

PART III

Perspectives

11 Strauss's place in the twentieth century

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Not long ago, the idea of devoting an essay to Richard Strauss's influence on twentieth-century composition might have seemed absurd. From around 1918 onwards, the erstwhile "leader of the moderns" and "chief of the avant-garde" was widely ridiculed as a Romantic relic, whose undoubted native talent had been tainted by poor taste or unprincipled commercialism.¹ Charles Ives identified Strauss with "the comfort of a woman who takes more pleasure in the fit of fashionable clothes than in a healthy body."² Aaron Copland described Strauss's tone poems as "the offspring of an exhausted parentage ... the final manifestation of a dying world."³ Igor Stravinsky, in conversation with Robert Craft in the late 1950s, issued an incomparably withering putdown: "I would like to admit all Strauss operas to whichever purgatory punishes triumphant banality. Their musical substance is cheap and poor; it cannot interest a musician today." Stravinsky went on: "I am glad that young musicians today have come to appreciate the lyric gift in the songs of the composer Strauss despised, and who is more significant in our music than he is: Gustav Mahler."⁴ Strauss in no way despised Mahler, but the point holds. Composers at various points on the stylistic spectrum, from Copland and Britten to Boulez and Berio, hailed Mahler, not Strauss, as the *fin-de-siècle* prophet of modernity.

It was different in Strauss's intellectual heyday, in the years of *Salome* and *Elektra*. Mahler called *Salome* "one of the greatest masterworks of our time."⁵ In early 1913, a few months before the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky heard *Elektra* "with total delight" at Covent Garden, announcing in an interview that among operas written after *Parsifal* there were only "two that count": *Elektra* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, in that order.⁶ Debussy, writing as Monsieur Croche, identified Strauss as "practically the only original composer in modern Germany" and admitted that "it is not possible to withstand his irresistible domination."⁷ The young Béla Bartók threw himself into composing after hearing a performance of *Also sprach Zarathustra* in 1902, and got to know Strauss's scores well enough that he could play several of them from memory at the piano.⁸ Few of Strauss's colleagues neglected to criticize one aspect or another of his output, but they saw him fundamentally as a force to be reckoned with, one from whom much could be learned. The tone poems and operas from 1894 to

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1909 – *Till Eulenspiegel* to *Elektra* – constituted a kind of mother lode of modernist gestures.

How did Strauss become the great unmentionable in twentieth-century music history? The obvious culprit is his seeming retreat from modernist tendencies in the period after *Elektra* – at least according to conventional definitions of modernism in music. That picture of Strauss has come under skeptical scrutiny in recent years, with scholars such as Walter Werbeck, Bryan Gilliam, and Charles Youmans tracing essential continuities in Strauss's idiosyncratic approach to tonality, form, and aesthetics, from *Guntram* to *Elektra* to *Daphne* to *Metamorphosen*.⁹ Gilliam proposes that Strauss's music from *Rosenkavalier* onward should be considered *more* progressive: "Strauss realized that the musical language for the new century should be one that intentionally lacks stylistic uniformity ... one that arguably foreshadows the dissolution of the ideology of style in the late twentieth century."¹⁰ Yet the fact remains that Strauss's tonal language became less overtly radical just as modernism moved to the forefront. Another obstacle was the uneven quality of his work in the twenties and thirties. Latter-day listeners may have learned to savor operas such as *Intermezzo* and *Die ägyptische Helena*, but one can understand how the man who wrote *Schlagobers* and *Friedenstag* cut a less impressive figure than the one who wrote *Don Quixote* and *Salome*. Finally, Strauss's official activities in Nazi Germany and ties to the Party leadership cast a pall that not even the most apologetic biographers were able to dispel. Reactionary, creatively exhausted, sympathetic to fascism – such was the profile that Strauss presented in later years.

It is striking, then, that Arnold Schoenberg, who had withstood insults from Strauss and had good reason to join the censorious stampede, generally refrained from doing so. One comment, from 1923, stands out: "I was never *revolutionary*. *The only revolutionary* in our time was Strauss!"¹¹ Plainly this remark was something other than a fulsome compliment; revolutions, Schoenberg observed, "simply bring reaction out into the open," implying that in Strauss the revolutionary and the reactionary went hand in hand. Yet, with his sense of fair play, Schoenberg was acknowledging the older man's looming presence in the world of his youth. In a 1946 memorandum, he went further, defending Strauss against accusations of Nazi leanings and reasserting his significance unambiguously: "I believe that he will remain one of the characteristic and outstanding figures in musical history. Works like *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Intermezzo*, and others will not perish." (Schoenberg's liking for *Intermezzo* is surprising, since the opera lies well outside the canon of the "acceptable" Strauss. In a 1926 letter to Webern, Schoenberg said that although he found the music "very poor in invention and primitive in technique" he nonetheless emerged with a sympathetic

impression of Strauss's personality.)¹² The final sentence of the 1946 note is most telling: "I speak from the standpoint of honesty."¹³

