of the 20th century.

Even his official biographer and friend Willi Schuh implicitly acknowledged this dichotomy in the introduction he contributed to a Festschrift celebrating Strauss’s 80th birthday in 1944. But Schuh gave it a positive spin by comparing him with another long-lived artist, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (an idol of the aging composer): “In their young years lauded and condemned as ‘revolutionaries’ of their art, in their mature years, on account of their classical posture, suspected of being ‘reactionaries,’ both followed their daimon calmly through all the various phases of their relation to the world until they reached advanced age.” Even nowadays, what happened after Elektra is often described as a step back from the abyss, handily symbolized by the volte-face that Der Rosenkavalier (premiered in 1911) seems to enact not only in musical style but as a fantasy anchored to a nostalgic view of the past. Curiously, that image of stepping back from the abyss is sometimes applied to another composer who was almost the exact contemporary of Strauss (outliving him by nearly a decade): Jean Sibelius, whose bleak, despairing Fourth Symphony (also premiered in 1911) is taken to embody an Elektra-like stretching-to-the-limit for its composer, after which he “reverted” to a more immediately accessible musical language, rejecting pressure to continue along the
Modernist path. As with Strauss, the music of Sibelius faced the censure of gatekeepers of opinion who preferred to enforce a linear, putatively progressive interpretation of artistic history; and Sibelius has similarly benefited from reassessment by later champions of his work. Once derided as yet another holdout from outdated Romanticism, the Finn is now hailed as a pioneer on his own terms, a source of inspiration for composers ranging from Peter Maxwell Davies to John Adams and Thomas Adès.

Strauss, for his part, almost perversely went out of his way to épater l’avant-garde, so to speak, by playing the role of the conventional bourgeois to the hilt. He reveled in material comforts and pointedly talked about his creative work with the attitude of a man of business: exactly the opposite of how Modernism preferred to typcast the protesting, alienated artist—an image that was itself held over from the Romantic era. And there is the far darker issue of Strauss’s (brief) role as a music official in the early years of the Third Reich (though he kept his distance from the Nazi Party). Rather than emigrate, his defenders argue, Strauss intended to use his influence to counteract National Socialist policies. In any case, what can at best be construed as political naïveté and detachment strengthened the association of later Strauss with a reactionary worldview.

Yet, with the collapse of faith in the Modernist project, the once widespread view of a sharp dichotomy between the revolutionary and the reactionary in Strauss’s music has itself come to seem out of date. When originality for its own sake no longer stands as the chief criterion for creative authenticity, Strauss’s instinct to respect “the capacity of today’s ears”—to honor the need to communicate with his audience—points toward a different understanding of innovation, one that is by no means a risk-free retreat to the comforting familiarity of the past. Leon Botstein, an eloquent exponent of the postmodern reevaluation of Strauss, observes that “the simultaneous presentation, undercutting, and gradual withdrawal of the sentimental in music is perhaps Strauss’s profoundest contribution” to the artist’s response to the condition of modernity.

All of this is distilled into Capriccio, premiered in 1942, and which Strauss conceived less as a grand finale than as a sublime epilogue to his operatic career—in the composer’s phrase, as a “theatrical fugue” (recalling the fugue that concludes Verdi’s late Falstaff) and “a conversation piece for music.” Strauss made Capriccio an opportunity to ruminate on the history of opera itself, the perennial aesthetic issue of the proper relation between words and music here taking concrete form as an allegorical love story.

At Capriccio’s center is the widowed Countess Madeleine, on whom the composer lavished one of the most sumptuous and refined solo scenes in all of his operas. The Countess touches on the very questions that affected Strauss as he reflected on his own position in a rapidly changing world, and on larger issues that must remain open-ended: the relation between beauty and truth, head and heart, the “real world” and the ideal perfection of art.

THOMAS MAY writes about the arts and blogs at memeteria.com.

The Program in Brief...

Richard Strauss’s final opera, Capriccio, and his tone poem Also sprach Zarathustra date from opposite ends of his long career, with some forty-five years separating them. Capriccio was completed in 1941 and first performed in 1942; such was Strauss’s status as a composer that, despite the Reich’s disapproval of some of his friends, he was nonetheless able to produce an opera in Munich in the heart of wartime. Capriccio contemplates the question of the primacy of music or words in opera, symbolically represented in the choice the heroine must make between two suitors, one a composer, the other a poet.

The Sextet for Strings reflects Strauss’s examination of operatic conventions: this mostly demure ten-minute piece takes the place of an overture and, upon the raising of the curtain, is revealed as music being played within the opera, in a performance attended by the characters. It is generally warm and lovely, with a brief moment of intense tension at its center; like an overture, it foreshadows the opera’s tone. The Moonlight Music, from near the end, sets the stage for the closing scene, in which the Countess Madeleine contemplates the opera’s central question as personified by her two suitors. The BSO’s only previous subscription performances of Capriccio’s closing scene, in March 2000, were led by André Previn, to whose memory this week’s concerts are dedicated.

Although the opening moments of Richard Strauss’s 1896 tone poem Thus spake Zarathustra are recognizably among the most famous passages in music—even predating the fame gained through its use in the soundtrack of Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey—the work as a whole is less frequently played than such other Strauss tone poems as Don Juan or Till Eulenspiegel. The work’s origin as Strauss’s musical response to an important but mystical and controversial philosophical treatise by Friedrich Nietzsche makes its concept perhaps less immediate than those of its fellows among the six great tone poems Strauss wrote between 1888 and 1898, but its musical features are just as dramatic and brilliant. Following the famous “Sunrise” passage, its episodes evoke sections from Nietzsche’s big poem, including “Of joys and passions,” “Of science,” “The convalescent,” and several others. Strauss makes his points in a purely musical way, using the opening fanfare as a motivic touchstone through the emotionally far-ranging narrative.

Robert Kirzinger/Marc Mandel
RICHARD GEORG STRAUSS was born in Munich, Germany, on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in the Bavarian Alps, on September 8, 1949. He composed “Capriccio,” the last of his fifteen operas, in 1939–41, completing it on August 8, 1941. The first performance was given in Munich on October 28, 1942; the conductor was Clemens Krauss, who had also written the libretto, and the role of the Countess Madeleine was taken by Viorica Ursuleac, Krauss’s wife.

THE ORCHESTRA IN THE FINAL SCENE OF “CAPRICCIO” consists of two flutes, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, bass trombone, timpani, two harps, and strings.

Think Strauss and think loud. Think exuberant extroversion, think unsurpassed orchestral virtuosity, even think bombast on occasion, think the swagger of Don Juan, the jokes of Till Eulenspiegel, the fierce mortal struggle of Death and Transfiguration (whose accurate portrayal Strauss himself admired as he lay dying sixty years later) as well as the technicolor exaltation of its closing pages, think Heldenleben with its untroubled narcissism and brilliant portraiture, think of Dr. and Mrs. Strauss in bed in the Symphonia domestica, think of the thundersheets and the wind machine in the Alpine Symphony. But tonight’s program begins with a very different Richard Strauss, an artist capable of exquisite delicacy and touching intimacy. Not that those qualities are absent from the masterpieces I have mentioned—Heldenleben is especially rich in such moments—but there they are oases in the framework of a grand, public style, while Capriccio, the last of Strauss’s fifteen operas (sixteen if you count the two versions of Ariadne auf Naxos separately), is a work so private that one marvels that it dares to be an opera at all. It is the supreme achievement of the Strauss who was a master of piano and pianissimo, of transparency, and one who could be wonderfully eloquent in understatement.

There is a sad film clip of Strauss conducting a rehearsal in Munich of the end of Act II of Der Rosenkavalier. It comes from the last year of the composer’s long life, 1949. The orchestra greets him with an emotional ovation, which is moving to see and hear, but, even though the young Georg Solti leads him by the arm into the pit and onto the podium, he stumbles. His voice is vigorous and his appearance handsome, but he conducts Baron Ochs’s enchantingly sleazy waltz without a trace of energy or spirit.

He had stumbled in his public life too. The biographies give bewilderingly contradictory accounts of the last two decades of Strauss’s life. He was not a Nazi, but he was not an outspoken opponent either and despised the Nazis no more than any other political party. He tried, even in the climate of the early Hitler years, to continue his collaboration with Stefan Zweig, the Jewish author who had written the libretto for his opera Die schweigsame Frau (The Silent Wife), and he had a Jewish daughter law to protect. At the same time, he watched with equanimity as Jewish colleagues were driven from the country and, always convincing himself that he was serving the cause of music by his actions or that if he did not take on certain jobs someone worse would, he replaced Toscanini at Bayreuth when the Italian conductor withdrew in protest against Hitler’s anti-Semitic policies, he took over Bruno Walter’s concerts at the Berlin Philharmonic, and he allowed Goebbels to name him President of the Reichsmusikkammer, the official government music bureau. He didn’t let his feelings show, but it is hard to escape the idea that the composer of Till Eulenspiegel, Don Quixote, Ein Heldenleben, and Elektra must have felt incredibly compromised.

