

## 2 Strauss's compositional process

WALTER WERBECK

TRANSLATED BY JÜRGEN THYM

### Principles and methods

Richard Strauss was a composer who, like any other member of his profession, made a living from the sale and performance of his works. With the printing of his music he offered it to the public, and with performances he saw to the unfolding of its public life. Whatever preceded the completion of the scores was, according to Strauss, inconsequential. Granted, the genesis of his works was not just a private matter – many other people were involved, including friends, colleagues, librettists, publishers, proofreaders, copyists, and translators – but he did not believe it of interest to the general public.

On the other hand, Strauss was a composer who, like his great model Richard Wagner, wanted his audiences to understand his music. When working on tone poems, he did not shy from offering progress reports to newspapers,<sup>1</sup> nor from arranging publications in which musicians or journalists explained the programmatic content. (To be sure, Strauss was much more taciturn with his operas. Fearing that other composers might preempt him, he never divulged the subject matter of his operas while working on them.) As his success increased, Strauss found himself confronted, again and again, with questions pertaining not only to the content of his music – the poetic ideas of the works – but also to his method of composition. Surprisingly, he never refused to answer such questions, but readily responded to them. The student of Strauss's compositional process thus finds a wealth of useful texts, ranging from detailed answers to a questionnaire<sup>2</sup> from c. 1895 (reprinted several times in a paraphrased and abbreviated version) to a manuscript (dated by Willi Schuh "circa 1940") with the title *Vom melodischen Einfall* (*On Melodic Invention*).<sup>3</sup> In these writings Strauss laid out the essential musical elements that concerned him during the act of composing and explained in detail, albeit more rarely, his specific working methods.

At the outset, a few remarks on his music are in order. The invention of themes and their elaboration into larger complexes stood at the center of Strauss's compositional practice. In accordance with the late-nineteenth-century trend towards "brevity of the musical idea,"<sup>4</sup> Strauss emphasized

again and again that what came to him initially were themes of two to four measures, and that the act of composing consisted of expanding these themes to eight, sixteen, or thirty-two measures. It has been reported that he likewise instructed his few composition students to develop a short melodic structure into “a larger melodic arch of sixteen to thirty-two measures.”<sup>5</sup> Strauss's consistency is remarkable: over a period of nearly fifty years he advised composers to invent “Classical” themes with periodic metric structures. This tendency can be attributed first to his own Classical training, and second to the advice Brahms gave him in Meiningen<sup>6</sup> to shape his themes as eight-measure phrases according to the pattern of Schubert's dances. Naturally Strauss's enthusiasm for Mozart also played an essential role.

In comparison with thematic content (melody), other musical parameters receive noticeably less discussion in Strauss's statements about his working method. But in 1918, in a conversation passed on by Max Marschalk, the composer assigned harmony a major role. “[T]he disposition of harmonies extending over, say, a movement or an act” occupied him intensely; he applied “the greatest of care ... in the choice of keys. I determine them for long stretches in advance, and finding the way to move from one to another is often quite labor-intensive.”<sup>7</sup> Obviously Strauss still considered melody and harmony – the traditional principal categories of composition since the beginning of the eighteenth century – to be the most essential elements of his music. In contrast, his use of orchestral color – an aspect of his music traditionally emphasized as particularly innovative – is not mentioned at all in Strauss's statements.

In Strauss's working methods, spontaneous inspiration apparently played an essential role with short works such as songs. “Reading [the poem] gave rise to the musical inspiration. I immediately jotted down the song” – thus Strauss to Marschalk on his composition of Achim von Arnim's poem “Stern” (“Star”) (TrV 237, 1).<sup>8</sup> Longer works, however, called for a different *modus operandi*. Strauss mentions this in an interview published shortly before his fiftieth birthday in the *Neues Wiener Journal*:

My music notebook accompanies me all the time ... and as soon as an appropriate motive occurs to me for a theme on which I am working at the moment, it will be recorded in my most faithful companion. The ideas I notate are only sketches to be elaborated later, but before I write down even the smallest of preparatory sketches of an opera, I am occupied with the text for six months. I dig in and study all situations and characters down to the smallest detail ... From my notes I fashion sketches, which later are put together for a piano reduction; I make changes in the sketches and work through them four times – this is the most exhausting part of composition. What follows then – the orchestral score, the grand colorful elaboration – is for me relaxation, it refreshes me.<sup>9</sup>

This passage, besides referring to work on themes and with libretti, focuses especially on the aspect of a precisely calculating economy of composition. The composer, it seems, worked according to fixed rules and followed a detailed strategy of musical production. Because of this rationalized method of composition, Strauss's critics have tended to refer to him as a skillful but uninspired "fabricator" (*Macher*). Technique, as Theodor W. Adorno put it, "has become independent of what matters."<sup>10</sup> And Stefan Zweig got the impression that even inspiration came to Strauss like clock-work.<sup>11</sup> The sketches, however, many of which have been preserved, tell a different story.

### Documentation of the compositional process

Strauss's description of his process of composing operas includes four stages: intensive study of the libretto; drafting of musical sketches; linking the sketches together in a *particell* (the term that, for brevity's sake, I will use instead of "piano score"); and, finally, the writing of the orchestral score. In instrumental works, the earliest stage, Strauss's "presketch planning,"<sup>12</sup> is omitted – that is, the habit of adding musical commentaries to libretti and copies of libretti even before the first musical sketches. Such commentaries could exist for printed or copied texts in the case of piano-accompanied songs, but a *particell* was not necessary in this case. The fundamental documents of any study of Strauss's compositional process are the sketches, and, in the case of larger, more complex works, the *particell*, which formed the basis for the orchestral score.

For Strauss the act of composition was finished with the completion of the *particell* (which he referred to not only as "piano score" [not to be confused with "piano reduction"] but also as "sketch").<sup>13</sup> Only when extending the study to include the process of orchestration (as we shall do below) does one need to consult the scores. The post-creative status of orchestration explains how Strauss could call this stage "relaxation" that "refreshed" him; the difficult work had been completed. Indeed, the fair copies of piano-accompanied songs, or orchestral scores, which Strauss wrote on the basis of the *particell*, are nearly always without mistakes: all traces of earlier troubles have been expunged. Their calligraphy communicates grace and elegance, in stark contrast to the hard work evident in earlier sketches. Richard Wagner may have been the model for planning the fair copies, especially the two-tiered work before the writing of the score.<sup>14</sup> Like Strauss, Wagner worked with individual sketches and a *particell* (the so-called *Orchesterskizze* or orchestral sketch) in preparing the score. And,

like Wagner (especially after *Siegfried*), Strauss moved from sketches to partcell as soon as possible, and he furnished the partcell with sufficient detail so that the writing of the score did not cause any difficulties.

Two impediments, however, hamper the study of Strauss's compositional process on the basis of sketches and partcells. First, the material has not come down to us in its entirety. The principal body of evidence is the 135 Garmisch sketchbooks, including several partcells. The sources in Garmisch, however, constitute less than half of the original stock – a circumstance attributable to Strauss's casual attitude towards compositional drafts.<sup>15</sup> Once a work was completed, he considered all preparatory work superfluous. Granted, he preserved musical sketches, as a rule, but he also liked to give them away as presents: complete sketchbooks and partcells, as well as single leaves removed, if necessary, from larger units. Occasionally, especially in the difficult economic times after World War II, Strauss used such manuscripts as a currency substitute. Separate notations on instrumentation were generally not preserved; they have come down to us only in exceptional cases. Any kind of statements about Strauss's compositional process and instrumentation on the basis of sketches need therefore to be qualified, as a matter of principle, by keeping in mind that the sources are not complete.

Second, Strauss scholars have studied the sources of compositional process only in isolated cases, on the basis of a few works or groups of works.<sup>16</sup> A complete systematic study remains to be written. In particular, we do not know how the young Strauss developed his method of composition in the crucial period of the mid 1880s. The first Garmisch sketchbook does not begin until 1886, and there are no sketches of the larger works composed earlier, with the exception of the Violin Concerto. Yet the materials for this latter work, together with the sketches for larger orchestral works following 1886, provide important clues concerning those years when the young composer, after a long search, finally found his own way. It appears that the development of an unmistakable musical language was closely linked to the development of a characteristic compositional method.

### **Compositional methods in the early works: the Violin Concerto**

Important clues to how Strauss sketched in his early years are contained in the drafts for his Violin Concerto, jotted down in a mathematical exercise book by the seventeen-year-old schoolboy around the turn of the year 1881–2.<sup>17</sup> Here a brief remark on the handwriting is necessary. Thus far,

unfortunately, neither the handwriting nor the musical script of the young Strauss have been studied in detail. Judging from letters of Strauss to Ludwig Thuille that have been published in facsimile,<sup>18</sup> one can conclude that the handwriting of the composer underwent drastic changes after 1879, and it probably was no different with his musical script – the illustrations in the 1999 catalogue (showing examples from before 1874 and from 1880) at least suggest such an interpretation.<sup>19</sup> We do not know exactly when, how, and why Strauss's writing style changed. Schuh remarked that “the strictly controlled and consciously painstaking way of composing” began “in the fall of 1878.”<sup>20</sup> In 1880 Strauss wrote his First Symphony, taking up the largest instrumental genre of his time and (in his own assessment) leaving behind the phase of small-bore composition. It is conceivable that in these circumstances he not only changed his handwriting but rethought his compositional methods. In any case, the sketches to the Violin Concerto already show the handwriting and style of notation of the following works, and they hint at working methods that Strauss did not fundamentally alter in subsequent years. For example, in the illustration on p. 6 of the catalogue, Strauss notates on two staves the music of mm. 190–221 from the first movement. He jots down essential elements of the music, melodic parts, and harmonies, and, by way of abbreviated or written-out instrumental notations, he lays out the orchestration. It seems that the draft served as the foundation for the score (the role that would later be played by the *particell*), even though it functioned at the same time as a sketch. As is shown on p. 5 with the notation for mm. 168–89,<sup>21</sup> Strauss crossed out an initial sketch for mm. 177–80, and on p. 6 there are improvements in the figurations of the violin. Typical for Strauss's method of sketching is the use of abbreviations: for example *bis*, meaning “twice” (p. 5 at the beginning), or *1–4 in Moll* (p. 6), by which Strauss meant a repetition of mm. 191–4, now in G minor.

All things considered, the draft of the Violin Concerto serves the functions of both the later sketches and the later *particells*: it is a document of composition and, at the same time, a preparation for the score. We do not know whether additional sketches preceded the draft, nor do we know whether Strauss was already differentiating between sketches and *particell* by the time he was seventeen. Worth noting are a few deviations from the score (e.g., the violin figures in the solo cadenza); even after completing the draft, Strauss changed some details. Finally, two additional observations: in the violin cadenza Strauss notates fingerings – proof that he was not only familiar with the technique of playing the violin but also with orchestral instruments in general; and if, as seems clearly the case, he drafted the music during classes at school, then already in these early years he was not dependent on a piano for composition.<sup>22</sup>

## Compositional methods in mature works: sketches

After the Violin Concerto, Strauss's compositions for large orchestra and for chamber ensemble became increasingly complex. Without doubt sketches did exist for works as substantial as the two Symphonies, *Wandrer's Sturmlied*, the First Horn Concerto, the Piano Quartet, and the *Burleske*. But nothing is known about such materials thus far – the Garmisch sketchbooks begin with the work on *Aus Italien* (1886). We can conclude with a reasonable amount of certainty that from 1896 Strauss separated sketch and *particell* into two compositional stages. For that reason I will first describe only the sketches, followed by the *particells*.