Honesty requires a more rigorous accounting of the legacy of a composer who has always been better appreciated in concert halls and opera houses than in intellectual circles. Indeed, in recent decades, as the definition of "modernism" has been expanded to include not merely a progression towards increased harmonic and rhythmic complexity but also a more complex, pluralistic approach to the question of style, Strauss has undergone a rehabilitation. Once more he serves as a model for contemporary composers of various stylistic orientations. Yet the task of describing Strauss's historical position remains difficult. Because this composer cannot be identified with a clearly demarcated body of techniques, his influence seems amorphous. The glue that holds his works together – the best ones, at least – is not a coherent system or a language but a musical personality that agglomerates disparate materials. One might see him everywhere or nowhere, depending on how one chooses to look. In this chapter I will give particular attention to Strauss's effect on Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, with briefer observations following on his connections to Stravinsky, Messiaen, and various late-twentieth-century composers in both Europe and America.

Strauss and the Second Viennese School

Schoenberg's relationship with Strauss has drawn considerably less attention than his relationship with Mahler, although Strauss had no less an impact on the younger composer's musical development. Biographical evidence suggests that Schoenberg felt a certain awe in Strauss's vicinity. This is from a typically obsequious letter of 1903: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, honored master, once again for all the help you have given me at a sacrifice to yourself in the most sincere manner. I will not forget this for the whole of my life and will always be thankful to you for it."¹⁴ The meekness persisted as late as 1912, as Schoenberg's Berlin diary records: "He was very friendly. But I was very awkward. Bashful, as a fifteen-year-old boy isn't with me (Zweig!), I stammered and must have come across as an off-putting devotee."¹⁵ Often, the young Schoenberg seemed to be following Strauss's lead or moving in tandem with him. In 1898 he made sketches for a symphonic poem entitled *Frühlingstod*, based, like *Don Juan*, on a poem by Nikolaus Lenau. In the year 1899, both composers were immersed in the poetry of Richard Dehmel – Strauss in the extraordinary song-scene *Notturmo*, Schoenberg in *Verklärte Nacht*. In 1901 Schoenberg worked on a libretto for a prospective opera entitled *Die*

Example 11.1 *Salome*, beginning, clarinet

Schildbürger; back in 1894 Strauss had plotted an opera with the title *Till Eulenspiegel among the Schildburgers*. Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande* came about when Strauss suggested the Maeterlinck play as a subject.¹⁶ Walter Frisch has suggested that the formal design of Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony owes something to Strauss's *Don Juan*.¹⁷

Schoenberg's "Strauss phase" reached its height in 1905 and 1906, the years of *Salome*. The opera made an enormous impression on Schoenberg; Mahler gave him a copy of the vocal score sometime in 1905, and, when Egon Wellesz went to study with Schoenberg that fall, he saw the score resting on his teacher's piano, open to the first page. "Perhaps in twenty years' time someone will be able to explain these harmonic progressions theoretically," Schoenberg said to Wellesz.¹⁸ When *Salome* had its Austrian premiere, in Graz, in 1906, Schoenberg made sure to attend, bringing with him no fewer than his six of his pupils: Berg, Heinrich Jalowetz, Karl Horwitz, Erwin Stein, Viktor Krüger, and Zdzisław Jachimecki.¹⁹ The expedition had the appearance of a class field trip for the nascent Second Viennese School.

What on the first page of *Salome* did Schoenberg find so interesting? The first notes on the clarinet provide a possible clue (Example 11.1). The first four notes belong to the scale of C# major, but the second set of four seem to refer to the scale of G major. With the ninth note, the second G#, the music returns to the realm of C#, but those G major notes indicate, in an almost subliminal way, traditional harmony splitting at the seams. The C#–G polarity is confirmed by the arrival of a G dominant seventh in the seventh measure.

From his earliest years Strauss felt an urge to stage harmonic collisions across the interval of the tritone. He took his lead from the later Wagner operas, especially *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung*, where the chord on the lowered fifth becomes almost an alternative dominant. (In a youthful letter to Ludwig Thuille, Strauss mocks a passage in *Die Walküre* where chords of G and C# appear close together; perhaps his interest was aroused all the same.)²⁰ The "tritone complex," as it might be called, surfaces, among other places, in the opening chords of "Ruhe, meine Seele!" (where C dominant sevenths alternate with F# minor sevenths); at the end of the introduction to *Don Quixote* (where the pitches E♭ and B♭ sound against an incomplete

Example 11.2 *Elektra*, four mm. before rehearsal no. 178

The musical score for Example 11.2 is a four-measure excerpt from Richard Strauss's *Elektra*. It features a vocal line and several instrumental parts. The vocal line, in treble clef, begins with a rest and then sings the lyrics "(leise) Ich habe keine guten Nächte" in a descending melodic line. The instrumental parts include:

- Flute and Clarinet (fl. cl.) in the upper staff.
- Violins and Violas (vn. va.) in the middle staff, playing a complex, chromatic accompaniment with triplets and dynamic markings of *pp*, *pizz.*, *ppp*, and *p*. The instruction "mit Dämpfern, arco" is present.
- Violoncello and Double Bass (vlc, arco) in the lower staff, providing a harmonic foundation with chords and triplets.