Nor was he happy about his musical life. He seemed to be more a historical figure than a living composer. He was still writing—he had never stopped—but his fame rested on music dating from before World War I: nothing since Der Rosenkavalier, first produced in 1911, had really caught on. It was a truism that Richard Strauss was washed up and had been for decades, that he had outlived himself. In the years since his death, that judgment has been revised, indeed entirely overturned, much as comparable verdicts on late Puccini, Debussy, Rachmaninoff, and Stravinsky have been reconsidered. True, none of Strauss’s later operas is a box office magnet comparable to Elektra’s concerts at the Berlin Philharmonic, and he allowed Goebbels to name him President of the Reichsmusikkammer, the official government music bureau. He didn’t let his feelings show, but it is hard to escape the idea that the composer of Till Eulenspiegel, Don Quixote, Ein Heldenleben, and Elektra must have felt incredibly compromised.

The year 1941 found Strauss and his wife in poor health, depressed by the war, worried about prospects for their daughter-in-law and their half-Jewish grandson, dismayed by the ever more chilly treatment the composer was getting at the hands of the German government, and unhappy about his failure to make headway with a tone poem Die Donau (The Danube) he had hoped to give the Vienna Philharmonic on its one hundredth-birthday present. Work on Capriccio cheered Strauss up somewhat, not least because after unhappy experiences with Joseph Gregor, the clumsy librettist of Friedensstag, Daphne, and Die Liebe der Danae, he had found a congenial and stimulating literary partner in the conductor Clemens Krauss. The premiere of Capriccio in October 1942 went well, too, and he was especially delighted by the contributions of his librettist-conductor as well as those of Viorica Ursuleac and the young Hans Hotter.
his last. But his father was solo horn at the Court Opera in Munich (more of him later), and so Richard had grown up around opera from the beginning. It is fitting that his last theater piece should be an opera about opera—and the last time Strauss raised a baton, after sixty-five years of conducting, it was to lead the Intermezzo (the Moonlight Music) from Capriccio.

Capriccio has a complicated history, which from first thought to first performance spanned ten years. While Clemens Krauss signed as librettist, Stefan Zweig, Joseph Gregor, and Rudolf Hartmann had all been involved en route, as was Strauss himself, and the references in the play encompass various historical characters from 18th-century Paris, the 16th-century poet Pierre Ronsard, Carlo Goldoni, the rivalry of Gluck and Piccinni, Strauss himself, and, centrally, Antonio Salieri’s Prima la musica e poi le parole (“First the music and then the words”), which had its premiere in 1786 as half of a double bill of operas about opera, its partner being Mozart’s The Impresario.

Strauss himself thought of this “conversation piece”—as the title page calls it—as “caviar to the general.” It is witty, intelligent conversation subtly set, laced with sharp observation of human behavior, only occasionally expanding into that lush, all-embracing, purr-inducing lyricism at which Strauss was so good. The issue is: which is more important in opera, the words or the music? The occasion for the discussion is the preparation of a new opera which is in fact Capriccio, though this is disguised by virtue of the fact that the action is set in Paris in the spring of 1777. Much ink has been lavished on this question since the beginning of opera nearly 400 years ago. Most of the argument has been dry, humorless, angry. In Capriccio it takes on charm because it is presented as human drama. Flamand, a composer, and Olivier, a poet, are both in love with the beautiful young and widowed Countess Madeleine. Which will she choose? Strauss emphasized to his librettist that he must not supply a happy ending; rather, that the curtain should fall on a question mark. But in opera, music has, so to speak, the last word, literally as well as figuratively. Krauss and Strauss, word-loving, word-beholden, word-skilled though they both were, were themselves musicians. Capriccio does end on a question mark, but quietly the orchestra suggests that if there were an answer...

It is the Countess’s birthday, and her two admirers have written presents. Olivier’s is a sonnet (actually one of Ronsard’s) and Flamand’s is a string sextet, and when the curtain rises we see the Countess, eyes closed, listening to Flamand’s offering. This Sextet for Strings is the first music we hear in Capriccio. It is the overture, and it is also our transport to the pre-Revolutionary Paris of Strauss’s fantasy. In the turns of its lovely texture it suggests a smiling, subtly erotic sketch for the tragic Metamorphosen to be written four years later. It is a declaration of love, Flamand’s to Madeleine, Strauss’s to music.

