



Richard STRAUSS

Burlesque for Piano and Orchestra

Richard Georg Strauss (11 June 1864 – 8 September 1949) was a German composer, conductor, pianist, and violinist. Considered a leading composer of the late Romantic and early modern eras, he has been described as a successor of Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt. Along with Gustav Mahler, he represents the late flowering of German Romanticism, in which pioneering subtleties of orchestration are combined with an advanced harmonic style. Strauss's compositional output began in 1870 when he was just six years old and lasted until his death nearly eighty years later. While his output of works encompasses nearly every type of classical compositional form, Strauss achieved his greatest success with tone poems and operas. His first tone poem to achieve wide acclaim was *Don Juan*, and this was followed by other lauded works of this kind, including *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, *Ein Heldenleben*, *Symphonia Domestica*, and *An Alpine Symphony*. His first opera to achieve international fame was *Salome* which used a libretto by Hedwig Lachmann that was a German translation of the French play *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde. This was followed by several critically acclaimed operas with librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Die ägyptische Helena*, and *Arabella*. His last operas, *Daphne*, *Friedenstag*, *Die Liebe der Danae* and *Capriccio* used libretti written by Joseph Gregor, the Viennese theatre historian. Other well-known works by Strauss include two symphonies, lieder (especially the *Four Last Songs*), the *Violin Concerto in D minor*, the *Horn Concerto No. 1*, *Horn Concerto No. 2*, his *Oboe Concerto* and other instrumental works such as *Metamorphosen*. A prominent conductor in Western Europe and the Americas, Strauss enjoyed quasi-celebrity status as his compositions became standards of orchestral and operatic repertoire. He was chiefly admired for his interpretations of the works of Liszt, Mozart, and Wagner in addition to his own works. A conducting disciple of Hans von Bülow, Strauss began his conducting career as Bülow's assistant with the Meiningen Court Orchestra in 1883. After Bülow resigned in 1885, Strauss served as that orchestra's primary conductor for five months before being appointed to the conducting staff of the Bavarian State Opera where he worked as third conductor from 1886 to 1889. He then served as principal conductor of the *Deutsches Nationaltheater und Staatskapelle Weimar* from 1889 to 1894. In 1894 he made his conducting debut at the Bayreuth Festival, conducting Wagner's *Tannhäuser* with his wife, soprano Pauline de Ahna, singing Elisabeth. He then returned to the Bavarian State Opera, this time as principal conductor, from 1894 to 1898, after which he was principal conductor of the Berlin State Opera from 1898 to 1913. From 1919 to 1924 he was principal conductor of the Vienna State Opera, and in 1920 he co-founded the Salzburg Festival. In addition to these posts, Strauss was a frequent guest conductor in opera houses and with orchestras internationally.

The ***Burleske in D minor*** is a composition for piano and orchestra written by Richard Strauss in 1885-86, when he was 21. The work's original title was *Scherzo in D minor*, and it was written for Hans von Bülow, who had appointed Strauss assistant conductor of the Meiningen Court Orchestra. However, von Bülow considered it a "complicated piece of nonsense" and refused to learn it. He said the piano part was "Lisztian" and "unplayable", particularly for a pianist with a small handspan (Strauss says that von Bülow could barely reach an octave). Strauss rehearsed the work with the Meiningen Orchestra, conducting and playing the solo part himself, but then set it aside. He wrote to von Bülow: "Given an outstanding pianist, and a first-rate conductor, perhaps the whole thing will not turn out to be the unalloyed nonsense I took it for after the first rehearsal. After the first run-through, I was totally discouraged." In 1889, Strauss became acquainted with Eugen d'Albert, who liked the work, although he suggested some cuts and changes to the piano part. Strauss rededicated the revised work to d'Albert, who premiered it under its new title *Burleske*, at a convention of the General German Music Association at Eisenach on 21 June 1890, in the same concert as the premiere of Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration*. The word "Burleske" translates as "farce" or "mockery".

The piece starts with a theme introduced on timpani and answered by the orchestra. The piano then enters in a state of high excitement. A second, more lyrical Brahmsian theme emerges, followed by waltz-like measures not unlike the waltzes from *Der Rosenkavalier*. The work ends quietly, again on the timpani. It takes about 20 minutes to perform. The piece is scored for piano solo and an orchestra of piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in B-flat, 2 bassoons, 4 horns (2 in F, 2 in D), 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings.