

Richard Strauss, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896)

Abstract

Born in Munich to a wealthy and musical family, Richard Strauss (1864-1949) worked as a conductor in Munich and Weimar before becoming chief conductor at the Berlin Court Opera in 1898. While the modern program Strauss staged in Berlin hardly corresponded to the conservative tastes of Wilhelm II, he was nonetheless highly regarded as a conductor and promoted to general music director in 1908, a position he held until 1919. As a composer Strauss is mainly known for his operas such as *Salomé* (1905, also featured in this chapter), *Elektra* (1909), and *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911). Using his professional standing, Strauss actively campaigned for improving composers' earnings by advocating stronger copyright protection. When a society for the protection and licensing of musical copyrights, the *Genossenschaft Deutscher Tonsetzer* (GDT), was founded in 1903 (after earlier efforts had failed), Richard Strauss became its chairman. In the interwar period, he moved to Vienna to direct the State Opera, but resigned in 1924 and returned to Germany. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, he agreed to serve as president of the *Reichsmusikkammer* [Reich Music Chamber], allowing himself to be co-opted by Nazi cultural policy. Strauss apparently hoped that this would enable him to push through cultural reforms that he had long advocated. However, this proved to be an illusion, and Strauss was dismissed in 1935 after a letter he wrote to Stefan Zweig, expressing criticism of the "Aryanization" of German cultural life, was intercepted by the Gestapo. Yet Strauss, who was sometimes described as "Wagner's heir," was never banned or ostracized by the Nazi regime (although Goebbels called him a "decadent neurotic") and Strauss' works continued to be performed in Germany through the 1930s and 40s. He died in 1949 at his home in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's eponymous work, Richard Strauss' symphonic poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* [Thus Spoke Zarathustra] was composed in 1896, when Strauss served as chief conductor at the Munich Court Opera. The premiere took place in Frankfurt am Main, however, as the audience there was considered more open-minded towards both Nietzsche's ruminations and Strauss' music. Nietzsche, one of the most original and provocative thinkers of nineteenth-century German philosophy, had echoed the cultural critique of "German philistinism," and thereby found support among many progressive artists of his time: Gustav Mahler, for one, incorporated vocals drawn from Nietzsche's book *Zarathustra* into his 3rd Symphony. Richard Strauss' piece, a "tone poem" meant to evoke the content of Nietzsche's philosophical novel, is divided into nine parts, roughly corresponding to chapters in Nietzsche's book: 1. Introduction, or Sunrise; 2. Of the Backworldsmen; 3. Of the Great Longing; 4. Of Joys and Passions; 5. The Song of the Grave; 6. Of Science and Learning; 7. The Convalescent; 8. The Dance Song; 9. Song of the Night Wanderer. Featured here is the famous first part, "Sunrise," which became immortal thanks to its use in Stanley Kubrick's cinematic masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

Source

Source: Richard Strauss, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1896. Performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Fritz Reiner, RCA Victrola, 1967.

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