We do not know when Strauss started to use the sketchbooks typical for him: small notation booklets, mostly in oblong format. The first Garmisch sketchbook of this type carries the number 4 in Trenner's list, but since Strauss himself gave this item the heading "Skizzen I," it indeed could have been the first "real" sketchbook.<sup>23</sup> The date is approximately 1897; Sketchbook "II" also originated in this year – indeed, as Strauss noted, on September 10, his third wedding anniversary. Such precise dates of sketches or sketchbooks are unfortunately rare; an exact chronology of Strauss's sketches has been, and still is, an urgent necessity for Strauss scholars.

Before using the booklet that he labeled I, Strauss drafted his music (aside from what appears in the math exercise booklet) either on single sheets that later were bound together (Trenner's Sketchbook 1 is such a collection) or in an upright sketchbook (Trenner 2) that possibly was bound together by Strauss himself. But even after small-format sketchbooks became the norm, Strauss still sometimes used individual sheets to write down sketches of any kind; of those sheets presumably only a few have come down to us (such leaves could have been cut out of sketchbooks).

Strauss sketched his music mostly in pencil. But there are also ink sketches, and those drafts do not necessarily follow the pencil sketches in terms of chronology. A clear differentiation between pencil sketches for early drafts and ink sketches for later stages of composition develops only gradually.

## Musical sketches

The entries in the sketchbooks can be divided generally into musical sketches and verbal texts. Concerning the musical sketches, the following can be said:

First, when Strauss sketches music, he focuses exclusively on the essential constituent parts of the composition: theme/motive/melody and harmony.

Example 2.1 Sketchbook 1, p. 47: *Don Juan*, mm. 53–6, harmonic skeletonExample 2.2 Sketchbook 1, p. 49: *Don Juan*, mm. 52–5, passagework in the strings

He drafts on two staves (rarely on fewer, and even less often on more than two staves), producing one-voice motives or themes, two-part skeletons or polyphonic passages (concentrated as a rule on just a few main voices), and themes with harmonic progressions (the most common type), but sometimes only chord progressions and series of sounds. What he sketches – whether horizontal or vertical events – can, in general, lay claim to thematic significance. In other words, Strauss's sketches confirm the impressions gained from his statements cited earlier: his compositional work involves the traditional main elements of music – melody and harmony.

Second, he generally omits what seems to him superfluous: meter, clefs, key-signatures, and indications for instrumentation (e.g., timbre), articulation, dynamics, and tempo. Such details about which he was certain could be left out of the sketches without causing problems. Surprisingly, one searches mostly in vain for sketches of the typical Straussian figurations that imbue his music with its characteristic élan. However strongly such figurations set the tone in his scores, during the creative process they were clearly of secondary import. The ornamentation of his music was for Strauss a process comparable to orchestration: it gave the music its characteristic décor, but it did not count as musical substance and thus was not fixed until the writing of the score. Exceptions do exist, in cases where the figurations have particular import, as in *Don Juan*, mm. 52ff. Here Strauss first sketched the most important material, the harmonic successions in the woodwinds, then followed two pages later with a draft of the fast string passages. Both drafts are already very close to the final version (Examples 2.1 and 2.2).

Third, composition is sometimes easy, sometimes difficult for Strauss. Unsuccessful passages are crossed out, or Strauss abandons a sketch and



Figure 2.1 Sketchbook 2, pp. 71–3: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, sketches for “Von den Hinterweltlern.”

starts afresh: either on the same staff or system, on the next, or sometimes on a different page. As in the Violin Concerto, literal repeats are abbreviated with *bis* and measures that appear later in a different context are marked *vi-de* or with other symbols or numbers. Evidently Strauss encountered major difficulties only rarely, but he was noticeably less at ease with sections in slow tempo (for example in *Tod und Verklärung* or *Ein Heldenleben*) than with fast passages.

Strauss's working method may be shown briefly in the earliest surviving sketches to *Also sprach Zarathustra* in Sketchbook 2 (Figure 2.1). On the page preceding the example (p. 70) he had sketched only the Nature motive ( $c'-g'-c''$ ) in triple meter and then mm. 428–30 of the upper voice