 The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 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)

The musical score for Example 11.3 shows the famous “kiss” chord from Richard Strauss's *Salome*. It is a four-measure excerpt in C# major. The upper staff (treble clef) features a melodic line with accents and dynamic markings of *ff* and *sf*. The lower staff (bass clef) features a complex harmonic structure with chords and triplets. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

A dominant seventh); in the battle sequences of *Heldenleben* (where, at rehearsal no. 59, trumpets alternate chords of E major and B \flat minor); and in *Symphonia domestica* (where an abrupt juxtaposition of F major and B major characterizes the marital tension of Richard and Pauline Strauss). In *Elektra*, he takes the step of letting tritonally opposed triads sound simultaneously – usually B minor and F minor. A prominent example occurs alongside Hofmannsthal's line “Ich habe keine guten Nächte” (“I have no good nights”; Example 11.2).

Another instance of Straussian polytonality is the famous chord that accompanies Salome's kiss of the severed head of John the Baptist. Maurice Ravel once singled out that harmony by way of observing that Strauss's effect on Viennese modernism had been underestimated. In a 1931 interview, Ravel stated that Schoenberg and his followers “detest Strauss (who hates them as well), but they owe a great deal if not to Strauss the composer, at least to Strauss the musician.” Ravel continued: “... Strauss was the first to superimpose lines which were harmonically incompatible. Look at this chord in *Salome* [Example 11.3], which stubbornly resists any cadential analysis – it is at best understood as a simultaneous use of different tonal areas. That is surely one of the sources of Strauss's so-called atonal style.”²¹ Richard Taruskin, in the fourth volume of his *Oxford History of Western Music*, casts doubt on the “kiss” chord's radical reputation, noting that it does in fact easily allow for cadential analysis; Strauss has simply superimposed two conventional progressions within the key of C# major: I–IV–I

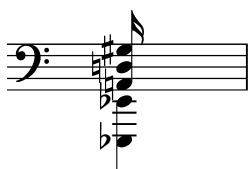
Example 11.4 Arnold Schoenberg, sketches for Chamber Symphony No. 2



Example 11.5 Schoenberg, Op. 15, No. 14, vocal line, m. 2



Example 11.6 Schoenberg, Op. 11, No. 1, end



and I→VI–I. The result, Taruskin states, is an “intensification” of cadence, not a nullification.²² Yet the sheer density of the chord – there are eight notes sounding together, the vocal score having omitted B# in the flutes – surely destabilizes the feeling of cadence on the practical acoustical level. Indeed, the C# tonality immediately gives way to a brutal postlude in and around the key of C minor – as if Strauss were resolving, after a 100-minute delay, the G dominant seventh that was left hanging in the seventh measure of the opera.

Yet it was probably not Strauss’s superimposition of disparate triads that most interested Schoenberg. In the most frenzied moments of *Salome* and *Elektra*, the syntax of tonal harmony seems on the verge of breaking down into an interplay of constituent intervals. One need only remove the middle note from those two superimposed triads to arrive at what Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt called the “primal cell” of Schoenberg’s music: a harmony made up of two fourths separated by a tritone.²³ The same configuration of notes can be obtained by extracting the notes G#, C#, D, and G from the initial clarinet scale of *Salome*. Sketches for the Second Chamber Symphony,²⁴ which was begun in April, 1906, show Schoenberg playing around with the elements of that primal cell while remaining barely within the bounds of tonality (Example 11.4). A similar pattern appears in the fourteenth song of *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* (Example 11.5). In the final measure of the first of the *Drei Klavierstücke*, among other places, the fourths are telescoped into a single harmony (Example 11.6). As Stuckenschmidt shows, Schoenberg

Example 11.7 (a) *Salome* at rehearsal no. 355; (b) Anton von Webern, Op. 6, No. 4 (original version), m. 12

Example 11.8 Alban Berg, *Altenberg Lieder*, “Hier ist Friede,” end

had long relished the sound of a fourth with a tritone above it – the notes A, D, and G# can be heard grinding together in both *Gurre-Lieder* and *Pelleas und Melisande* – but the pungent new dissonances in Strauss's scores, particularly the emphasis on semitone clashes, may have spurred him on.

Webern and Berg, too, had their youthful Straussian adventures, which left a mark on their mature works. In the fourth of Webern's *Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 6, one finds low, groaning sonorities that are not dissimilar to the famously chilling chord that appears at the beginning of *Salome*'s final monologue (Example 11.7).