Countess Madeleine is lovely to the eye, beguiling to men, not inexperienced, ironic, narcissistic, not deeply certain of who she is and what she wants and needs. As the opera begins to draw to its close, it is evening, the witty, profound, and impassioned arguments about opera have subsided, and everyone has left. The elegant salon is flooded in moonlight, with Strauss’s Moonlight Music evoking moonlight as only he knew how to paint it for us. Madeleine learns from her major-domo that Olivier, the poet, has left word that he will call on her in the morning and will plan to be in the library at eleven. She hears this news not without chagrin and amusement because Flamand, the composer, has already announced his intention of meeting her in the library at eleven. She begins her Closing Scene: “Tomorrow morning at eleven! It is disaster!...” Since Olivier wrote a sonnet in her praise and Flamand set it to music, the two rivals have become inseparable, Madeleine observes. Accompanying herself on the harp, she sings through the sonnet. Words and musical tones, she remarks, melt into one and become something new. But how to choose? Her image in the mirror gives her no answer but response only with a searching look. Indeed, can there even be a conclusion that is not trivial? The last words in the opera are the major-domo’s: “Madame Countess, supper is served.” Madeleine leaves the room, smiling, humming Flamand’s melody for Olivier’s sonnet as she goes, and Strauss, all his long life a supreme master of final cadences, here gives us what is perhaps his most beautiful one—music’s loveliest question mark.

Michael Steinberg

MICHAEL STEINBERG was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1976 to 1979, and after that of the San Francisco Symphony and New York Philharmonic. Oxford University Press has published three compilation volumes of his program notes, devoted to symphonies, concertos, and the great works for chorus and orchestra. THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE OF “CAPRICCIO” (sung in English) was given at the Juilliard School in New York on April 4, 1954 (with a preview performance on April 2); Frederick Waldman conducted, with Gloria Davy in the role of the Countess Madeleine.

THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA has played music from “Capriccio” on three previous occasions: on July 3, 1997, at Tanglewood—the Moonlight Music and Closing Scene, with soprano Jessye Norman and conductor Seiji Ozawa; in subscription concerts in March 2000—the Sextet, Moonlight Music, and Closing Scene, with soprano Janice Watson and conductor André Previn; and in March 2015—the Sextet alone, conducted by Christoph von Dohnányi.
Richard Strauss

“Also sprach Zarathustra,” Tone poem for large orchestra, free after Nietzsche, Opus 30

RICHARD GEORG STRAUSS was born in Munich, Germany, on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Bavaria, on September 8, 1949. He began the composition of “Also sprach Zarathustra” in Munich on February 4, 1896, and completed it on August 24. Strauss himself conducted the Municipal Orchestra of Frankfurt-am-Main in the first performance on November 27, 1896.

THE SCORE OF “ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA” calls for one piccolo, three flutes (third doubling second piccolo), three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassesoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two bass tubas, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, orchestral bells, a deep bell, two harps, and strings.

Surely no major philosopher has ever had a closer relationship to music and musicians than Friedrich Nietzsche, and no work of philosophy has inspired more musical compositions than his Also sprach Zarathustra (Thus spake Zarathustra). Nietzsche was an excellent pianist and an amateur composer as well, having turned out a fair number of choral works both sacred and secular, songs, and piano pieces by his thirtieth year. And even as late as 1887, when he was forty-three, he published a work for chorus and orchestra entitled Hymnus an das Leben (Hymn to Life) to a text by the woman he once hoped to marry, Lou von Salome. But the central experience in his musical life, reflected in his writings ever after, was his acquaintance with Wagner, whose music at first overwhelmed him totally, to such an extent that he turned the end of his first book, The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music (1872), which had begun as a study of the ritual origin of Greek tragedy, into a paean to Wagner’s work. Gradually, though, he became disillusioned with Wagner and eventually turned into one of his most outspoken opponents. But in addition to being drawn to some of the musical questions of the day, at least as they reflected his own concerns, Nietzsche was also a source for music in others. His best-known work, Also sprach Zarathustra (1883-85), served as the basis for songs by Schoenberg, Delius, Medtner, and Taneyev, as well as larger works by Mahler (Third Symphony), Delius (A Mass of Life), and Strauss, not to mention such lesser-known composers as Diepenbrock, Rezníček, Peterson-Berger, Campo, and Ingenhoven.

