

## The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss

Richard Strauss is a composer much loved among audiences throughout the world, in both the opera house and the concert hall. Despite this popularity, Strauss was for many years ignored by scholars, who considered his commercial success and his continued reliance on the tonal system to be liabilities. However, the past two decades have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest in the composer. This *Companion* surveys the results, focussing on the principal genres, the social and historical context, and topics perennially controversial over the last century. Chapters cover Strauss's immense operatic output, the electrifying modernism of his tone poems, and his ever-popular lieder. Controversial topics are explored, including Strauss's relationship to the Third Reich and the sexual dimension of his works. Reintroducing the composer and his music in light of recent research, the volume shows Strauss's artistic personality to be richer and much more complicated than has been previously acknowledged.

**Charles Youmans** is Associate Professor of Music at Penn State University. He is the author of *Richard Strauss and the German Intellectual Tradition* (2005), and his articles and essays have appeared in *19th-Century Music*, *The Musical Quarterly*, the *Journal of Musicology*, and various edited collections.

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The Cambridge Companion to  
**RICHARD  
STRAUSS**

.....

EDITED BY  
Charles Youmans  
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For my parents



## Contents

- List of illustrations* [page ix]  
*List of music examples* [x]  
*List of tables* [xii]  
*Notes on contributors* [xiii]  
*Preface and acknowledgments* [xvii]  
*Chronology of Strauss's life and career* [xxi]  
*List of abbreviations* [xxvii]

### **Part I • Background** [1]

- 1 The musical world of Strauss's youth  
*James Deaville* [3]
- 2 Strauss's compositional process  
*Walter Werbeck* [22]
- 3 Maturity and indecision in the early works  
*Wayne Heisler, Jr.* [42]

### **Part II • Works** [57]

- 4 The first cycle of tone poems  
*David Larkin* [59]
- 5 The second cycle of tone poems  
*James Hepokoski* [78]
- 6 Strauss's road to operatic success: *Guntram*,  
*Feuersnot*, and *Salome*  
*Morten Kristiansen* [105]
- 7 The Strauss–Hofmannsthal operas  
*Bryan Gilliam* [119]
- 8 Opera after Hofmannsthal  
*Philip Graydon* [136]
- 9 “Actually, I like my songs best”: Strauss's lieder  
*Susan Youens* [151]
- 10 Last works  
*Jürgen May* [178]

### **Part III • Perspectives** [193]

- 11 Strauss's place in the twentieth century  
*Alex Ross* [195]



12	Musical quotations and allusions in the works of Richard Strauss	
	<i>Günter Brosche</i>	[213]
13	Strauss in the Third Reich	
	<i>Michael Walter</i>	[226]
14	Strauss and the business of music	
	<i>Scott Warfield</i>	[242]
15	Kapellmeister Strauss	
	<i>Raymond Holden</i>	[257]
16	Strauss and the sexual body: the erotics of humor, philosophy, and ego-assertion	
	<i>Bryan Gilliam</i>	[269]
17	Strauss and the nature of music	
	<i>Charles Youmans</i>	[280]
	<i>Notes</i>	[294]
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	[326]
	<i>Index</i>	[332]

## Illustrations

- 2.1 Sketchbook 2, pp. 71–3: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, sketches for “Von den Hinterweltlern.” [page 29]
- 2.2 Sketchbook 3, p. 17: *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, continuity draft of opening. [33]
- 2.3 Sketchbook 3, p. 31: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, partcell of opening orchestration. [38]

