

**Der Rosenkavalier** premièred in 1911 at Hofoper in Dresden

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Running time: 185 minutes

Performed by the Bavarian State Opera in 1979

Princess von Werdenberg, the Feldmarschallin	<i>Gwyneth Jones</i>	Soprano
Baron Ochs auf Lerchenau	<i>Manfred Jungwirth</i>	Bass
Octavian, younger brother of Count Rofrano	<i>Brigitte Fassbaender</i>	Soprano
Herr von Faninal, a wealthy parvenu	<i>Benno Kusche</i>	Baritone
Sophie, his daughter	<i>Lucia Popp</i>	Soprano
Marianne, her duenna	<i>Anneliese Waas</i>	Soprano
Valzacchi, an Italian intriguer	<i>David Thaw</i>	Tenor
Annina, his partner	<i>Gudrun Wewezow</i>	Mezzo
An Italian Singer	<i>Francisco Araiza</i>	Tenor
Mohammed, a little black page	<i>Patrick Leppelt</i>	Actor
Conductor	<i>Carlos Kleiber</i>	
Stage Director	<i>Otto Schenk</i>	

**Synopsis***Vienna during the reign of the Empress Maria Theresa*

**ACT 1:** The bedroom of Princess Werdenberg, wife of a Field Marshal (hence *Marschallin*), who's spent just the night with her 17 year old lover Count Octavian. Their breakfast is interrupted by her cousin Baron Ochs (described by Strauss as a *rural Don Juan*). Octavian disguises himself as a chambermaid (*Mariandel*), with whom Ochs flirts. The baron wants the Marschallin to recommend a young nobleman – a *Rosenkavalier* – to bear a traditional silver rose to his fiancée Sophie von Faninal, daughter of a recently ennobled arms dealer.

It's then time for the Marschallin's levée. The stage fills with a panoply of tradesmen, petitioners, intriguers, as well as an Italian tenor (who sings a pastiche of an Italian aria by Mozart). This song is cut short by a dowry argument between Ochs and a lawyer. Valzacchi and Annina both offer Ochs their services. A silver rose is handed to the Marschallin.

Left alone, the Marschallin compares her younger self with Sophie. At 32 she's conscious of growing older, and aware that Octavian will soon leave her for a younger woman. She's in a melancholy mood when he returns. The Marschallin tells him that time slips by too quickly so she often gets up at night to stop the clocks. After Octavian leaves, the Marschallin realises that they haven't kissed goodbye. She sends her young page Mohammed after him with a casket containing the silver rose.

[Interval]

ACT 2: Herr von Faninal's palatial home. Sophie and her duenna wait with Faninal for the rose-bearer's arrival by coach. Octavian ceremoniously presents Sophie with the rose, and they are mutually attracted at first sight. Ochs is ushered in and fondles Sophie lecherously, while his disreputable bodyguard also ruffles feathers. Sophie is appalled, and Octavian vows to prevent her marriage to Ochs. Their love duet is abruptly ended by Valzacchi and Annina, who want to spy for Ochs.

Octavian challenges Ochs to a duel and wounds him slightly. Ochs acts as if he has been badly wounded, and Sophie tells her father that she won't marry this oaf. Octavian meanwhile wins over Valzacchi and Annina. While Ochs – bandaged – is left alone, Annina brings him a message from the Marschallin's maid *Mariandel* agreeing to an assignation. Ochs, delighted, sings his favourite waltz.



ACT 3: Under Octavian's supervision – in a private room at an inn – Valzacchi, Annina and others rehearse the opening of trapdoors and similar devices with which they plan to scare Ochs. Octavian dons his disguise as *Mariandel*, and goes to meet the baron. Accompanied by waltzes played by an offstage band, they sit down to supper. Ochs vainly tries to seduce the *girl*, who refuses his advances. Every time he approaches, apparitions appear at windows or through trapdoors. Annina, dressed in black as a widow, now enters to claim Ochs as the father of her children, who noisily shout 'Papa!'.

Ochs calls the police, and explains to a suspicious commissioner that he's dining with his fiancée Sophie. Octavian has ordered Valzacchi to send for Faninal and Sophie who both refute Ochs's story. Octavian provides a truthful explanation, and sheds his female attire. Meanwhile the Marschallin, summoned by Ochs's valet, recognises the police commissioner as her husband's ex-orderly, and assures him that the rumpus was only a masquerade.

