

Seven Ages of Strauss

For most of Richard Strauss's eighty-five years, there was hardly a time when a camera record of his activities was absent. Thus it is possible to present, herewith, a veritable Seven Ages of Man, amended to suit the circumstances of one who was never a soldier, full of strange oaths, but "schoolboy," "lover," "justice" (of his own court of honor), etc. Some of the sources of the pictures are as interesting as the subject matter itself.



Aged three: photo obtained from his sister (still living in Munich, aged 90, a few years ago).



Super schoolboy: young composer of the Weimar period (c.1884, aged 20).



—Culver.

First years of mastery, mid-Nineties, when first tone poems were being performed worldwide.

Photo taken at Rodaun, near Vienna, country home of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, with whom he began to collaborate in 1908.

—Culver.



With his wife, Pauline de Ahna, whom he married in 1894, and their son, "Bubi."

The elderly sage of Garmisch, the photo was taken by a G.I. in 1945 (four years before Strauss's death), and given as a souvenir to Irving Kolodin, who visited the composer in that year.

Legend in his lifetime—aged sixty.

—Culver.



clusively for money was to conduct the same music in a department store that he conducted in a concert hall); the other, that such success could not possibly accrue to any composer who wrote high-minded music and did not pander to the public.

The only flaw in this kind of reasoning is that it simply isn't so. In his early years, Strauss was perhaps the most abused composer in history—certainly more so than Wagner. Not only his subject matter—from *Don Juan* to *Zarathustra*—was denounced as offensive, egotistical, and unacceptable: his musical treatments of them were rated, each in turn, as over-written, unplayable, and bombastic. He had few friends in the press in those early days: his friends were primarily among music lovers, professional and lay, who responded to what they heard. As for being high-minded, it was the commonest of complaints that Strauss's writings were so high-minded they were over the heads of most of those who listened to them. There is nothing in the least musically simple, even today, in the intertwined allusions to his own themes in *Ein Heldenleben* or the fugue in the section of *Zarathustra* entitled "Of Science." And, to the last, his mental powers served him unfailingly in the late oboe concerto, the duet concertino, the two sonatas for wind instruments, and, of course, the *Metamorphosen*.

Thus, there must have been some other element in Strauss than writing down, or pandering, or otherwise compromising his standards, that enabled him to be not merely prolific and versatile and high-minded, but also enormously successful. I would state this as something more even than talent (rated by some as genius): I would attribute it to his roots deep in the soil of German music, to which he remained inextricably attached all his life, and from which he derived a sustenance unmatched by any contemporary, and now beyond recapture by any successor. Like Prokofiev and Poulenc—who, in their lesser ways, each strove for a kind of Straussian inclusiveness in their output—he was the end product of an abundant development (Hindemith was, perhaps, the echo of its dying fall), fulfilling the role for which destiny had cast him. "A minor player with a bit part in the last act," he is reputed to have said late in life about his relationship to those who had preceded him. But to be worthy of the company of such major "players" as Beethoven and Schumann, Mozart, Brahms, Schubert, Haydn, Bach, and Wagner, even a "bit player" would have to be a star.

How such a "bit player" (or "star") emerged from the background of his time is worth a moment's consideration.

Richard Strauss was not only born at a time of intellectual division and esthetic conflict but, literally, into it. The son of the Munich Opera's most distinguished virtuoso of the French horn, Richard Strauss heard it said of his father Franz, by no less a sage than Richard Wagner, "Old Strauss is an unbearable fellow, but when he plays his horn, one cannot be cross with him."

What made Franz Strauss, by the measure of Wagner, a crusty dissident, made him, in the interests of a musical son, an ideal paterfamilias. Quick to recognize and encourage his son's extraordinary talents, Franz Strauss knew where and how to see to their furtherance. From the start he applied the level and the T-square of a high professional standard as his frame of reference. Within it there was no place for the slipshod, the meretricious, or the merely prodigious—qualities he would not indulge, after all, in the one to whom he referred scornfully as "the swindler of Bayreuth."

It has become customary to speak of Strauss's "life-long devotion to Mozart." Doubtless such a disposition was latent in him, but the more accessible model, in such a work as the Serenade for Thirteen Winds of 1881, was unquestionably Mendelssohn. In turn, in a matter of not much more than months, there came a trend to Brahms, a phase of Strauss that is recalled as often as one hears his early *Burleske* for piano and orchestra. Inevitably, however, Strauss was magnetized to Wagner, even if it meant "wolfing the score of *Tristan*" as he described it, without father Strauss finding out.