## Music examples

- 2.1 Sketchbook 1, p. 47: *Don Juan*, mm. 53–6, harmonic skeleton [page 28]
- 2.2 Sketchbook 1, p. 49: *Don Juan*, mm. 52–5, passagework in the strings [28]
- 4.1a *Macbeth*, mm. 6–13 [64]
- 4.1b *Macbeth*, mm. 324–30 [64]
- 4.2a *Macbeth*, mm. 67–70 [65]
- 4.2b *Macbeth*, mm. 387–8 (woodwind only) [65]
- 4.3 *Don Juan*, mm. 536–43 [70]
- 4.4 *Tod und Verklärung*, mm. 13–20 [72]
- 4.5 *Tod und Verklärung*, mm. 268–70 [75]
- 4.6 *Tod und Verklärung*, mm. 160–4 [75]
- 5.1 *Don Quixote*, mm. 1–17 [87]
- 5.2 *Don Quixote*, mm. 109–22 [89]
- 5.3 *Ein Heldenleben*, mm. 1–19 [91]
- 5.4a–e *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, opening idea and transformations [94]
- 5.5a *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Nature” [97]
- 5.5b *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Reverent shudder” [97]
- 5.5c *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Longing” [97]
- 5.5d *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Of the afterworldsmen” [97]
- 5.5e *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Of joys and passions” [97]
- 5.5f *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Disgust” [97]
- 5.5g *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Ideal” theme [98]
- 5.5h *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Dance” theme [98]
- 8.1 *Intermezzo*, mm. 1–4 [140]
- 8.2 *Capriccio*, final scene, rehearsal no. 258 [149]
- 9.1 “Ruhe, meine Seele!” mm. 1–7 [156]
- 9.2 “Leises Lied,” mm. 1–6 [159]
- 9.3 “Leises Lied,” mm. 11–21 [160]
- 9.4 “Am Ufer,” mm. 1–12 [163]
- 9.5 “Am Ufer,” mm. 22–33 [164]
- 9.6 “Im Spätboot,” mm. 1–7 [168]
- 9.7a “Im Spätboot,” mm. 15–17 [169]
- 9.7b “Im Spätboot,” mm. 24–6 [169]
- 9.8 “Wie erkenn’ ich mein Treulieb?,” mm. 1–8 [173]
- 9.9 “Guten Morgen, ’s ist Sankt Valentinstag,” mm. 1–10 [175]
- 9.10 “Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß,” mm. 11–15 [177]
- 10.1 Oboe Concerto, first principal motive [182]
- 10.2 Oboe Concerto, second principal motive [182]
- 10.3 Oboe Concerto, third principal motive [183]
- 10.4 *Metamorphosen*, mm. 1–3 [187]
- 10.5 *Metamorphosen*, mm. 1–2, *passus duriusculus* [188]

[x]

- 10.6 *Metamorphosen*, mm. 1–2, *saltus duriusculus* [188]
- 10.7 *Duett-Concertino*, third movement, rehearsal no. 22 [190]
- 11.1 *Salome*, beginning, clarinet [198]
- 11.2 *Elektra*, four mm. before rehearsal no. 178 [199]
- 11.3 *Salome*, “kiss” chord, quoted in Maurice Ravel, “An Interview with Ravel,” in Arbie Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) [199]
- 11.4 Arnold Schoenberg, sketches for Chamber Symphony No. 2 [200]
- 11.5 Schoenberg, Op. 15, No. 14, vocal line, m. 2 [200]
- 11.6 Schoenberg, Op. 11, end [200]
- 11.7 (a) *Salome* at rehearsal no. 355; (b) Anton von Webern, Op. 6, No. 4 (original version), m. 12 [201]
- 11.8 Alban Berg, *Altenberg Lieder*, “Hier ist Friede,” end [201]
- 11.9 Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, mm. 100–1 [202]
- 11.10 *Salome*, four mm. after rehearsal no. 300 [202]
- 11.11 Schoenberg, *Die glückliche Hand*, beginning, bass clarinet and bassoons [202]
- 11.12a *Salome*, three mm. before rehearsal no. 228, flute [203]
- 11.12b Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire*, I, m. 6, flute [203]
- 11.12c Pierre Boulez, *Le Marteau sans maître*, V, m. 31, flute [203]
- 11.13 *Salome*, five mm. after rehearsal no. 361 [204]
- 11.14 *Salome*, three mm. before rehearsal no. 255 [204]
- 11.15 Berg, *Lulu*, Basic Series [205]
- 11.16 Berg, *Lulu*, Prologue, m. 44 [205]
- 11.17 (a) *Salome*, six mm. after rehearsal no. 361, first trumpet; (b) Igor Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, six mm. after rehearsal no. 125, first trumpet [207]
- 11.18 Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, six mm. before end, trumpets [207]
- 11.19 *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act II, one m. after rehearsal no. 25, celesta and harp [209]
- 11.20 Olivier Messiaen, “Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu,” m. 5 [210]
- 12.1 “Im Abendrot,” mm. 77–8, quotation of *Tod und Verklärung* [223]