Also sprach Zarathustra has an unusually poetic text for a work of philosophy, loosely narrative in character, filled with extraordinary imagery and wordplay. It consists of four parts containing some eighty short sections, each recording the (invented) sayings of Zarathustra (“Zoroaster” to the Greeks) covering all sorts of diverse topics; each section ends with the formula “Also sprach Zarathustra” (“Thus spake Zarathustra”). From the beginning, Zarathustra speaks of the death of God and man’s need to overcome himself, to become the Übermensch,”* to break out of the inertia and cultural conditioning that is so much a part of life that it is considered “human nature.” Strauss became acquainted with Nietzsche’s work while reading in preparation for work on his first opera, Guntram. What interested him most of all was the philosopher’s criticism of the established church and ultimately of all conventional religion. Strauss was the last composer who could be called an intellectual, but he made the courageous decision to attempt to deal with Nietzsche’s philosophical ruminations as a symphonic poem. Perhaps he was attracted by the beauty of the language in the poem, of which Nietzsche himself said (in his Ecce Homo) that it might well be considered a musical composition. But it is one thing to regard a poetic text as being “musical” in some metaphorical sense and quite another to compose music about it.

Strauss’s approach avoided what is perhaps the fundamental notion of Nietzsche’s philosophy—that the same events will recur eternally on a grand scale—even though that might have lent itself perfectly to a gigantic rondo. He chose, instead, one particular theme of the work, which he described after the first Berlin performance: “I did not intend to write philosophical music or portray Nietzsche’s great work musically. I meant rather to convey in music an idea of the evolution of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of development, religious as well as scientific, up to Nietzsche’s idea of the Übermensch.” For a musical setting of his plan, Strauss conceived one enormous movement that has little in common with the traditional musical forms which, however extended, had been the framework behind such earlier works as Don Juan (an extended sonata) or Till Eulenspiegel (a free rondo). For Zarathustra, Strauss selected a limited number of section titles from Nietzsche’s work and arranged them in a way that made possible musical variety and development of material, quite unconcerned that they were presented in an order quite different from the philosopher’s: Strauss was, after all, creating a work of music and seeking particularly musical means to express the main idea.

The most important of the unifying musical ideas—it comes up again and again—is the use of two keys, C and B, whose tonic notes are as close together as they can be melodically, though harmonically they are very far apart, to represent the natural world on the one hand and the inquiring spirit of man on the other. Time and again these two tonalities will be heard in close succession—or, indeed, even simultaneously. This frequent pairing helps justify the very ending of the work, which has been hotly debated since the first performance.

At the head of the score Strauss printed the opening lines of Nietzsche’s prologue, in which Zarathustra observes the sunrise and announces his decision to descend to the world of mankind from the lonely spot high up in the moun-
tains where he has passed ten years. The opening of the tone poem is a magnificent evocation of the primeval Sunrise, with an important three-note rising figure in the trumpets representing Nature and the most glorious possible cadence in C (alternating major and minor at first before closing solidly in the major). That trumpet theme is the single most important melodic motive of the work.

Immediately there is a drastic change of mood to the section entitled Von den Hinter-weltlern (“On the After-worldly”), the most primitive state of man, which is, to Nietzsche, the condition of those who put their faith in an afterlife rather than seek fulfillment in this life. Gloomy, insubstantial phrases soon introduce an important new theme (heard here in B minor) leaping up, pizzicato, in cellos and basses; this theme is used throughout to depict man’s inquiring mind. Strauss satirizes those inquiries that lead to religion by quoting the opening phrase of the plainsong Credo in the horns and moves into a lush passage of conventional sweetness for the strings divided into sixteen parts.

This leads into Von der grossen Sehnsucht (“On the Great Longing”), a passage that appears much later in Nietzsche’s book; but its title was so apt for Strauss’s plan—to depict man’s yearning to move beyond ignorance and superstition—that he uses it at this point. The section is developmental in character, combining the B minor “inquiring mind” motive with the C major “Nature” motive, while casting further aspersions at religion by quoting the Magnificat melody as well as the Credo. A vigorous new figure rushes up from the depths of the orchestra, gradually overpowering everything else. With a harp glissando it sweeps into Von den Freuden- und Leidenschaften (“Of Pleasures and Passions”). This section, in C minor, links man’s sensuality with Nature (through the key relationship) rather than his spirit. It introduces a passionate new theme followed by an important motive blared out by trombones and heard frequently thereafter, sometimes identified as the theme of “satiety,” representing the protest of those higher elements of spirit against such indulgence. This theme has elements related harmonically to both keys, C and B, and therefore plays an important part in the proceedings. A development of this material, Das Grablied (“The Tomb Song”), follows immediately in B minor and related keys.