In the long run, Strauss's low-lying chord may have mattered more to Second Viennese School practice than the “kiss” chord cited by Ravel – particularly since it is generated by a verticalization (with one semitone alteration) of the short melody from the first full measure of the opera. In “Hier ist Friede,” from the *Altenberg Lieder*, Berg makes what seems to be a direct homage to Strauss's deathly harmony (Example 11.8), and a transposition of this chord appears in *Wozzeck*, just before Marie's murder (Example 11.9). Georg Büchner's text – “How the moon rises red! Like a bloody iron!” – anticipates Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* as translated by Hedwig Lachmann.

Schoenberg and his pupils also helped themselves to typical Straussian gestures – the washes and smears of orchestral color, the phrases that leap about and are cut off abruptly, the tendrils of sound scattered across the page. In a curious way, Strauss scores and Second Viennese School scores look alike even when they sound different. For example, Strauss had a habit

Example 11.9 Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, mm. 100–1

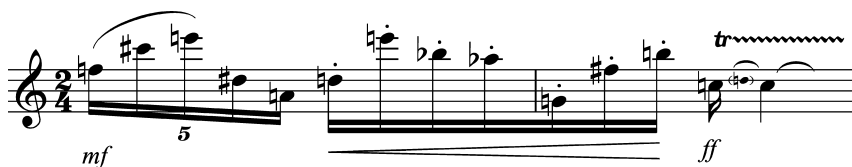
Example 11.10 *Salome*, four mm. after rehearsal no. 300, horns

Example 11.11 Schoenberg, *Die glückliche Hand*, beginning, bass clarinet and bassoons

of appending a held note or a trill to a spasmodic run of sixteenth or thirty-second notes. A famous instance is the whooping of the horns in *Salome* when Herod discovers that he has lost his ring of power (Example 11.10); compare what the bass clarinet and bassoons play at the very beginning of Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand* (Example 11.11).

Erwartung and *Pierrot lunaire* are especially rife with this nervous scurry-and-trill gesture, which, like so much in Strauss, seems to come from Wagner (compare the music for Klingsor and Kundry in Act II of *Parsifal*), and which can also be found in Mahler. It would become a favorite device of Boulez, Berio, and many other post-World War II composers, and remains commonplace in the work of even the youngest composers today. A certain lineage can be seen in Examples 11.12a–c.

Some other Straussian gestures that apparently interested the Second Viennese School: the chilling sound of muted brass playing *fortissimo*; piercing high harmonics in the double basses (compare the cistern sequence of *Salome* with the sleeping soldiers in *Wozzeck*); flutter-tonguing in the brass (compare the bleating of the sheep of *Don Quixote* with various passages in Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* and *Erwartung*);²⁵ rapid diminutions of durations (compare *Tod und Verklärung*, mm. 5–6 after X, with the final measure of *Erwartung*); chromatic or whole-tone ostinatos on the timpani (compare *Salome*, rehearsal no. 362, with *Wozzeck*, Act I, m. 295); and obsessive repetitions of intervals such as the minor third (compare *Salome*

Example 11.12a *Salome*, three mm. before rehearsal no. 228, fluteExample 11.12b Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire*, I, m. 6, fluteExample 11.12c Pierre Boulez, *Le Marteau sans maître*, V, m. 31, flute

at rehearsal nos. 306 or 350 with the second of the *Drei Klavierstücke*). Certainly, not all of these gestures and devices germinated in Strauss or were unique to him. But their rapid proliferation in Strauss's tone poems and operas from 1894 to 1914 helped to propel them into twentieth-century discourse.

Perhaps the most fascinating line of descent from Strauss to Schoenberg involves twelve-tone writing. Strauss's twelve-note subject for the "science" fugue in *Also sprach Zarathustra* is often cited alongside the opening of Liszt's *Faust Symphony* as a precursor to dodecaphony, and it is not an isolated event: surprisingly often, Strauss approaches total chromaticism by arranging triads in mutually complementary sets. The pianist Glenn Gould was among the first to notice Strauss's propensity to capitalize on "the harmonic consequences of triads that divide between them the twelve-tone capacity of the chromatic scale," although Gould went on to make the important point that Strauss was mainly concerned with contrasting his saturated harmonic field with straightforward diatonic formulae.²⁶ Tethys Carpenter, in a study of *Elektra*, demonstrated that the opera can profitably be analyzed with the pitch-class-set vocabulary one would apply to a twelve-tone score.²⁷ Returning to *Salome*, the work that Schoenberg knew so well, one notes with interest the sequence of chords that sounds in the orchestra when Herod calls for Salome's death, immediately after the "kiss" chord has sounded (Example. 11.13). D minor is the tonality associated

Example 11.13 *Salome*, five mm. after rehearsal no. 361

HEROD: Man tö - te die-ses Weib!

The musical score for Example 11.13 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line for Herod, with the lyrics "HEROD: Man tö - te die-ses Weib!". The middle staff is for the trumpet (tpt) and the bottom staff is for the trombone (trb, tb). The music is in 4/4 time and features complex harmonic textures with chromatic movement and dynamic markings such as *ff* and *mf*.