## Tables

- 8.1 Strauss's later operas *sans* Hofmannsthal [Page 137]
- 10.1 Order of the *Vier letzte Lieder* [192]
- 12.1 Instances of self-quotation in *Ein Heldenleben* [223]

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## Preface and acknowledgments

Three decades into the oft-noted “resurgence” of Strauss scholarship, taking him seriously is no longer remarkable. True, for Strauss to become the object of academic inquiry there had to be a rediscovery. Unshakably popular with the listening public, this all-too-likable composer was for many years simply ignored by scholars. But what seemed novel in the 1980s and 1990s has settled into normalcy; musicologists now routinely investigate Strauss with the same tools applied to Bach and Beethoven.

Not surprisingly, uncritical assumptions have faded away. Strauss’s rejection of atonality is no longer an indictment. The sophistication of his intellect has been recognized, and indeed, documented. A fresh appreciation of the heterogeneity of early-twentieth-century musical modernism has cast his varied oeuvre in a different light. And musical developments during the last fifty years suggest that qualities long considered old-fashioned may have been among his most visionary. There is a new Strauss among us, then, a more complex figure with richer connections to his art and its history.

This sea change was already apparent in 1999, when the fiftieth anniversary of the composer’s death elicited a spate of biographical reassessments. These publications alerted the broader public to work by a handful of Straussian musicological pioneers – most importantly Bryan Gilliam on one side of the Atlantic and Walter Werbeck on the other – and stimulated a second wave of scholarly interest now sufficiently large and diverse to be called a “community.” The last ten years have seen over a dozen new Ph.D. dissertations on Strauss, a healthy series of international conferences and essay collections, and even the first article on the composer in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. With contributions from scholars representing six different nations and a wide range of methodologies, *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss* is one more sign of the depth that now obtains.

Given the wealth of newly available information, there is every reason to introduce Strauss again to the general reader and undergraduate music student – the kind of enthusiast whose regular engagement with the music is one of the most important justifications for musicological research. The expectations of this reader account for the book’s organizational plan. At the center stand new accounts of the major genres, with several chapters each for tone poem and opera, and separate treatments of the early works, lieder, and the beloved “Indian summer.” This material is approached via three chapters on topics yet to be elucidated for the non-specialist: the

musical life of late-nineteenth-century Munich, where Strauss came of age; the creative process by which the composer produced his works; and the promising but mostly forgotten (with a few notable exceptions) music of his first twenty years. Finally, the last section deals with important topics in the endless wrangling over this controversial figure: his place in the twentieth century, his love for musical borrowing, his relationship to the Nazi regime, his unapologetic treatment of music as a business, his character as a performer, and his curious tendency to write music about music.

In a detailed overview of Munich's diverse musical culture in the 1870s and 1880s, James Deaville clarifies the range of influences on an apprentice composer talented enough to succeed in any direction he chose. The impressive artistic substance of each respective camp, and the power of the personalities involved, goes a long way towards explaining why in his youth Strauss had already developed into something of a musical chameleon, paradoxically flexible long after being acknowledged as a "finished" professional musician. Walter Werbeck demonstrates, drawing on meticulous study of the surviving sketches, that Strauss continued to refine his creative methods well into his maturity – even after such masterworks as *Don Juan* (1888) and *Tod und Verklärung* (1889) – but also that by *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1895) he had arrived at a method that would serve him for the next fifty years. A similar finding-of-his-way is documented by Wayne Heisler, Jr. in a survey of Strauss's youthful output. The high quality of these pieces, attested not just by Heisler's analyses but by the facts of contemporaneous reception, is all the more striking given their stylistic variety; as in the technical realm of compositional process, the challenges of youth would coalesce into an idiosyncratic mature practice.

David Larkin too shows that for Strauss the phenomenon of the "overnight success," as we might be tempted to read *Don Juan*, emerged from struggle, specifically Strauss's need in *Macbeth* simultaneously to absorb and adapt the legacies of Liszt and Wagner. By the time of the second group of tone poems, considered by James Hepokoski with a level of sophistication appropriate to their content, the composer was actively pushing the orchestral genre to the breaking-point, in every musical respect but also in its long-standing Romantic capacity as a bearer of philosophical and spiritual content. And even as Strauss drove this side of his creative personality to its culmination, he was building momentum towards his principal creative outlet, opera. The triumph of *Salome* would mark the conclusion, as Morten Kristiansen explains, of an even more elaborate negotiation with the demands of tradition (a resolution that no other German composer would find in the twenty years after *Parsifal*).

The relationship with Hofmannsthal, which would produce Strauss's greatest creative triumphs, is shown by Bryan Gilliam to have flourished

through a strange chemistry that saw superficial differences in personality and outlook enlivening deeper commonalities: devotion to the artistic themes of gesture, transformation, and the power of marriage and children to give life meaning. The cruel loss of Hofmannsthal, and then of Stefan Zweig, the poet best equipped to replace him, would prove endlessly disheartening to Strauss, but Philip Graydon confirms that these setbacks did nothing to weaken the composer's creative energies, or to discourage him from further operatic explorations even as he entered his seventies. In recent decades these later operas have experienced a slow but steady revival, much as is to be hoped for the songs considered in loving detail by Susan Youens, who reveals the myriad subtle beauties to be found in measure after measure of works that even confirmed Straussians can overlook. Such would not be the fate of the so-called *Four Last Songs* and *Metamorphosen*, in spite of their genesis in a period when Strauss claimed to be writing only "wrist exercises." Jürgen May discloses the full extent of Strauss's continuing productivity in this final period, however, establishing connections among the two celebrated works and the others, and arguing that all of them offer insights into his creative personality, however insistently he may have downplayed their significance.

If certain topics seem perennially at issue in the controversies swirling about Strauss, the surest way towards intellectual progress must be to resist oversimplification. What, for example, did he mean for the twentieth century? Alex Ross considers the full scope of possibilities, sharing new insights on the obvious connection to the Second Viennese group, but also efficiently surveying the enormously wide field of subtler influence – an impact that continues to be felt, consciously for some composers, even today. Günter Brosche reveals that the question of influence *on* Strauss is no less complex; not only is there much to be done in establishing the facts of Strauss's encyclopedic intertextuality, but the work of interpreting this deeply important creative practice has only begun. Nowhere is the avoidance of the easy answer more crucial for the historian than in the Nazi question, and Michael Walter provides an uncompromisingly forthright treatment, with source-critical observations informing a cautious piecing-together of Strauss's own perspective, offered from a standpoint equidistant from apology and accusation.

For a composer who so openly reveled in the practical activities of a musician, Strauss has enjoyed relatively little scholarly treatment of these aspects of his life. Scott Warfield takes up the widely, inexplicably ignored question of what was required for a young composer to compete in the music business in late-nineteenth-century Bavaria; whatever natural talents and interests Strauss possessed in this area, his mature practice was shaped in reaction to powerful forces that had to be confronted. The book

on his character as performer remains to be written, but Raymond Holden indicates here both what would need to be considered and how it could be done. A desire to bring music closer to the authentic realities of human experience underlay Strauss's frequent and at times disconcertingly realistic treatments of sexuality, which Bryan Gilliam shows to have been integral to the philosophical agendas served by this music. Finally, my own contribution examines a practical question directly at issue in Strauss's works themselves: what factors might account for his life-long joy in using music to reflect on the very art of music, a tendency that despite its often playful character seems bound up with his deepest beliefs about the nature of the art.

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## Chronology of Strauss's life and career

- 1863 Franz Strauss, aged forty-one, marries the twenty-five-year-old Josephine Pschorr on August 29; Franz had lost a previous wife and daughter to cholera in 1854, and a son to tuberculosis in 1852.
- 1864 On June 11, Richard Strauss is born at 2 Altheimer Eck, Munich, adjacent to the brewery owned by his mother's family.
- 1865 In his capacity as first horn with the Court Opera, Franz plays in the premiere of *Tristan und Isolde*, under Hans von Bülow; he would also take part in the first performances of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868), *Das Rheingold* (1869), *Die Walküre* (1870), and *Parsifal* (1882).
- 1867 Birth of Strauss's only sibling, Johanna, on June 9.
- 1868 The young Strauss enjoys walking with his father to hear the band play at the changing of the guard on the Marienplatz, whistling the tunes as they return home; he receives his first piano lessons from August Tombo, harpist in the Court Orchestra.
- 1869 The family moves to its permanent home at 11 Neuhauserstrasse.
- 1870 Strauss produces his first two compositions, the "Schneiderpolka" ("Tailor's Polka") and "Weihnachtslied" ("Christmas Song"), written down by Franz; matriculates at Munich's Cathedral School; Franz Strauss named Professor at Munich's Royal Music Academy.
- 1871 First two visits to the opera, to hear *Der Freischütz* and *Die Zauberflöte*; at the carnival festivities at the Munich Odeon, Strauss joins the children's masquerade as a *Minnesinger* from *Tannhäuser*.
- 1872 Introduced to Ludwig Thuille (1861–1907) by Pauline Nagiller, a friend of Josephine Strauss; begins violin study with Benno Walter, concertmaster of the Court Orchestra and Franz's first cousin.
- 1873 Conducts Franz's orchestration of the "Schneiderpolka" at a carnival concert arranged by the Munich Philharmonic Association.
- 1874 Enters the Ludwigs-Gymnasium, Sendlinger Straße, Munich; his teacher writes that "there can be few pupils in whom a sense of duty, talent, and liveliness are united to the degree that they are in this boy"; an inheritance allows the family to purchase a Blüthner grand piano.
- 1875 Begins music theory studies with Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer (harmony, counterpoint, canon, fugue, form, basic orchestration).
- 1876 At a Pschorr family concert Strauss plays Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*.
- 1877 Completes a Serenade for Orchestra – the first work he orchestrated himself – dedicating it to Meyer; by now Strauss has produced some fifty compositions, mostly works for piano, songs, and chamber music.
- 1878 Beginning of friendship with Friedrich Rösch (1862–1925), close confidant, personal lawyer, musical colleague; advanced piano study with distinguished Munich pedagogue Friedrich Niest.