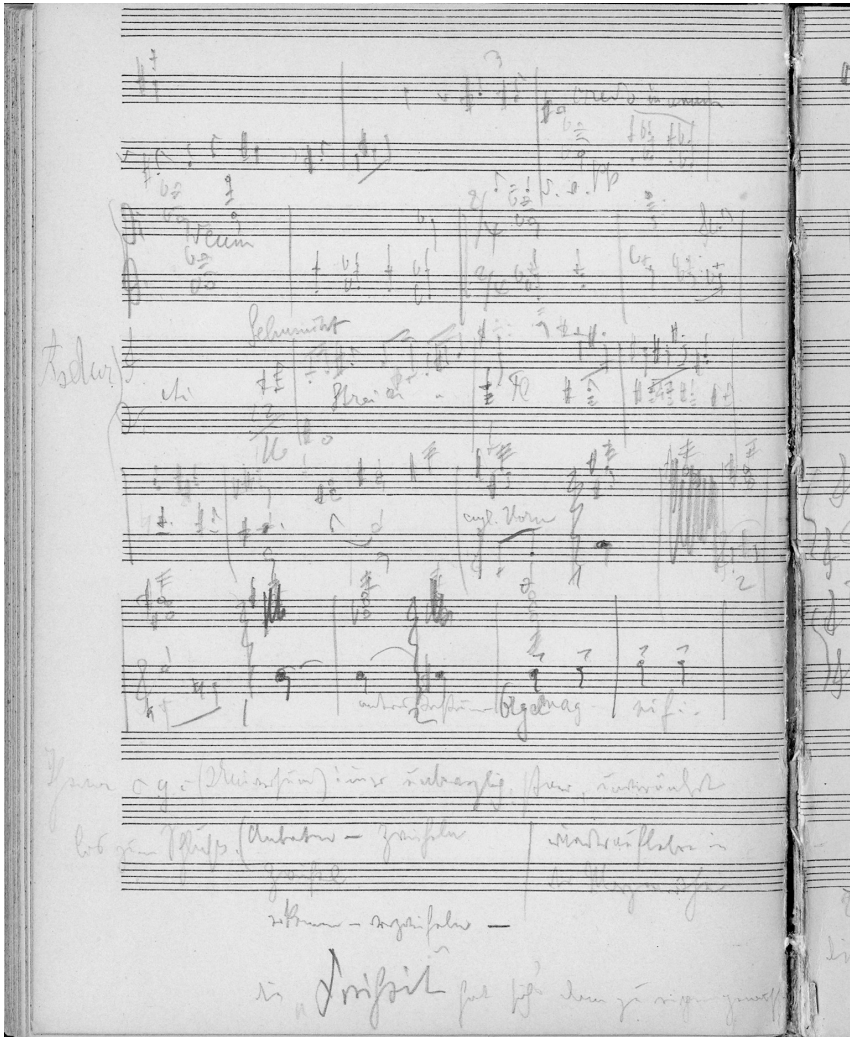


Figure 2.1 (cont.)

of the violins. On p. 71 begins an extended draft of the music after the introduction. At the beginning of the top of the upper system, he writes out mm. 22 and 23 as in the final version. (Since the bass motive in m. 23 is derived from the  $A^b$  major theme of the *Hinterweltler* [“backworldsmen”], it is likely that the theme had been already drafted in sketches that did not survive.) Then he sketches m. 24 – with a bass rhythm of two quarter notes followed by a half note instead of the final version’s quarter note followed by a dotted half – and m. 25, again almost completely identical with the final version. Measure 26 is notated in a system of three staves; as in a *particell*, indications for instrumentation appear in the upper and middle staves – perhaps a spontaneous idea for a combination of brass

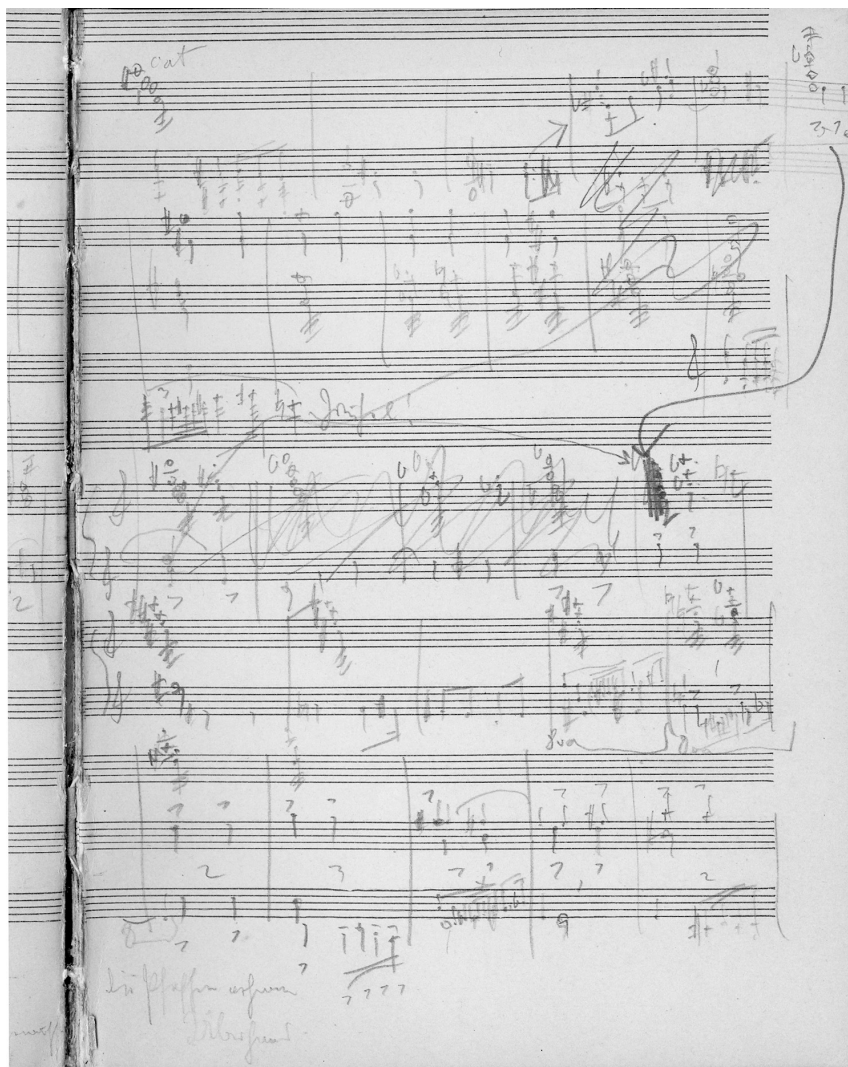


Figure 2.1 (cont.)