It dies away into the depths as cellos and basses begin a passage in strict imitation labeled Von der Wissenschaft (“On Science”). What could be more scientific than a fugue? And this one begins with the notes of the Nature theme, in C, followed immediately by the three notes of the B minor triad, then continuing to all the remaining pitches of the chromatic scale. The imitations work the tonality around to B minor again, and a new developmental section gets underway, climaxing in Der Genesende (“The Convalescent”), in which vigorous statements of the fugue theme, beginning in the bass, intertwine with the “satiety” theme, leading finally to a powerful C major triple-forte for full orchestra, breaking off into pregnant silence. The next chord? B minor, bringing in an extended new development of several of the major ideas, treated with extraordinary orchestral virtuosity. This comes to an end in an utterly unexpected way—by turning into a Viennese waltz, and a waltz in C major at that! For this section Strauss borrows Nietzsche’s title Das Tanzlied (“The Dancing Song”). Here, for the very first time in Strauss’s life, he seems ready to take on his older namesakes, the other Strausses who were renowned as the waltz kings. And here, already, we can get more than a tiny glimpse of Der Rosenkavalier, still some sixteen years in the future. This waltz begins as an amiable and graceful dance with a theme based on the Nature motive, but it soon builds in energy and vehemence, as many of the earlier themes make their appearance, only to be destroyed in turn by the “satiety” motive, which takes over fiercely at the climax of the score (corresponding to a similar climax in the book), as a great bell tolls twelve times.

Strauss marks this passage in the score Nachtwandlerlied (“Night Wanderer’s Song”), though that word is not used by Nietzsche. The equivalent passage in the book is “Das andere Tanzlied” (“The other dancing song”), where a bell peals twelve times and between each of its clangs the poet inserts a line of the poem “O Mensch! Gib Acht!” (“O man, take care!”); the entire poem, which was used by Mahler in his Third Symphony, is recapitulated later in the fourth part of Nietzsche’s book. Strauss treats the passage as purely instrumental; the bell rings every four measures, ever more softly, as the music settles onto a chord of C major, only to slip, with magical effect, into a gentle, bright B major for the coda, in which the violins present a sweet theme representing “spiritual freedom.” It moves delicately up to the heights, in the top strings and woodwinds, to all appearances preparing a conclusion on the B major chord.

Yet this B is softly but insistently undercut by cellos and basses, pizzicato, with the rising three-note “Nature” motive, as if to say: Earth—the natural world—abides in spite of all. Four more times the upper instruments reiterate their chord of B, only to find that the bottom strings repeat the C with quiet obstinacy, finally bringing the work to an end.

Those last measures, almost closing in two keys simultaneously, aroused endless discussion when the work was first performed. One Boston critic, Louis Elson, found nothing to admire in the piece, which he characterized as “chaos.” Referring to the title of the tone poem, he commented: “Zarathustra...did everything but speak; he had an impediment in his speech which caused him to stutter even the most beautiful phrases. At the end of the work there is a modulation from the key of B to the key of C that is unique, for the Gordian knot is cut by the simple process of going there and going back again. If such modulations are possible, then the harmony books may as well be burnt at
But Elson showed no sign of appreciating Strauss’s carefully worked out opposition of the two keys throughout the work, which alone justifies that extraordinary conclusion. Indeed, though Strauss admitted to and even explained the literary program that lay at the back of his mind when composing, his artful musical development—the interaction between two keys that normally have little relationship to one another, the rich thematic progress creating its own unique pattern of statement and recapitulation, the brilliant scoring—produced a work that really does not need its program for support. It is more likely, in fact, that the better one knows Nietzsche’s book, the less useful it is as a guide to the music. At the same time, Strauss’s rich invention, lavish display of sheer technique, and imaginative treatment of a basic formal problem provide quite enough to occupy the attention during the performance of this colorful score.

Steven Ledbetter

* Nietzsche used the German word “Übermensch” for his notion of the elevated being who overcomes the finitude of this life, not through brute power but rather (as the root word “Mensch” implies) through attaining a superiority in those characteristics that are uniquely human. Shaw’s Man and Superman popularized an alternative translation of the term, but these days it is too closely associated in our minds with comic book heroes to be of use when discussing Nietzsche or his ideas.

To Read and Hear More...