- 1879 Thuille moves to Munich to study at the Royal Music Academy, bringing to a close the rich correspondence between himself and Strauss during the former's 1877–9 stay in Innsbruck.
- 1880 Conclusion of training with Meyer; secret study of the score of *Tristan und Isolde*.
- 1881 First published work, the *Festmarsch* for large orchestra, Op. 1 (composed in 1876), dedicated to Georg Pschorr.
- 1882 Graduates from the Ludwigs-Gymnasium; enrolls at the University of Munich for the winter semester, 1882–3; accompanies his father to Bayreuth for the first performances of *Parsifal* (Strauss attends not the premiere but a later performance); visits Vienna, where he meets Hans Richter and Eduard Hanslick and plays the piano in a performance of his Violin Concerto.
- 1883 In December begins a three-month trip to Berlin, where he meets Hans von Bülow, Joseph Joachim, the concert agent Hermann Wolff, and the musicologist Philipp Spitta, among many other musical figures.
- 1884 Makes his conducting debut with Bülow's Meiningen Orchestra at the Munich Odeon on November 18, performing the Suite in B $\flat$  major for Thirteen Wind Instruments, Op. 4.
- 1885 In September takes up the position of Court Music Director in Meiningen, as Bülow's assistant; succeeds Bülow on the latter's departure in November; befriended by the arch-Wagnerian composer and violinist Alexander Ritter (1833–96), a member of the Meiningen orchestra.
- 1886 Completes *Aus Italien*; moves to the Munich Court Opera as third conductor, working under Hermann Levi and Franz Fischer; in the spring, beginning of love affair with Cäcilie Wenzel, Court Actress in Meiningen.
- 1887 In August, meets his future wife, Pauline de Ahna (1863–1950), who becomes his vocal student.
- 1888 Completes *Macbeth* (first version; revised 1891) and *Don Juan*; prepares new production of Wagner's *Die Feen* at Munich, only to hand over the performances to the second conductor, Franz Fischer; first invitation to a Wahnfried soirée (the following summer Strauss would serve as rehearsal assistant at Bayreuth).
- 1889 Completes *Tod und Verklärung*; relocates to Weimar as Kapellmeister to the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach; Franz Strauss abruptly pensioned from the Munich Court Opera by means of a notice posted on a bulletin board; first extant letter to Dora Wihan, an early love interest whom Strauss had met in 1883.
- 1890 Conducts Ritter's one-act operas *Der faule Hans* and *Wem die Krone?* at Weimar.
- 1891 In May, hospitalized for life-threatening lung inflammation; growing intimacy with Cosima Wagner and family, marked by familiar *du* form of address with Siegfried Wagner.
- 1892 Conducts *Tristan und Isolde* at Weimar, in a *Nuancierung* designed to compensate for the orchestra's small size; in November departs for eight-month journey to Greece and Egypt to convalesce from severe lung ailment; immerses himself in Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, and completes the short score of his first opera, *Guntram*.

- 1893 Completes *Guntram* (premiere: May 10, 1894, Weimar).
- 1894 Returns to Munich as Kapellmeister; lukewarm reception of Weimar premiere of *Guntram*; marries Pauline on September 10, offering the Op. 27 lieder as a wedding present.
- 1895 Completes *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*; conducts *Tannhäuser* at the Bayreuth Festival; bitter disappointment at the negative reception of *Guntram*'s first Munich performance in November.
- 1896 Promoted to Hofkapellmeister at Munich; completes *Also sprach Zarathustra*.
- 1897 Completes *Don Quixote*; in collaboration with Ernst von Possart, revival of *Così fan tutte* at the eighteenth-century theater designed by Francois Cuvilliés in Munich's Residenz.
- 1898 Completes *Ein Heldenleben*; moves to Berlin as conductor at the Court Opera; with Rösch and Hans Sommer, begins planning a society for the protection of composers' rights.
- 1899 First meeting with Hugo von Hofmannsthal, at the Berlin home of Richard Dehmel.
- 1900 First letter from Hofmannsthal, offering the ballet *Der Triumph der Zeit*; to Eugen Spitzweg, his long-time publisher, Strauss declares that he will "never again hand over performance rights to a publisher."
- 1901 Completes *Feuersnot* (premiere: November 21, 1901, Dresden); elected president of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein* (All-German Music Society).
- 1902 On the Isle of Wight without his family, Strauss conceives the idea for *Symphonia domestica*; back home, Pauline pens a letter threatening divorce after erroneously discovering "evidence" of an affair.
- 1903 Completes *Symphonia domestica*; with Rösch and Sommer, founds *Genossenschaft Deutscher Tonsetzer* (German Composers' Cooperative); awarded honorary doctorate from the University of Heidelberg.
- 1904 First American tour, with performances in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Washington, and other smaller cities.
- 1905 Completes *Salome* (premiere: December 9, 1905, Dresden); Franz Strauss dies at age eighty-three.
- 1906 The first Austrian performance of *Salome*, in Graz, is attended by Mahler, Puccini, Schoenberg, and (it is said) the young Adolf Hitler.
- 1907 *Salome* is banned from New York's Metropolitan Opera after one performance, at the behest of J. P. Morgan's daughter; Strauss suffers second major illness of his life, collapsing from exhaustion and weakness of the heart.
- 1908 Completes *Elektra* (premiere: January 25, 1909, Dresden).
- 1909 Turns down Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces* for performance in Berlin.
- 1910 Completes *Der Rosenkavalier* (premiere: January 26, 1911, Dresden); first appearance as conductor at the Vienna Court Opera, with *Elektra* (June 19); Josephine Strauss dies at the age of seventy-two.
- 1911 Devastated by the news of Mahler's death (May 18), Strauss declares that he will title his *Eine Alpensinfonie* "Der Antichrist."