Ochs is persuaded to leave, pursued by creditors, children and tavern staff. The three sopranos unite for their justly celebrated trio: both the young lovers sing of their delight, while the Marschallin accepts the situation with good grace. She leaves them alone for a shorter duet. The lovers then depart for their carriage, leaving the stage empty apart from one dropped handkerchief, which the black page triumphantly retrieves as the curtain falls.

## ***Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss**

Hugo von Hofmannsthal concocted this plot in a few days with the help of a friend. They borrowed ideas from many sources, including Molière, Verdi's *Falstaff* and Hogarth's paintings (*Mariage à la mode*). Some characters are based on operatic prototypes (Mozart's Countess and Cherubino from *Le Nozze di Figaro*).

Hofmannsthal created an 18th century Vienna in considerable detail, but many of the customs – such as the silver rose – were invented. The opera ran into censor trouble in Dresden (and Berlin), but it was a great success. Many operatic centres took up the work quickly. This is opera on an enormous scale: a huge cast, and music for 112 instruments!

Although Hofmannsthal imagined *Der Rosenkavalier* as a neo-Mozartian opera in the *Figaro* mould, Strauss's music is post-Wagnerian, with developed leitmotifs and a richly allusive orchestration. The vocal writing continues the development of Strauss's lyrical conversational style (neither aria or recitative). Exquisite orchestral detail shows Strauss as a tone poet at the height of his creative powers: for example high polytonal chords to depict the silver rose using flutes, harps, celesta and individual violins.

KOBBE: "THE GREAT THIRD ACT TRIO IS AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF STRAUSS'S LUXURIANT WRITING FOR COMBINED FEMALE VOICES ... HERE AT ITS FINEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE. IT PROVIDES A SPLENDID AND CATHARTIC SUMMARY OF THE EMOTIONAL THREADS WHICH HAVE GONE TO MAKE THE DRAMA."



HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL WITH RICHARD STRAUSS

The role of the Marschallin is a particularly notable creation. As well as emphasising Strauss's affinity with the soprano voice, there are also rewarding parts for Ochs and Faninal. The work is bound together with a string of memorable waltz tunes. With its perennially pertinent subject matter, and matchless blend between libretto and music, *Der Rosenkavalier* had every ingredient for the lasting popular success that has materialised. Hofmannsthal and Strauss never quite recaptured the same lyrical élan.

### **Richard Strauss**

As well as composing 15 operas, Strauss also excelled in the genres of LIEDER and orchestral TONE POEMS. He composed copiously from the age of five: by the age of 16 he'd heard Hermann Levi conduct his first symphony. Five years later Hans von Bülow employed him as an assistant. In 1886 he became a junior conductor at the Munich opera, moving on to the Weimar Court Opera three years later.

TONE POEMS – *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung* – brought early success, and he conducted the première of Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, as well as his own first opera (in which his future wife Pauline played the female lead) four months before their marriage. Strauss's sympathy for the female voice owes much to her.

Strauss then returned to the Munich Opera, becoming chief conductor there in 1896, before a longer tenure as chief conductor of the Royal Berlin Opera from 1898-1908 (during this period his friend Mahler held a similar position at the Vienna Court Opera). In 1920 Strauss helped to establish the Salzburg Festival.

**RICHARD STRAUSS OPERAS** [FOCUSING ON HIS PIVOTAL HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL COLLABORATIONS]

Guntram (1894), <i>Feuersnot</i> (1901), <i>Salome</i> (1905)		
<i>PREMIERE</i>	<i>TITLE</i>	<i>LIBRETTIST</i>
1909 Dresden	<i>Elektra</i>	von Hofmannsthal, after Sophocles
1911 Dresden	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	von Hofmannsthal
1912 Stuttgart	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	von Hofmannsthal [revised 1916]
1919 Vienna	<i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i>	von Hofmannsthal
1924 Dresden	<i>Intermezzo</i>	Richard Strauss
1928 Dresden	<i>Die ägyptische Helena</i>	von Hofmannsthal [revised 1933]
1933 Dresden	<i>Arabella</i>	von Hofmannsthal
Die schweigsame Frau (1935), <i>Friedenstag</i> (1938), <i>Daphne</i> (1938), Die Liebe der Danae (1944), <i>Capriccio</i> (1942)		

After an unsuccessful first opera, it's notable that Strauss's output during the next 15 years was restricted to one act operas: he effectively built on the success of his Tone Poems by creating three stage equivalents. *Salome* and *Elektra* were both operatic triumphs (despite some moral reservations about the former). To capture intense, dark psychological and emotional states he opted for Expressionist atonality in some parts of *Elektra*.