Renée Fleming has recorded the closing scene of Strauss’s Capriccio with Christoph Eschenbach conducting the Vienna Philharmonic (Decca). In addition, she is the Countess Madeleine on a video release of a 2011 Metropolitan Opera performance of Capriccio with Andrew Davis conducting (Decca), as well as on video releases of productions from the Opéra National de Paris (Arthaus Musik) and the Vienna Staatsoper (C Major). For a complete recording of Capriccio on compact disc, the classic account, from 1957, has Wolfgang Sawallisch conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra with a cast headed by soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, tenor Nicolai Gedda, and baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (EMI: monaural). Prior to that, in 1953, Schwarzkopf recorded what is considered to be an equally classic account of just the closing scene, with Otto Ackermann conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra (also EMI and monaural). Noteworthy later recordings of the complete opera feature Gundula Janowitz with Karl Böhm conducting the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon) and Kiri Te Kanawa with Ulf Schirmer conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (Decca). Other recordings of the closing scene have featured sopranos Lisa Della Casa (who is also the Countess Madeleine in a live 1964 Vienna Staatsoper performance of the complete opera led by Georges Prêtre on Orfeo), Felicity Lott (who can also be heard in a complete studio recording of the opera), and Elisabeth Söderstrom (whose rendition of the closing scene has been available both studio-recorded and live-in-concert). Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony Orchestra are recording the Sextet for Strings and Moonlight Music from Capriccio during this week’s performances for future release on compact disc.
This week’s Boston Symphony performances of Also sprach Zarathustra with Andris Nelsons conducting are being recorded for future release on compact disc. Nelsons has previously recorded Zarathustra with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (Orfeo) and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam (a video release on C Major). The BSO has previously made three recordings of the piece: with Serge Koussevitzky conducting in 1935 (originally RCA), William Steinberg in 1971 (Deutsche Grammophon), and Seiji Ozawa in 1981 (Philips). A 1986 Ozawa/BSO performance from Festival Hall in Osaka, Japan, was issued on both Laserdisc (Sony) and DVD (Parnassus). Strauss himself can be heard conducting two performances of Also sprach Zarathustra with the Vienna Philharmonic, one from 1942 (reissued on CD by Music & Arts), the other from 1944 (Preiser). Other recordings of varying vintage include Leonard Bernstein’s with the New York Philharmonic (Sony), Herbert Blomstedt’s with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra (Decca), Gustavo Dudamel’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon), Herbert von Karajan’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon), Rudolf Kempe’s with the Dresden Staatskapelle (EMI), Zubin Mehta’s with the Los Angeles Philharmonic (Decca), and Fritz Reiner’s with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (RCA).  

Marc Mandel

Andris Nelsons

The 2018-19 season is Andris Nelsons’ fifth as the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Ray and Maria Stata Music Director. Named Musical America’s 2018 Artist of the Year, Mr. Nelsons will lead fourteen of the BSO’s twenty-six subscription programs in 2018-19, ranging from orchestral works by Haydn, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and Copland to concerto collaborations with acclaimed soloists, as well as world and American premieres of pieces newly commissioned by the BSO from Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Andris Dzenitis, and Mark-AnthonyTurnage; the continuation of his complete Shostakovich symphony cycle with the orchestra, and concert performances of Puccini’s one-act opera Suor Angelica. In summer 2015, following his first season as music director, Andris Nelsons’ contract with the BSO was extended through the 2021-22 season. In November 2017, he and the orchestra toured Japan together for the first time. In February 2018, he became Gewandhauskapellmeister of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, in which capacity he brings both orchestras together for a unique multi-dimensional alliance. Immediately following the 2018 Tanglewood season, Maestro Nelsons and the BSO made their third European tour together, playing concerts in London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Lucerne, Paris, and Amsterdam. Their first European tour, following the 2015 Tanglewood season, took them to major European capitals and the Lucerne, Salzburg, and Grafenegg festivals; the second, in May 2016, took them to eight cities in Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg.

The fifteenth music director in the history of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andris Nelsons made his BSO debut at Carnegie Hall in March 2011, his Tanglewood debut in July 2012, and his BSO subscription series debut in January 2013. His recordings with the BSO, all made live in concert at Symphony Hall, include the complete Brahms symphonies on BSO Classics; Grammy-winning recordings on Deutsche Grammophon of Shostakovich’s symphonies 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11, The Year 1905, as part of a complete, live Shostakovich symphony cycle for that label; and a new two-disc set pairing Shostakovich’s symphonies 6 and 7, Leningrad. Under an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, Andris Nelsons is also recording the complete Bruckner symphonies with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic.