STRAUSS profited from these composers not only in what he learned about them from absorbing their impulses and examples, but also in what he learned about himself. He was soon clear in his own mind that he was no symphonist, that he would have to create "for every new work a correspondingly new form," a prescription he systematically proceeded to do in *Till Eulenspiegel* (a rondo), *Don Quixote* (a theme and variations), *Ein Heldenleben* (something like a total symphonic sequence in one movement), *Zarathustra* (a kind of gigantic suite), etc.

When he had exploited his command of the orchestra through the sequence of works that ended with the *Symphonia Domestica*, Strauss turned to the challenge of the stage, where success had eluded him in such early works as *Feuersnot* and *Guntram*. When he had completed *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Rosenkavalier*, there was no doubt of his capacity to deal with any subject to which he addressed himself—orchestral or operatic, high tragedy or low comedy, grandiose or intimate. Nor that

he had evolved a language suitable for the exposition of *any* problem to which he addressed himself.

The perplexing question to us music-lovers—as compared with the professionals who consider all such issues settled, and all the answers known (in part, because they have stopped asking such perplexing questions)—is: What has become of the Strauss vocabulary (Glenn Gould deals with this in his own fashion, on page 58)? It was, when it was new, sufficient to impel Bela Bartók to a desire for a musical career (*Zarathustra* was the work, to judge from a statement in Serge Moreux's *Bartók*); it absorbed Arnold Schönberg in several early works, especially his *Pelléas und Mélisande*; and it earned the respect of Gustav Mahler, who said: "Strauss and I tunnel from opposite sides of the mountain: someday we shall meet." Stravinsky paid him the compliment (in *Expositions and Developments*) of describing the effect of *Heldenleben* on him as "an emetic."

Bartók and Schönberg each digressed—for better or worse—on ways of their own: and Mahler did not live long enough after that observation in 1908 (he died three years later) to extend his probe as far as it might have gone. With Strauss, the tunnel only inched forward slowly thereafter. And now, it seems, it is fated to remain a kind of deserted mine shaft, holding a prospect of riches still to be revealed, if anyone can ever resume its forward progress.

Or, in another image, sink roots far enough into the same soil to reach the depth of Strauss and Mahler. How promising a prospect this is can be judged from the clear evidence that even those who sought, at an earlier time, to absorb and perpetuate Strauss's substance only attained a loose command of his mannerisms (as in the case of Korngold). And there don't seem to be many now who can even deal with the mannerisms.

It is all too obvious that a return to the conditions of Strauss's youth, even to the mere thoroughness of his education and development under father Franz, is a hopeless unreality. So then, it would seem, would be the assumption of anything like a similar command of the musical language. It all reminds one almost too graphically of the broken pieces of Nothing bequeathed to Sieglinde from Siegmund. Try as he might, it could not be forged anew by Mime, artful smith—for ordinary purposes—that he was. It could, in the final outcome, only be fused anew by one with the giant strength of those who had created it in the first place.

The trouble with music today, for many of us, is that there are too many Mimes and not even one Siegfried.

Strauss and the Electronic Future

By GLENN GOULD

ONE of the certain effects of the electronic age is that it will forever change the values that we attach to art. In fact, the vocabulary of esthetic criteria that has been developed since the Renaissance is mostly concerned with terms that are proving to have little validity for the examination of electronic culture. I refer to such terms as "imitation," "invention," and above all "originality," which in recent times have implicitly conveyed varying degrees of approval or censure, in accordance with the peculiarly distorted sense of historical progression that our age has accepted, but which are no longer capable of conveying the precise analytical concepts that they once represented.

Electronic transmission has already inspired a new concept of multiple-authorship responsibility in which the specific functions of the composer, the performer, and indeed the consumer, overlap. We need only think for a moment of the manner in which the formerly separate roles of composer and performer are now automatically combined in electronic tape construction or, to give an example more topical than potential, the way in which the home listener is now able to exercise limited technical and, for that matter, critical judgments, courtesy of the modestly resourceful controls of his hifi. It will not, it seems to me, be very much longer before a more self-assertive streak is detected in the listener's participation, before, to give but one example, a "do-it-yourself" tape editing is the prerogative of every reasonably conscientious consumer of recorded music (the *Hausmusik* activity of the future perhaps!). And I would be most surprised if the consumer involvement were to terminate at that level. In fact, implicit in electronic culture is an acceptance of the idea of multi-level participation in the creative process.