- 1912 Completes *Ariadne auf Naxos* (premiere: October 25, 1912, Stuttgart).
- 1913 Beginning on March 30, three-week auto tour through Italy with Hofmannsthal.
- 1914 Travels to Paris to conduct premiere of *Josephslegende* with the Ballets Russes; on the eve of World War I, receives honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford.
- 1915 Completes *Eine Alpensinfonie*; founding of *Genossenschaft zur Verwertung musikalischer Aufführungsrechte* (Cooperative for the Exploitation of Musical Performance Rights, or *GEMA*).
- 1916 Completes revision of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (premiere: October 4, 1916, Vienna).
- 1917 Completes *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (premiere: October 19, 1919, Vienna); with Hofmannsthal, Max Reinhardt, and Alfred Roller, founds the *Salzburger Festspielhausgemeinde* (Salzburg Festival Society).
- 1918 At the conclusion of the war, after a brief stint as interim director of the Berlin Opera – which he calls a “nuthouse” (*Narrenhaus*) – Strauss reaches agreement on a contract with the Vienna State Opera.
- 1919 Becomes co-director, with Franz Schalk, of the Vienna State Opera.
- 1920 Tours South America with the Vienna Philharmonic to raise money for the financially strapped Court Opera; he would return in 1923.
- 1921 Travels again to the USA, conducting his tone poems, accompanying Elizabeth Schumann, and being broadcast on radio for the first time.
- 1922 First Salzburg Festival to feature musical performances (the 1920 and 1921 events having been devoted to Hofmannsthal’s *Jedermann*), with Strauss conducting *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*.
- 1923 Completes *Intermezzo* (premiere: November 4, 1924, Dresden).
- 1924 Resigns Vienna post after Schalk’s machinations (henceforth Strauss’s principal income comes from guest-conducting engagements and compositional royalties); Franz Strauss marries Alice von Grab, who would become Strauss’s faithful assistant and the caretaker of the Richard Strauss-Archiv until her death in 1991.
- 1925 Completes *Parergon zur Symphonia domestica* for Paul Wittgenstein; death of Rösch.
- 1926 Travels to Athens to consider sites for a proposed Strauss Festival Theater.
- 1927 Completes *Die ägyptische Helena*, which Hofmannsthal regarded as his best libretto (premiere: June 6, 1928, Dresden); birth of Strauss’s first grandchild, Richard.
- 1928 Conducts the first Vienna performance of *Helena*, which he calls (in a letter to Pauline) “perhaps the greatest triumph of my life.”
- 1929 Death of Hofmannsthal on July 15; in a letter to the poet’s wife, a grieving Strauss declares “No one will ever replace him for me or the world of music!”; arranges Mozart’s *Idomeneo* for the Vienna State Opera, stating that he will “personally answer for my impiety to the divine Mozart if I ever get to heaven.”
- 1930 Deaths of Cosima and Siegfried Wagner; Strauss has Franz Werfel and Alma Mahler-Werfel to dinner, with what Alice calls “a lively discussion of Christianity.”