instruments. But Strauss kept only the stopped trombones, replacing the stopped horns with bassoons and the continuous F minor tremolo in the bass with an eighth note with rests. For mm. 29–30 Strauss first sketched a harmonic progression from F minor to  $A\flat$  minor. What he later called the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* (“motive of longing”) was to appear in this key for the first time in its distinct form; at the end the tone  $E\flat$  was marked with a fermata. Then the sketch stops. Strauss notated, at the bottom of the page, two Gregorian themes – a Magnificat verse and a Credo intonation – and the indication *Asdur* ( $A\flat$  major). In this way he clarified that these themes were to be incorporated in the  $A\flat$  major sphere of the *Hinterweltler* theme and that the  $A\flat$  major music could begin after the fermata.

But Strauss was not satisfied with the simple harmonic progression from F minor via A $\flat$  minor to A $\flat$  major. He crossed out the A $\flat$  minor measures, so that the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* would not be too closely connected with the *Hinterweltler* harmonies. On the next page we find an improved version, one that was to be of major significance for the entire piece: the exposition of the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* in B minor. (Two systems later Strauss explicitly writes the word *Sehnsucht* above the motive.) Thus was born the harmonic conflict between the tonalities of C and B that is central to *Zarathustra*. The motive now ends on D $\sharp$  (the same pitch as before, enharmonically), two Credo intonations ensue, and then the A $\flat$  major theme can begin. Strauss's remark *Asdur, etc.* at the beginning of the third system confirms that the theme had been drafted before and was to be incorporated at this point.

To help keep track of musical fragments, Strauss began with Sketchbook 4 to supply numbers to sketches related to each other. That practice was especially helpful when pieces from separately sketched sections were pasted together – for instance in *Don Quixote*, a tone poem for which Strauss sketched individual “episodes” without knowing whether they would make it into the final version. Later, however, Strauss abandoned the practice of numbering sketches.

Fourth, in general we can distinguish between continuity drafts and individual sketches. Continuity drafts notate more or less extended sections in one stroke. Often Strauss succeeds with them right away – as for instance on the first page of sketches for *Till Eulenspiegel* (Figure 2.2). Granted, the slow introduction has not been conceived; the piece was to begin in a fast tempo (which however is not indicated in the sketch) with the clarinet theme (mm. 46ff. of the final version).<sup>24</sup> Strauss needed two attempts to find the correct metric position of the horn; the first try was abandoned after four measures. But then the knot unraveled: the music from m. 6 to m. 45 was jotted down at one fell swoop.

Strauss did not always succeed in producing such quick and sure drafts, and many times did not intend to; the sketching practice with *Don Quixote* mentioned earlier is a case in point. Thus we frequently encounter fragmentary sketches: short passages from different sections of a piece. Some of these are passages where Strauss got stuck in his continuity drafts; in others he picks up material already drafted in order to add more detail or try out thematic combinations. Often in such sketches, themes or motives are jotted down that Strauss invented for a specific composition but for which there was not yet a definitive position. They can be inventions of his own as well as quotations. The Gregorian melodies in *Zarathustra* belong in this category (Strauss used only the first five tones of the Magnificat verse, but the complete Credo intonation). Another example is the “doubt” motive

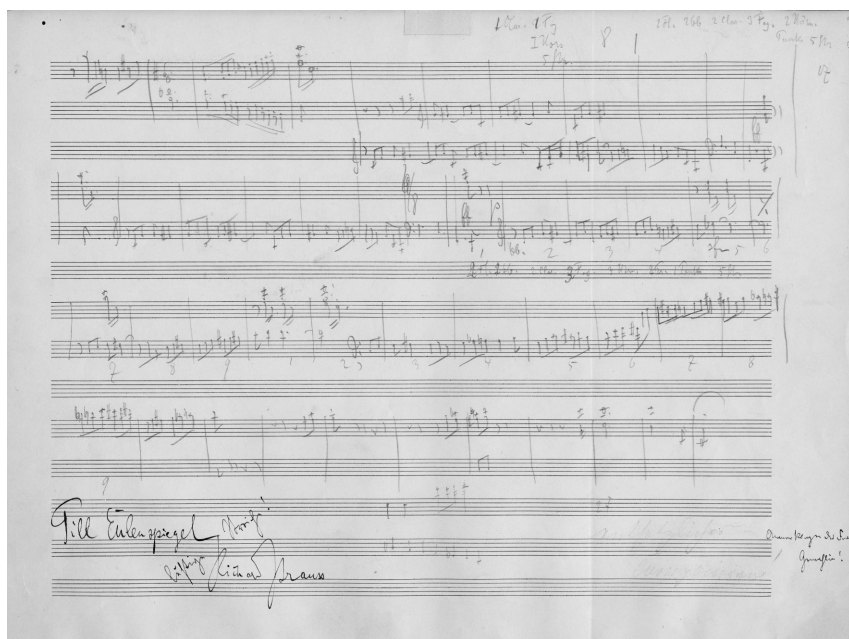


Figure 2.2 Sketchbook 3, p. 17: *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, continuity draft of opening.

notated in the middle of p. 73 of Sketchbook 2 (Figure 2.1), which Strauss liked so much that shortly thereafter he included it in the sketches. (In the end this motive was introduced much later, *fortissimo* in the trombones, at the end of *Von den Freuden- und Leidenschaften* ["Of joys and passions"], mm. 150–3.) Strauss also wrote out a *Lebenstrieb* ("Urge to life") motive and a theme labeled *niedrige Leidenschaften* ("base passions"), but he used only the former.