Example 11.14 *Salome*, three mm. before rehearsal no. 255

The musical score for Example 11.14 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the trombone (trb) and the bottom staff is for the double bass (db), trombone (tb), and cymbal (cbn). The music is in 4/4 time and features complex harmonic textures with chromatic movement and dynamic markings such as *f* and *mf*. The score includes triplet markings (3) and a crescendo hairpin.

with *Salome's* Five Jews – a chord of righteous indignation. The second chord is a whole-tone collection. Then a C minor triad is set against an appoggiated G \flat major triad, echoing the tritone complex with which the work began. And the lower brass play arpeggios in A \flat minor (hardly audible in performance). These chords together – D minor, C minor, G \flat major, and A \flat minor – cover eleven of the twelve tones of the chromatic scale. Another tremor of twelve-tone writing occurs immediately after Salome demands Jochanaan's head, the complementary triads being D \flat major, E \flat minor, G major, and A minor (Example 11.14). Such episodes are the presumably accidental by-product of Strauss's urge to leap across the tritone while holding on to conventional tonal relationships within opposed spheres (D minor as the supertonic of C major, A \flat minor as the supertonic of G \flat major).

We are now within hailing distance of the tonally biased twelve-tone works of Alban Berg – particularly *Lulu*. Berg, too, knew his *Salome*; after seeing the opera in Graz in 1906, he subsequently went to see *Salome* no fewer than six times when the Breslau Opera gave a run of performances in Vienna. As it happens, the Basic Series of *Lulu*, so designated by George Perle in his study of the opera,²⁸ can be broken down into almost the same complex of four triads that sounds when Herod calls for Salome's death (Example 11.15). A similar array duly appears in *Lulu's* Entrance Music (Example 11.16). This is a passage that the Strauss of *Elektra* might have composed.

Example 11.15 Berg, *Lulu*, Basic SeriesExample 11.16 Berg, *Lulu*, Prologue, m. 44

Relations between Strauss and the Second Viennese School came to a bad end. Strauss had supported Schoenberg in the early phase of his career, but the advent of atonality caused a break between the two. In 1909, Schoenberg sent Strauss his *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, having written them more or less at Strauss's request. "You are ... the person who could best risk taking somebody like myself under his protection," Schoenberg wrote plaintively in a letter.²⁹ "People in Europe believe in you ..." Strauss answered with a carefully worded statement to the effect that these "daring experiments in content and sound" were unsuitable for his conservative Berlin public. He also suggested that Schoenberg hire an orchestra to try out the pieces – the implication being that Schoenberg might be surprised to find what they actually sounded like. Despite that veiled insult, the two composers remained on friendly terms for several more years. Then, in 1913 or early 1914, Strauss wrote Alma Mahler a letter in which he suggested that Schoenberg would be better off shoveling snow than scribbling on music paper. Alma Mahler showed the letter to Erwin Stein, who decided that Schoenberg should know about it.³⁰ Schoenberg subsequently wrote to an associate of Strauss: "He is no longer of the slightest artistic interest to me, and whatever I may once have learnt from him, I am thankful to say I misunderstood."³¹ As we have seen, Schoenberg later arrived at a more balanced assessment of Strauss's place in musical history.

Games of style

Let's go back to the slithering little clarinet scale that begins *Salome*. Schoenberg, studying the vocal score on his piano, may have seen it as a crack in the façade of tonality – the beginning of the disintegration of the

tonal system into a non- or pan-tonal play of intervals. But this bifurcation does not necessarily point in the direction of atonality – that is, a conscious avoidance of the basic chords of the tonal system. Alternatively, it might suggest a new, kaleidoscopic kind of tonal harmony in which familiar chords are combined in unfamiliar ways. This ambiguity exhibits in microcosm the larger ambiguity of Strauss's legacy to twentieth-century music – to Schoenberg and his school on the one hand, and to Stravinsky, Bartók, and Messiaen on the other.

Strauss never renounced diatonic tonality, but from *Till Eulenspiegel* onwards he treated the tonal system with a certain detachment, as if he no longer believed in it wholeheartedly. Think of the textbook dominant-tonic progressions that pop up at the very end of *Der Rosenkavalier* – a surreally, almost insolently simple conclusion to an opera that is heavily freighted with harmonic complexity. Such sequences are more like images of tonality than the real thing. Leon Botstein has written: "... one might suggest that *Rosenkavalier* is itself a radical work, a harbinger of neoclassicism and an ironic deconstruction of notions of history and progress."³² In *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Strauss deliberately toyed with past styles, reducing his orchestra to Mozartian proportions and confronting his second soprano with outrageously anachronistic coloratura writing.³³ There was always a side of Strauss that wished to escape, even to undermine, the grandiose architecture of Germanic tradition. While his quest for Nietzschean lightness may be deemed a failure – in no way did he become "the Offenbach of the twentieth century," as he once claimed – he did his part to dismantle the Wagnerian apparatus and to nudge music in a fresh direction.