As well as waltzes and succulent melodies *Der Rosenkavalier* also includes harmonic progressions which are as advanced as any in *Elektra*. His operatic development benefitted from his experience as a theatrical conductor. He and von Hofmannsthal both wanted to break fresh operatic ground. *Ariadne auf Naxos* was too ambitious initially, before a more practical revision was created. This was followed by *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, a fairytale cum allegory, in which flights of fancy are complimented by outstanding musical beauty.

The melodic recitative style used throughout *Intermezzo* also ensured the subsequent success of *Arabella*. This return to romantic period comedy was composed to a Hofmannsthal libretto that had been completed before the writer's 1929 death. *Die schweigsame Frau*, freely adapted by Stefan Zweig from Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman* comedy, is one of Strauss's happiest scores. Despite his delight in finding a new and congenial Jewish partner, the Nazi era terminated this collaboration.

He worked grudgingly with the Viennese theatre historian Joseph Gregor on his next three stage pieces. *Friedenstag*, the first of two one act operas was an anti-war piece. Ironically Hitler attended the first Viennese performance: unsurprisingly this opera was banned in Germany after a few months. Strauss's last three operas belong to a so-called 'Indian Summer' phase where richness is combined with simplicity.

**Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929)**

Hugo von Hofmannsthal was an Austrian writer. His great-grandfather was a Jewish tobacco farmer who'd been ennobled by the Austrian emperor. Hofmannsthal wrote poems and plays from an early age. In the 1890s he wrote several short verse plays, influenced by Maeterlinck, Browning and Alfred de Musset. He met Richard Strauss for the first time in 1900. After graduating in 1901, he joined an avant-garde writing group with Arthur Schnitzler.

*Jedermann* (with music by Nilson) – his 1911 adaptation of *Everyman* the traditional English morality play – later became a staple at the Salzburg Festival, which he'd helped to found. The patriotic and conservative-minded Hofmannsthal never fully recovered from the end of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918. Among his later writings was a screenplay for a film of *Der Rosenkavalier* (1925).

His partnership with Richard Strauss became the most prolific and enduring in operatic history. From 1906 it lasted more than half of Hofmannsthal's adult life and notionally continued until 1933, as Strauss continued to work from existing libretti. After a curtailed partnership with Stefan Zweig, Strauss persuaded his penultimate collaborator Joseph Gregor to expand a Hofmannsthal scenario into *Die Liebe der Danae*. Hofmannsthal's lifelong interest in Classical mythology was to prove a recurring element in Strauss's operatic output.

### Selected Musical Biography

MARSCHALLIN: Dame Gwyneth Jones (born 1936) is a Welsh dramatic soprano, widely regarded as one of the greatest Wagnerian sopranos of her time. Her extensive international career includes the Bayreuther Festspiele (where she appeared 146 times across 15 seasons). Her 93 Met performances between 1972 and 1995 included 20 appearances as the Marschallin. She made a guest appearance in the 2012 *Quartet* film based on Ronald Harwood's comedy (playing a former operatic rival of Dame Maggie Smith).

OCTAVIAN: Brigitte Fassbaender (born 1939) is a German mezzo-soprano opera singer and stage director. Her father was the baritone Willi Domgraf-Fassbaender. From 1999 to 2012 she was Intendant of the Tyrolean State Theatre in Innsbruck, for whom she wrote libretti for two musicals. Signature roles have included Octavian (Richard Strauss) and Nicklass (Offenbach). As well as operatic work, Fassbaender has performed as a Lieder singer (eg Schubert) and in Bach and Handel oratorios, as well as speaking roles after retirement as a singer.

SOPHIE: Lucia Popp (1939-1993) was a Slovak operatic soprano. She made her professional debut in Bratislava in 1963 as the Queen of the Night with little vocal training, but earned a Met debut in the same role four years later. As her voice developed extensively during her career, she managed to perform at least two different roles in all of the following operas: *Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Magic Flute*, *Der Freischütz*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Arabella*.

CONDUCTOR: Carlos Kleiber (1930–2004) was a conductor, and son of Erich Kleiber another eminent Austrian conductor. He was renamed Carlos after his family emigrated to Buenos Aires in 1935. He subsequently attended English boarding schools. Kleiber conducted in Germany and Switzerland, and made highly regarded symphonic recordings. He made his UK debut in 1966 with a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* (which had been premièred by his father in 1925). Kleiber was regarded as an eccentric genius, who was only interviewed once. After one private concert he was remunerated with a custom-built Audi.