- 1931 First contact with Stefan Zweig.
- 1932 Completes *Arabella*, despite the unfinished state of the libretto for the second and third acts (premiere: July 1, 1933, Dresden); birth of second grandchild, Christian.
- 1933 Appointed President of the Reich Music Chamber of the new National Socialist regime; after Toscanini withdraws from Bayreuth in protest at Nazi policies, Strauss takes his place in a move towards reconciliation with the Wagner family; meets Hitler and suggests that the new government offer financial support to the festival.
- 1934 Completes *Die schweigsame Frau* (premiere: June 24, 1935, Dresden); meets Hitler again at Bayreuth and asks for an extension of the thirty-year period of copyright protection.
- 1935 Letter to Stefan Zweig requesting (in vain) a secret artistic collaboration is intercepted and delivered to Goebbels; Strauss resigns his official post.
- 1936 Completes *Friedenstag* (premiere: July 24, 1938, Munich); conducts *Olympic Hymn* at the Berlin games; during the winter games at Garmisch, no official from the Nazi government visits Strauss at his home.
- 1937 Completes *Daphne* (premiere: October 15, 1938, Dresden).
- 1938 On *Kristallnacht*, Strauss's grandsons are beaten in Garmisch; Alice is placed under house arrest.
- 1939 Hitler and Goebbels attend festival performance of *Friedenstag* in Vienna; the following day, a two-hour conversation with Goebbels; Strauss writes to Heinz Tietjen and Heinz Drewes seeking protection for his *nichtarisch* daughter-in-law and grandchildren.
- 1940 Completes *Die Liebe der Danae* (dress rehearsal for canceled premiere, August 16, 1944; premiere: August 14, 1952, Salzburg); revision of *Guntram* performed in Weimar.
- 1941 Completes *Capriccio* (premiere: October 28, 1942, Munich).
- 1942 Zweig commits suicide in Brazil; Strauss approaches the gate of the concentration camp at Theresienstadt in his chauffeur-driven automobile, determined to visit Alice's grandmother, Paula Neumann, an octogenarian inmate, only to be turned away by incredulous guards.
- 1943 Destruction of the Munich Nationaltheater by Allied bombs; among the lost materials are the "model productions" of Strauss's operas made by Clemens Krauss.
- 1944 Goebbels's declaration of total war leads to cancellation of Salzburg premiere of *Die Liebe der Danae*, but not before a full dress rehearsal attended by Strauss and a full audience; Alice and her children are classified as "half-breeds, first class"; records some of his orchestral music with the Vienna Philharmonic.
- 1945 Completes *Metamorphosen*; Allies occupy Garmisch, but declare Strauss's villa off limits after he introduces himself to American soldiers as the composer of *Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier*; Vienna State Opera destroyed; beginning of exile in Switzerland.
- 1946 Invited to the USA by Lionel Barrymore; copies Eichendorff's "Im Abendrot" into a sketchbook.

- 1947 Travels to London at the invitation of Sir Thomas Beecham for final foreign tour; conducts *Don Juan*, *Burleske*, *Symphonia domestica*, waltzes from *Rosenkavalier*, and "God Save the King."
- 1948 Completes last four orchestral lieder; cleared by denazification tribunal.
- 1949 After a heart attack on August 15, Strauss dies in his Garmisch villa on September 8, two days before his fifty-fifth wedding anniversary.
- 1950 Pauline Strauss dies on May 13.

## Abbreviations

- Chronicle* Willi Schuh. *Richard Strauss: A Chronicle of the Early Years 1864–1898*. Trans. Mary Whittall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- New Perspectives* Bryan Gilliam, ed. *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Recollections* Richard Strauss. *Recollections and Reflections*. Ed. Willi Schuh. Trans. L. J. Lawrence. London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1953. Originally published as *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Zurich: Atlantis, 1949). The second and third editions (Zurich: Atlantis, 1957, 1981) include material not in the first edition or the translation.
- Strauss and His World* Bryan Gilliam, ed. *Richard Strauss and His World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Strauss/Hofmannsthal* Franz and Alice Strauss, eds. *The Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal*. Arr. Willi Schuh. Trans. Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