That one 1913 comment about *Elektra* aside, there is little evidence that Stravinsky made positive contact with Strauss's music. But musical influence is a mysterious process, proceeding sometimes through direct contact and sometimes along indirect, even unconscious lines. The Stravinsky who wrote *Petrushka* might have absorbed certain ideas that Strauss had put into the air. The flexibility of Strauss's language in the tone poems and the early operas – the abruptness of the transitions, the habit of abbreviating and truncating themes, the entire quicksilver manner that Debussy, in a review of *Ein Heldenleben*, prophetically labeled "cinematographic" – comes enticingly close at times to Stravinsky's *Petrushka* manner. Notice, for example, Strauss's savagely curt way of announcing the death of the protagonist in *Till Eulenspiegel*, with a sudden snare-drum roll that slices into the middle of a boisterous D major progression. *Petrushka*'s demise is signaled much the same way; indeed, the snare-drum roll becomes an organizing principle of the composition. Compare also the motive of Herod's command in *Salome* with one of *Petrushka*'s principal motifs (Example 11.17). The resemblance becomes even more marked when, in

Example 11.17 (a) *Salome*, six mm. after rehearsal no. 361, first trumpet; (b) Igor Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, six mm. after rehearsal no. 125, first trumpet

Example 11.18 Stravinsky, *Petrushka*, six mm. before end, trumpets

the final measures of the ballet, four trumpets are split between the keys of C major and F# major, echoing both the instrumentation and the harmonic ambiguity of the “command” figure (Example 11.18). The likeness might, of course, be entirely accidental. As Richard Taruskin demonstrates in *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, Stravinsky’s tendency to combine chords across the tritone is derived from Rimsky-Korsakov, who made a habit of the device well before Strauss wrote *Salome*.³⁴ Still, one can understand why Strauss himself thought that Stravinsky was borrowing a trick or two from him. “It is always interesting to hear one’s imitators,” he said on hearing *The Firebird* in 1912.³⁵ There, perhaps, is the source of Stravinsky’s later venom on the subject of Strauss.

The putative “neoclassicism” of *Ariadne* surely did not affect Stravinsky directly. There is no reason to doubt him when he says, in conversation with Craft, “*Ariadne* makes me want to scream.”³⁶ All the same, in a curious historical twist, *Ariadne* exerted an oblique gravitational pull on Stravinsky’s career. In 1912, the Princesse de Polignac attended the premiere of the original version of *Ariadne* in Stuttgart, and, in the words of her biographer, Sylvia Kahan, “experienced something of an epiphany.” Strauss’s economical employment of an orchestra of thirty-six instruments gave her the idea that “the days of big orchestras were over and that it would be delightful to return to a small orchestra of well chosen players and instruments.”³⁷ She proceeded to commission from Stravinsky a score requiring thirty-to-thirty-six instruments, even specifying the instrumentation. She did not mention the Strauss connection, which would surely have rubbed Stravinsky the wrong way. In response, Stravinsky made plans for a piano concerto, although it would be twelve years before the Concerto for Piano and Winds emerged. In roundabout fashion, Strauss

helped guide Stravinsky towards his neo-Baroque and neoclassical writing of the 1920s and after.

Paul Hindemith was one of a number of early-twentieth-century composers who divested themselves of an adolescent Strauss infatuation. He conspicuously mocked Strauss's middle-period, grand-operetta style in the "Duett Kitsch" of *Neues vom Tage*. Even so, aspects of the hard-edged, biting style favored by Hindemith and other young central European composers of the 1920s have pre-echoes in obscure corners of Strauss's turn-of-the-century music. In the years when Strauss was engaging with leftist, socialist, anarchist, and/or anticlerical poets such as John Henry Mackay, Karl Henckell, and Oskar Panizza, he occasionally adopted something like a "protest" voice in his songs, although efforts in this line proved to be little more than experimental dabbling. The 1901 song "Das Lied des Steinklopfers," on a text by Henckell, might easily be mistaken for the work of a radical young Berliner of the pre-Nazi years: its restless, driving rhythms, percussive piano sonorities, and angrily thrusting vocal line dramatize Henckell's statement of solidarity with the poor, hungry worker who seethes at having to "break stones / For the Fatherland."³⁸

Among more conservative-minded composers of the World War I and interwar period, Strauss remained a potent force. The old guard of German music – the likes of Franz Schmidt, Max von Schillings, Hans Pfitzner, and Joseph Marx – struggled, with mixed success, to emerge from Strauss's shadow; Pfitzner fulminated against Strauss to the end of his life, believing himself to have been unjustly overlooked. Ottorino Respighi, in *Fountains of Rome*, unabashedly borrowed from the mountain-climbing motives in Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* – a work that was admittedly fair game, given its own brazen theft from Max Bruch. Karol Szymanowski openly imitated early Strauss in works such as *Hagith*, then worked his way to a much more individual style in the Third Symphony and *King Roger*, although the ecstatic, ear-saturating climaxes of these pieces show lessons learned from *Salome*, particularly in the art of puncturing an essentially tonal surface with eruptions of dissonance.