If we think for a moment about the way in which our concept of history has influenced our use of such words as "originality," some conventional judg-

ments about artistic figures are placed in a very curious light indeed. For instance, we are forever being told that although Bach was a great man he was decidedly retrogressive in his own musical tastes—the implication being that had he been a little less of a genius, his remoteness from contemporary fashion would have quite done in his inspiration. Mendelssohn, after some violent fluctuations of the approval meter, is pretty much out of favor once again, not due to any lack of musical ability but largely for the reason that he was less innovation-prone than some of his colleagues, that his music is therefore less "original" and, one somehow is left to assume, less valuable. As a matter of fact, Mendelssohn provides a rather interesting case because the question of identification in our historical concept is quite often left to the observation of what you might call the quirk-quotient, the discovery at reasonably frequent intervals of some tell-tale response to a particular constructive problem for which a certain composer becomes noted. For instance, César Franck becomes noted for verbatim sequential transpositions: he thereby becomes easier to identify and the satisfaction of confirming the identification holds, for the uniquely illogical processes of the Western mind, the implication of unity within the particular work. But Mendelssohn, on the other hand, is inclined to spurn positive identity-factors of this kind and to draw instead upon what one could call negative factors. His work is more notable for those situations that he prefers to avoid than for the stylistic gestures that he attempts to indulge, and this is what infects his music with such a moving, puritanical quality. Since, however, the negative considerations of unity are out of fashion at the moment, so, unfortunately, is he.

Most of these ideas about the validity or lack of validity in a particular artistic procedure stem from an idea of history that has encouraged us to conceive of historical action in terms of a series of climaxes and to determine the virtues of artists according to the manner in which they participated in, or better still anticipated, the nearest climax. We tend to visualize a greatly exaggerated concept of historical transformation and, for reasons that seem expedient in helping us make history approachable and teachable (in order to make history captive is perhaps closer to the point), we tend to prefer antithet-

ical descriptions of historical point and denial, and to these we assign descriptions, terms that are consequently infected with all sorts of extraneous notions about progress and retrogression.

The absurdity of these assumptions about progressivism could perhaps be illustrated if I were to suggest the various judgments that might be applied to the same artistic experiment if it happened to be labeled in a variety of ways. Let's assume that someone were to improvise at the piano a sonata in the style of Haydn and to pass it off, at first, as a genuine work of that composer. The value that the unsuspecting listener would assign to this opus (let's assume it was brilliantly done and most admirably Haydnesque) would very much depend upon the degree of chicanery of which the improviser was capable. So long as he was able to convince the audience that this work was indeed that of Haydn it would be accorded a value commensurate with Haydn's reputation.

But now let us imagine that the improviser decided to inform the listener that this was not in fact a work of Haydn, though it very much resembled Haydn, but was in fact a work by Mendelssohn. The reaction to this bit of news would run something along the lines of—"Well, a pleasant trifle—obviously old-fashioned but certainly shows a good command of an earlier style"—in other words, bottom-drawer Mendelssohn.

But one last examination of this hypothetical piece: let us assume that instead of attributing it to Haydn or to any later composer, the improviser were to insist that it was a long-forgotten and newly discovered work of none other than Antonio Vivaldi, a composer who was by seventy-five years Haydn's senior. I venture to say that, with that condition in mind, this work would be greeted as one of the true revelations of musical history—a work that would be accepted as proof of the farsightedness of this great master, who managed in this one incredible leap to bridge the years that separate the Italian baroque from the Austrian rococo, and our poor piece would be deemed worthy of the most august programs. In other words, the determination of most of our esthetic criteria, despite all our proud claims about the integrity of artistic judgment, derives from nothing remotely like an "art-for-art's-sake" approach. What they really derive from is what we could only call an "art-for-what-its-society-was-once-like" sake.

When you begin to examine terms like "originality" with reference to those constructive situations to which they do in fact analytically apply, the nature of the description that they provide tends to reduce the imitation-

Recently, the brilliant Canadian musician, Glenn Gould has devoted less time to concertizing, more to writing, composing, and recording. Devotion to Strauss has been manifest in many ways, with a first performance of his variations on a motive from *Metamorphosen* scheduled for mid-summer.