The 2018-19 season is Maestro Nelsons’ final season as artist-in-residence at the Konzerthaus Dortmund and marks his first season as artist-in-residence at Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie. In addition, he continues his regular collaborations with the Vienna Philharmonic and Berlin Philharmonic. Throughout his career, he has also established regular collaborations with Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and has been a regular guest at the Bayreuth Festival and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.


Guest Artist

Renée Fleming

Renée Fleming is one of the most acclaimed singers of our time. In 2013, President Obama awarded her America’s highest honor for an artist, the National Medal of Arts. She brought her voice to a vast new audience in 2014, as the only classical artist ever to sing “The Star-Spangled Banner” at the Super Bowl. Winner of the 2013 Grammy Award (her fourth) for Best Classical Vocal Solo, Ms. Fleming has sung for momentous occasions ranging from the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony to the Diamond Jubilee Concert for Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. In 2008 she became the first woman in the 125-year history of the Metropolitan Opera to solo-headline an opening night performance.
Ms. Fleming earned a Tony Award nomination for her performance in the 2018 Broadway production of *Carousel*. Her current and upcoming tour schedule includes concerts in New York, Chicago, London, Amsterdam, Paris, Barcelona, Hong Kong, and Beijing. She is heard on the soundtracks of the 2018 Best Picture Oscar winner *The Shape of Water* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, and she provided the singing voice of Roxane, played by Julianne Moore, in the film of the best-selling novel *Bel Canto*. This summer she will make her London musical theater debut in *The Light in the Piazza* at Royal Festival Hall. In September, Decca released Ms. Fleming’s latest album, “Renée Fleming: Broadway,” featuring a collection of great musical theater songs from the 1920s to the present day. She has recorded everything from complete operas and song recitals to indie rock and jazz, and her album “Signatures” was selected by the U.S. Library of Congress for the National Recording Registry. Known for bringing new audiences to classical music and opera, she has sung not only with Plácido Domingo and Andrea Bocelli but also with Elton John, Sting, Josh Groban, and Joan Baez. She has hosted an array of television and radio broadcasts, including the Metropolitan Opera’s “Live in HD” series and “Live from Lincoln Center.” In her role as artistic advisor to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Ms. Fleming launched a collaboration with the U.S. National Institutes of Health, with participation by the National Endowment for the Arts, focused on the science connecting music, health, and the brain. Over the past year she has given more than twenty presentations with scientists and practitioners across North America on this subject. In 2010 she was named the first-ever creative consultant at Lyric Opera of Chicago. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of Carnegie Hall, the Board of Sing for Hope, and the Artistic Advisory Board of the Polyphony Foundation, and is a spokesperson for the American Musical Therapy Association. Her memoir *The Inner Voice*, published in 2004, is currently in its sixteenth printing. Among her awards are the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal, Germany’s Cross of the Order of Merit, France’s Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur, and Honorary Membership in the Royal Academy of Music. Renée Fleming made her Tanglewood and Boston Symphony Orchestra debuts in July 1991, as Ilia in a concert performance of Mozart’s *Idomeneo* led by Seiji Ozawa. Her BSO subscription series debut was in December 1998, in Haydn’s *The Creation* with James Levine conducting, since which time she has appeared numerous times with the BSO in Boston and at Tanglewood, where she has also been heard in recital in Seiji Ozawa Hall. Among her many other Symphony Hall appearances with the orchestra, she gave the American premiere of a work written for her, Henri Dutilleux’s BSO-commissioned *Le Temps l’Horloge*, in 2007, as well as the American premiere of its definitive revised version in January 2016. She sang the role of Tatyana in a 2008 concert performance of Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* with the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, and in 2016 at Tanglewood performed music of Egon Wellesz and Alban Berg with the Emerson String Quartet and Strauss’s *Four Last Songs* with the BSO under Ken-David Masur. Her most recent BSO appearances were as the Marschallin in concert performances of Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier* led by Andris Nelsons to open the BSO’s 2016-17 subscription season. This summer at Tanglewood, as the BSO’s 2019 Koussevitzky Artist, she will appear in the BSO-commissioned world premiere of Kevin Puts’s *The Brightness of Light* (inspired by letters of the iconic American artist Georgia O’Keeffe and her husband, the photographer-curator Alfred Stieglitz) as well as participate in a Tanglewood Learning Institute session on that new work, and offer master classes with the young singers of the Tanglewood Music Center.