Of particular interest is Strauss's effect on a group of partly or fully Jewish composers who thrived in the interwar years but went into eclipse with the advent of the Third Reich. This group includes Alexander Zemlinsky, Franz Schreker, Bernhard Sekles, Walter Braunfels, and Erich Wolfgang Korngold. None of these composers can be described as a follower of Strauss, but partial fingerprints can be detected in more than a few measures of their work – perhaps most obviously in Korngold's athletically leaping melodic figures and impressionistically hazy harmonies. They are all rooted in late Romanticism, but they generally avoid the inborn conservatism of Pfitzner and company, not least in their choice of subject matter.

Example 11.19 *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act II, one m. after rehearsal no. 25, celesta and harp

Strauss's scandalous success in setting Wilde's *Salomé* apparently inspired a slew of Wildean ventures: Sekles's 1913 ballet on the tale "The Birthday of the Infanta," Schreker's 1908 pantomime of the same title, and, most notably, Zemlinsky's operas *A Florentine Tragedy* and *Der Zwerg*. Now that such eclectic, energetically middle-of-the-road music is escaping decades of neglect and finding a new audience, Strauss, by extension, comes to seem a less marginal figure.

Perhaps the most improbable "Straussian" of the mid twentieth century was Olivier Messiaen. There is little direct evidence that Messiaen had any high regard for – or knowledge of – Strauss, although it is arresting to find this statement from him in Joan Peyser's biography of Pierre Boulez: "There are people who go unperturbed through change. Like Bach. Like Richard Strauss."³⁹ And, coincidentally or not, the opening scale of *Salomé* reappears as Mode 6 in Messiaen's textbook *Technique de mon langage musical*. Messiaen probably heard much about Strauss from his teacher Paul Dukas, who admired the German composer and was admired by him in turn. (Strauss even attempted to arrange performances of Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* during the Nazi period.)⁴⁰ Dukas and Strauss had in common a freewheeling approach to harmony that featured tonal chords in mercurial, shimmering sequences – a habit that both composers shared with Debussy and Rimsky-Korsakov. While it is difficult to isolate unambiguously Straussian elements amid the welter of turn-of-the-century mannerisms that fed Messiaen's omnivorous language, a comparison of Examples 11.19 and 11.20 suggests that the young Frenchman may have harbored a secret love for *Rosenkavalier*. The harmonies are considerably more dense in the Messiaen example, but the constructive principle – stringing together major and minor triads – is much the same. Notice also the tritone complex that underpins the sequence. A faint *Rosenkavalier* atmosphere returns several times in Messiaen's later music, notably in *Des Canyons aux étoiles*. When I hear the brilliant climax of "Bryce Canyon et les rochers rouge-orange," or the lush, glittering music of "Les Ressuscités et le chant de l'étoile Aldébaran," I always picture, for a moment or two, the Presentation of the Silver Rose.

Example 11.20 Olivier Messiaen, “Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu,” m. 5

The musical score consists of three staves in 9/16 time. The top staff, marked *ppp* and *8va*, contains a series of chords. The middle staff, marked *p* and *f*, contains a series of chords. The bottom staff contains a melodic line with a fermata.

Strauss in recent decades

After 1945, Strauss's influence effectively went underground for several decades. The composer seemed entirely eclipsed as a force in contemporary music, his reputation doubly damaged by his associations with Nazi Germany and by the seeming victory of a teleological, progress-oriented vision of music history. Stravinsky's slashing judgments in his conversations with Craft were hardly controversial; they confirmed the prejudices of most young composers and music intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s. The maverick opinion was Glenn Gould's, in his remarkable essay "Strauss and the Electronic Future": "It is entirely likely that Strauss, a man who seemed remote from the time in which he lived and totally unconcerned about the future, will, because of the new orientation of that future, gather a greater admiration than he ever knew."⁴¹

The new orientation that Gould had in mind was a less regimented and linear conception of the unfolding of musical history. Electronic media, the pianist predicted, would mean that new generations of composers, musicians, and listeners would be "exposed to the most astonishing variety of idiom without necessarily having to encounter it in any specific social situation." Indeed, in the later 1960s, composers began to avail themselves of a wider array of stylistic sources. Tendencies variously named "pluralism," "polystylistics," "New Simplicity," and "New Romanticism" came to the fore. Tonality enjoyed something of a resurgence, to the extent that it had ever faded. And Strauss's playful, unpredictable, often sardonic manipulation of tonality again received respectful attention. The sound-world of a work such as *Salome* – its polymodality, its intermittent polytonality,

its abrupt juxtapositions of common chords and more or less unheard-of dissonances, even its seeming lapses into vulgarity – might be seen not merely as a historically transitional phenomenon but as a vital response to an enduringly multiplicitous stylistic condition.