In his sketches Strauss did not restrict himself to themes for compositions he was working on at that moment. "Sometimes a theme comes to me," he said in an interview of 1902,<sup>25</sup> "and later I discover the poetic vestment for it." In other words, sometimes he notated motives as a stockpile without knowing whether and when he might use them. Occasionally Strauss sought inspiration by way of such notations.<sup>26</sup> In some sketchbooks he established lists of such themes.<sup>27</sup>

Fifth, we earlier considered the emphasis Strauss placed on thematic invention and the elaboration of short motives to longer periods of eight, sixteen, or thirty-two measures. Sketches documenting such a compositional process are rare in the manuscript sources before 1900 – presumably an indication that Strauss had no particular difficulties in these years with the elaboration of themes. He sketched his themes, in general, within continuity drafts, on which he worked for a considerable time, as shown for instance by the *Liebesszene* ("Love Scene") in *Ein Heldenleben* (mm.



288ff.): no fewer than ten pages of Sketchbooks 4 and 5 are devoted to this section. The difficulties have less to do with metric issues than with motivic divisions; for instance, Strauss needed several attempts until he found the continuation of the theme in m. 296. Still, the evidence suggests that Strauss thought in regular metric units: a sketch of more than sixty measures for a *Freundschaftstanz* (“Dance of Friendship”) in 6/8 meter in D major (Sketchbook 4, Sketch 19, pp. 34–7)<sup>28</sup> shows Strauss thinking exclusively in eight-measure segments.

Finally, when Strauss sketched songs, he focused completely on the vocal part, usually with the complete text added (or with sporadic gaps). Again, the melody dominates. Remarkably, several songs (e.g. Op. 15, Nos. 2 and 3) are sketched a whole tone higher than they appear in the final version. The sketches are sometimes significantly different – harmonically, melodically, and rhythmically – from the fair copies. The piano part is only rarely indicated; sometimes Strauss drafts the prelude (for instance for Op. 17, No. 5), sometimes only the postlude (Op. 17, No. 6). Even the harmonic support for the melody can be left out entirely or present only in rudiments; the chromatic bass progression of Op. 19, No. 4 (Sketchbook 1, mm. 27–30, p. 40) is an exception. We have to assume that as a rule these sparse jottings were enough for Strauss. However, we cannot rule out – especially given the incomplete state of the song sketches – that there were other drafts before the respective fair copies. In any case, the dates given in Franz Trenner’s work list for the genesis of the songs refer only to their fair copies, and tell us nothing about how long Strauss took to compose the songs.

### Textual sketches

Time and again Strauss entered textual annotations in the sketches of his instrumental works. Generally they provide indications of harmony and form, as well as, for the tone poems, of the program. The comments can range from merely a word (often abbreviated) to longer passages. Indications of dynamics, tempo, and instrumentation are rare – again confirming the impression that such parameters were not counted by Strauss as musical substance, however strongly they shape his music.

The language of these texts is characteristic. Strauss either uses musical-technical terms (e.g. “C dominant,” “development,” and “intensification”), or he mixes musical terms with programmatic indications (in the drafts of the tone poems). The latter texts have a dual function: on the one hand, the composer names specific compositional strategies on the basis of individual sketches; on the other, he ascertains the particular connection between these strategies and the program. When we find in the sketches for *Tod*

und Verklärung a text such as “at the end of the introduction the dreams become restless, but dynamics intensify only a little,”<sup>29</sup> Strauss assigns a sketch to a specific position in the program; at the same time, he uses the comment as a concrete instruction to himself (to hold back the dynamics in spite of the growing restlessness of the music).

Strauss's texts can be divided into several groups depending on position and content. A first group includes texts that belong to the notational sketch in which they are located. They consist mostly of names for motives, indications of keys, and remarks pertaining to structural function. In the process of composing, Strauss gives himself reminders of how to proceed with his work – how to fashion junctures, how to connect sketches notated non-contiguously, and how to revise drafts. A second group consists of texts that fit the sketches to which they belong, but that refer at the same time to larger structural sections.

A last group is particularly remarkable. In texts placed at the beginning of longer works or sections, Strauss laid out, often at considerable length, the structural and, if necessary, programmatic plan of all the music to follow. The concept of the finale of the Violin Sonata (jotted down in Sketchbook 1 at the beginning of the respective drafts) is envisioned as follows:

Violin sonata, last movement, first theme E $\flat$  major, second theme area [Seitensatz] E $\flat$  major with scherzando motive leading to middle theme in C major, this theme without cadence combines with the first theme in C major and finally moves to A $\flat$  major, secondary theme as cantilena with scherzando as a brief development; then middle movement in E $\flat$  major slides into the principal theme, which concludes the movement in brilliant 6/8 meter.<sup>30</sup>

For a piece of chamber music, as here, the only “program” is a structural plan. But for a tone poem such as *Don Juan*, Strauss, after sketching the first theme, combines the formal plan (motives, keys, function of sections) with programmatic cues:

from then on wild and jovial the pleasure theme as C sharp major cantilena, interrupted by the violas when the first Don Juan theme suffers exhaustion, initially both sound together, with a bold leap he jolts the first theme to the dominant of C, then a frivolous theme ensues in a wild hustle and bustle, merry jubilation is interrupted by sighs of pain and pleasure, then development, always fortissimo and greatest intensification suddenly a sobering-up, desolate English horn, love and pleasure themes sound confusingly, interrupted by new spells of longing and pleasure, finally a new love motive ensues very enthusiastic and gentle, then suddenly another eruption of the first theme, grand (?) dashing coda, tempestuous conclusion.<sup>31</sup>



In his preliminary planning, Strauss treated both works structurally in a similar way. There are several themes, a development, and a brilliant tempestuous conclusion. He succeeded in realizing these plans, however, only in the finale of the Violin Sonata. The structural conception of the tone poem was to be drastically changed.<sup>32</sup>

## Particells

Straightforward particells have come down to us only since *Guntram*. We do not know whether they existed for earlier works. There is evidence (of which more below) speaking against particells for, say, *Macbeth*, *Don Juan*, or *Tod und Verklärung*. In any case, Strauss tried out the use of a particell with *Guntram* and subsequently continued the practice. With his next tone poem, *Till Eulenspiegel*, however, it was not easy for him to distinguish between sketch and particell. A clear distinction between the two stages of composition emerges in the tone poems only with *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

Work on sketches and particells was not always linked to particular notational formats. *Guntram* and *Feuersnot* were written down in oblong particells, while *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, *Ein Heldenleben*, and the *Alpensinfonie* were sketched in upright particells.<sup>33</sup> The particell of *Till Eulenspiegel* is contained on separate leaves in oblong format that later were bound together, and the (unfortunately incomplete) particell of *Symphonia domestica* is part of the contents of Sketchbook 8.

Strauss's particells have a dual function: they represent the final stage of composition proper, and they serve as blueprint for the fair copy of the score. In the first function, they are documents of the compositional process; in their second role, they provide information about Strauss's method of orchestration.

To begin, a few remarks on the first function:

First, particells are the first continuity drafts of a given work from beginning to end. Passages that are not contained in the sketches are notated in the particell.

Second, in general, the particell contains much more information about the composition than sketches. By using at least two and frequently three staves continuously, Strauss was able to record many more voices. Indications of articulation and dynamics, however, continue to be rather sparse. Even figurations (melodic decorations) are often only hinted at. In many such instances Strauss did not come to a final decision until the writing of the score.

Third, all particells of the tone poems have, to some extent, the character of a sketch. While working on the particells, Strauss continued to

sketch – in other words, to compose. He used the particell to sum up and review the material sketched thus far. (That is the reason why, for instance, he occasionally jotted down in the particell for *Zarathustra* the page numbers where the passage at issue could be found in the sketchbook.) When there were difficulties – when the connections did not fit, when the formal functions did not develop properly, when harmonic progressions needed to be changed, etc. – then the particell became a sketch, until Strauss was satisfied and able to continue the work with the existing drafts. The sketch character of the particell is particularly strongly pronounced with *Till Eulenspiegel*, but in his other tone poems Strauss often rejected and revised certain passages at this stage. Moreover, even after the completion of the particell the composition itself was occasionally subject to revision. For instance, *Also sprach Zarathustra* began in the particell with a sustained perfect fifth in the horns (C–G); in the third measure the organ pedal and double basses were to sound their sustained C and the bass drum was to perform a roll (it is possible that Strauss indicated a tremolo also for the first measure; see Figure 2.3).<sup>34</sup> And sometimes Strauss included in the particells of his tone poems additional programmatic clues that he did not transfer to the score, such as the remark *fromme Schauer* (“pious shiver”) at the beginning of the third system.

## Orchestration

We now come to the second function of the particell, its role as immediate precursor to the orchestral score. Strauss wished not only to write his scores cleanly and clearly but also to arrange the staves as efficiently as possible: i.e., not to have any blank staves and, in the case of sparsely orchestrated passages, to have several systems on one page. That required a considerable amount of planning before writing any one page of the score, and many traces of this preparation can be found in the particells.

Scott Warfield has observed that Strauss's scores up to *Tod und Verklärung* were not optimized.<sup>35</sup> During these years, Strauss always notated one system per page, showing all staves required for the piece even when they were not needed. This can be seen in the facsimile of the autograph score of *Tod und Verklärung*, where one also finds the entire instrumentation notated at the beginning.<sup>36</sup> He changed this practice only with *Guntram*, where on the first page there are several systems and no indication of the complete instrumentation. The new method had several advantages, but it required working from a particell.

Beginning with *Guntram*, Strauss prepared to write a page of a score by first jotting down how many systems with how many staves were needed,

The image shows a page from a sketchbook with handwritten musical notation for the opening of 'Also sprach Zarathustra'. The title at the top reads 'Die Sonne geht auf. Das Licht ist in der Welt oder die Welt im Licht.' The score consists of several systems of staves, with various instruments indicated by numbers and abbreviations. The right margin contains a list of instruments and their parts, such as '2 Flöten', '2 Oboen', '2 Klarinetten', '2 Fagotte', '2 Hörner', '2 Trompeten', '2 Posaunen', '2 Pauken', '2 Becken', '2 Stabspiele', '2 Celli', '2 Kontrabässe', '2 Violinen', '2 Violen', '2 Violoncelli', '2 Kontrabässe', '2 Violinen', '2 Violen', '2 Violoncelli', '2 Kontrabässe'. The page is numbered '31' in the bottom right corner.