One important difference was that composers born in, say, 1935 or 1945 no longer displayed the aversion towards Strauss's sumptuous orchestration that seemed automatic among their elders. Copland, in *Our New Music*, spoke for most members of his Stravinsky-besotted generation when he wrote, "To us the general sound of Strauss's orchestra is over-rich ... [His scores] have little relationship to the more sober and precise orchestration of the present day."⁴² Latter-day American composers such as John Corigliano, David Del Tredici, John Adams, and Aaron Jay Kernis display a quite different mindset; they often take the attitude that the capabilities of the late-Romantic orchestra are, in a sense, to be enjoyed to the max, and with them Strauss's orchestration once again becomes a plausible if not dominant model. An ironic yet potent quotation from *Salome* – the threatening theme of Jochanaan – appears in Act II of Adams's *Nixon in China*, where it is associated with the totalitarian aesthetic of Mao Zedong's China. David Del Tredici, in his sequence of works on the subject of Alice in Wonderland, revels in fatty, protein-rich, quasi-Straussian textures and timbres; his fellow composer Robin Holloway cited Del Tredici's "super-Strauss/Respighi orchestration of a common chord" as an instance of musical surrealism, of a composer becoming "original-through-clichés."⁴³ Holloway himself is unafraid to take inspiration from Strauss in his music. The late Nicholas Maw felt much the same. Certain delicately ravishing effects in recent works of Osvaldo Golijov – in particular, the opera *Ainadamar* and the cello concerto *Azul* – reflect a study of the twilight tonality of *Daphne*.

The latter-day cult of Strauss is not limited to sybaritic Anglo-American neo-Romantics. German composers, too, have been lending him new ears. Even at the height of the post-war avant-garde, Hans Werner Henze showed an inclination to taste, on occasion, forbidden Straussian fruit – as at the opulently orchestrated, *Elektra*-like climaxes of *The Bassarids*. In his autobiography, Henze identified himself as a Mahlerian and denied taking direction from Strauss, yet he accepted one colleague's description of his music as "Strauss turned sour."⁴⁴ Members of younger generations generally remain circumspect about their progenitor, but the orchestral music of Wolfgang Rihm, among others, exhibits an awareness of how the Second Viennese School language emerged from the primordial Straussian ooze. For example, Rihm's violin concerto *Lichtzwang* (1975–6), written in memory of Paul Celan, contains a smattering of Straussian and/or Mahlerian gestures that would have been more or less unthinkable in preceding

decades: flamboyantly leaping and plunging figures for unison horns or trombones, self-consciously tragic utterances that descend in consecutive octaves, stagey dissonances that betray their tonal components. Logically enough, when the conductor Kent Nagano became the music director of the Bavarian State Opera, he commissioned Rihm to write *Das Gehege* (2006), a one-act companion to *Salome*.

Even so committed an avant-gardist as Helmut Lachenmann – a composer whose works exhibit no surface similarity to Strauss’s – has concluded that the “leader of the moderns” is due for a reconsideration. In 2002, Lachenmann made some notes about Strauss’s *Alpine Symphony*, in anticipation of a concert by the Ensemble Modern in which the *Alpine* would follow Lachenmann’s nearly hour-long 1984–5 piece *Ausklang*. The idea for the pairing came from the composer himself, who, it seems, had long been fascinated by Strauss’s largest orchestral work. He proposed that the piece be heard as a psychologically risky adventure in which tonality functions as a “railing,” a provisional path through a sonic wilderness:

The important thing is not to stigmatize aesthetic regression with contempt as being a vice of the subscribing audience, but to recognize and see through it with the highest degree of attentiveness, intelligence, and enthusiasm. By intelligent listening, the “effort of perception” that goes far beyond observing variations of sound, we can decide whether the *Alpine Symphony* with its “nature-like” liveliness and demonic, theatrical thunder is only a romantic work or – perhaps in contrast to its creator’s intention – also a tragic, instructive, enlightening piece ...

Lachenmann also offers the provocative suggestion that post-war avant-garde works have more in common with Strauss’s nature-painting than one might expect. He cites Stockhausen’s *Gruppen* as “a kind of *Alpine Symphony* with calls from the various pinnacles in the middle” – presumably alluding to the famous sequence in which six-note brass chords ricochet among three spatially distinct orchestral groups. Lachenmann leaves us with the intriguing suggestion that Strauss’s works, far from offering a dead end, may present a half-unexplored landscape for those seeking new paths:

... [T]he dialectics of today’s aesthetic situation seem to create a new false sense of security in seemingly inhospitable environments – the escape from the familiar has become the escape from oneself into falsely heroic zones. The adventure consists of recognizing the regressively colored aesthetic landscape as a “wasteland” or perhaps as a “glacier” which one can slide down or climb up in order to find oneself in unknown zones.⁴⁵