Figure 2.3 Sketchbook 3, p. 31: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, partcell of opening orchestration.

and then calculating whether the number of staves allowed a second system on the page. For that purpose he recorded, at the appropriate places in the partcell, the orchestration and the staves needed: he notated the instruments, one below the other, in abbreviations, beginning with the woodwinds and concluding with the strings (either, as in the case of *Till Eulenspiegel*, between the staves of the partcell, or, more frequently, in the margins – see Figures 2.2 and 2.3). This shorthand can be found for the first time on a leaf of the sketches for *Don Juan* (Sketchbook 1, p. 48), but it was used systematically in the partcells of *Guntram*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ein Heldenleben*.

Because his orchestra became constantly larger, Strauss decided, beginning with *Symphonia domestica*, to perform these calculations on separate sheets rather than in the particells. Only a few such leaves are extant, but they are important documents for studying the process of orchestration.<sup>37</sup>

Once the instrumentation and number of systems per page had been decided, Strauss, in order to use the space optimally, calculated the number of measures per system and counted the measures continuously in the particell.<sup>38</sup> Only when this was done could the writing of the score page begin. As Josef Gregor has testified, Strauss notated one measure at a time from top to bottom and then drew the measure line.<sup>39</sup>

Such a *modus operandi* required an astonishingly sure grasp of each measure of his orchestral score. For the first page of the *Eulenspiegel* sketches, a rudimentary draft of the first forty-or-so measures sufficed as a particell; additional preparatory work was not necessary (Figure 2.2). However, miscalculations occurred frequently – either Strauss forgot instruments or he misjudged the length of measures. For the beginning of the *Zarathustra* score, for instance, Strauss reckoned in the upper left margin on one staff for three oboes, a staff each for the E♭ clarinet and B♭ clarinets, a staff for three bassoons, and one for contrabassoon; then two staves each for four horns, four trumpets, and trombones and tuba together; one staff each for timpani and bass drum; two staves for organ; and five for strings (Figure 2.3). That adds up to twenty staves, but Strauss jotted down “(21)” – either miscalculating, or including a staff for the cymbal (missing in the list of instruments). And there was another oversight: instead of a tuba he used a third trombone (which however did not affect the number of staves). For the second page of the score, which began after nine measures on the first page with the antepenultimate measure of the particell's first system, Strauss jotted down the number of staves under the second system “(21) Fl. 5.–6. Horn 2 Tuben” and below that “(24)”: meaning that in addition to the twenty-one staves required for the first page, three more staves were needed for the second: one each for flutes, two additional horns, and two tubas.

Even when Strauss strictly observed the order of compositional phases from sketches via particell to score, he did not have to complete one phase before beginning the next. *Zarathustra* again provides a good example. Having begun the first sketches presumably in June or July, 1895, he started work on the particell on December 7 of the same year, at a time when some material remained to be sketched. He wrote the first page of the score on February 4, 1896, the birthday of his wife, before the particell (and thus the process of composition) had been completed. Thus it seems that for a while Strauss worked simultaneously on the sketches, the particell, and the score

of the tone poem. On July 17, 1896 the particell was completed; only five weeks later, on August 24 (at 4 p.m.), did Strauss put finishing touches on the score.

### **Strauss's compositional process in opera**

The compositional *modus operandi* that Strauss developed in the years up to 1900 served him for the rest of his life. All the evidence gathered thus far supports this hypothesis, even though not all sketches and drafts have been studied carefully. In particular, for his major works he produced sketches and particells, as had been his habit since *Guntram*. Although the relationship between voices and orchestra as well as dramaturgical conciseness were central in the composition of operas (the genre that dominated his work beginning with *Salome*), Strauss did not change his methods of sketching music, developing it into particells, and, finally, committing it to a precisely planned score. Moreover, the documents reveal that composition was not always easy for Strauss; on the contrary, he occasionally had to struggle for a satisfactory final product.

In place of the early structural and programmatic plans of his instrumental works, we encounter in his operas, as noted before, commentaries written into the libretti. Strauss notated motives, melodic lines (using letters or pitches, sometimes already with rhythmic shapes), rhythmic ideas (rendered with rhythmic symbols above individual syllables), keys (ranging from chords and brief ornaments to key areas for longer stretches), tempi, meter, harmonic functions and progressions, instruments, formal functions, and caesuras. Important examples have been discussed in the recent Strauss literature.<sup>40</sup> Keys seem to play a special role throughout; frequently even the first indications hold good in the final product. Melodic inspiration, unlike key, does not appear to have had a dominating role in Strauss's initial creative process when composing an opera – at least as far as these marginal comments in the libretti reveal.

But it may be doubted whether the notations that Strauss jotted into his libretti on first reading (and that were so admired by Karl Böhm and other contemporaries)<sup>41</sup> were indeed immediate inspirations. Without question Strauss began thinking about the music of an opera as soon as he knew the subject matter or plot. Keys, motives, and perhaps also themes were drafted before he had read a line of the text. The melody of the concluding duet of Octavian and Sophie in *Rosenkavalier* was already composed without knowledge of the text, and he had to ask Hofmannsthal to adjust the text to the pre-existing melody.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Strauss was already creatively prepared when reading a libretto; he was immediately able to determine

the rough tonal disposition as well as important motives because he had carried them in his head for a long time. But of course some rhythmic and melodic ideas may have been recorded as spontaneous inspirations – in which case he was able to rely on his experiences as a composer of *lieder*.

All things considered, the originality of Strauss's ideas is as astonishing as the diversity of his music. Such an immense and diverse *œuvre* was possible because Strauss understood how to compose with extreme calculation. With his happy combination of profound musical expressivity and the utmost rationality in production, he far surpassed even his great model Richard Wagner.