

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Der Rosenkavalier

(The Knight of the Rose)



Music by Richard Strauss

**Libretto by
Hugo von Hofmannsthal**

Opera in Three Acts

**Setting: Vienna
Time: Mid-eighteenth century**

Characters

The Marschallin (soprano)..... Kiri Te Kanawa
Octavian, her young lover (mezzo-soprano)..... Anne Howells
Baron von Ochs, her cousin (bass) Aage Haugland
Herr von Faninal, a rich merchant (baritone)..... Jonathan Summers
Sophie, his daughter (soprano) Barbara Bonney
Marianne, her duenna (soprano) Phyllis Cannan
Valzacchi, an intriguer (tenor) Robert Tear
Annina, his niece and accomplice (alto) Cynthia Buchan
Host (tenor) Paul Crook
Police Commissar (bass)..... Roderick Earle

Conducted by Georg Solti

The Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London

Première performance at the Semper Opera House in Dresden, Germany on January 26, 1911

Synopsis

ACT I

The Boudoir of the Marschallin

As morning sunlight streams through the windows of her boudoir, the Marschallin — Marie Therese, Princess von Werdenberg — is embraced by her young lover, Octavian (Count Rofrano). Her husband, a Field Marshal, is away on military duty. On hearing a young servant boy bringing chocolate for the Princess, Octavian dives behind the bed curtains until the child departs. Though neither Octavian nor the Princess are ready to break up, the Princess cannot conceal from herself that, in spite of Octavian's current love for her, the disparity in their ages will soon cause him to look to women younger for love.

Loud voices are heard in the antechamber, and again Octavian goes for cover. The Marschallin's country cousin, the Baron von Ochs, enters, trailed by several footmen. The Baron has come to follow up on a letter he had sent to the Marschallin, but which she has not bothered to read. She tactfully extracts the details — the Baron is engaged to Sophie von Faninal, the daughter of a nouveau riche arms dealer. In exchange for the Baron's title, the Faninal family will add to his impoverished estate a handsome dowry. The Baron has come to the Marschallin to suggest a suitable candidate to present the customary silver engagement rose for Sophie.

Octavian, meanwhile, has come out of hiding dressed as a chambermaid, "Mariandel," and catches the ever-wandering eye of the Baron. The Baron flirts shamelessly with the disguised Octavian, inviting "her" to dinner. He brags about his amorous exploits, one of which resulted in the birth of an illegitimate son, Leopold, who serves as his personal servant. Hoping to keep her lover in the picture, the Marschallin deceptively explains that "Mariandel" is also a bastard child, the sister of Octavian, Count Rofrano. Since the families are related, she suggests his services as the bearer of the rose.

The Marschallin's morning activities begin and, among her visitors are Valzacchi, a shady character, and his niece, Annina, who wish to sell their "black papers" detailing the local gossip and scandal. The Marschallin declines, and sends them on to the Baron, who is busy negotiating a prenuptial agreement with a notary. Meanwhile, the Marschallin is attended to by three orphans — her hairdressers, who, she complains, make her "look old;" a tenor who sings a lovely aria; and a salesman trying to sell her dogs and a bird. "Mariandel" escapes, and the Baron enlists Annina and Valzacchi to locate the shy servant girl.

When the room is cleared, the Marschallin muses sadly on her waning youth. Octavian returns (dressed again in men's clothes), but he is stunned to find that her mood has totally changed. The Marschallin recounts her youth, when she was forced into a loveless marriage fresh from the convent, and claims that her affair with Octavian is fleeting and that one day he will tire of her. Octavian protests, but she persists, and forces him to leave without a kiss. Starting up out of her reverie, the Marschallin tries to call him back, but is too late. She summons Mohammed, and sends Octavian the silver engagement rose to take to Sophie von Faninal.

ACT II

The Faninal home



Heralded by much excitement and an entourage of servants, Octavian enters the Faninals' ornate foyer and presents the ceremonial silver engagement rose to Sophie. Marianne, the girl's duenna (governess), chaperones a conversation between the young people, during which they are immediately drawn to each other and fall hopelessly in love.



The Baron arrives to be presented to Sophie. He admires the luxurious surroundings, but his free hands and impudent manner disgust Sophie. As soon as the Baron leaves to draw up a formal marriage contract with her father, Sophie begs Octavian to help her out of the marriage. Octavian promises to prevent Sophie from marrying the Baron, but their scheme is secretly observed by Valzacchi and his companion, Annina, whom the Baron has employed as spies. Their cries bring the Baron from the next room. When he enters, Octavian proclaims that Sophie will never marry him. A duel between Octavian and the Baron ensues. The Baron suffers a surface wound to his arm, but he wails that he has been murdered. Sophie tells her father that she never will marry the Baron. Furious, Faninal dismisses Octavian, orders a doctor to examine the Baron, and proclaims that his daughter will marry the Baron von Ochs dead or alive. A tearful Sophie flees the room.

Octavian is determined to win Sophie for himself. For that purpose he decides to make use of Annina and Valzacchi, who are so disgusted by the meager pay given them by the Baron, that they readily fall in with Octavian's plans.

The Baron, meanwhile, rapidly recovers once his wound has been dressed and he has drunk some of Faninal's good wine. After the crowd has dispersed, and the Baron is alone for a moment, Annina enters with a letter from "Mariandel," the chambermaid, promising to meet with him the following night. The Baron is delighted over the new conquest he believes himself to have made but, being a tightwad, he refuses to tip Annina, and she is determined to get even.

ACT III

A private dining room at an inn, near Vienna

With the help of Valzacchi and Annina, Octavian has rented a room in an inn which is fitted with trap doors, blind windows and secret panels. The three schemers prepare the room for a private dinner between the Baron and the lovely "Mariandel." Octavian checks to see that all his trick players in the room are in place — and Baron von Ochs walks right into the trap.

The Baron and "Mariandel" arrive for their private dinner. As Octavian coyly leads her suitor on, grotesque heads pop out of trap doors and secret panels, terrifying the Baron. Annina, in disguise, runs in, shrieking that the Baron is the father of her many children. Several small children then appear, crying "Papa, Papa."

The Baron calls for city officials, but his actions prove especially damning — being caught in a house of "ill repute." He turns to Valzacchi to verify his identity, but he is instead admonished. He then wildly asserts that "Mariandel" is his legitimate fiancée. Faninal and Sophie enter, disclaiming the Baron, and proving that he is lying to the commissioner. Faninal immediately dissolves the marriage agreement.



The Marschallin, summoned by one of the Baron's servants, quickly assesses the whole situation and forces the Baron to renounce Sophie. She then quietly restores order. The Baron begins to realize the farce that has been pulled on him and takes it in relatively good humor. However, when he tries to slip out unnoticed, he is presented with a bill for the night.

Sophie, Octavian, and the Marschallin are left alone. A lovely trio takes place, in which the Marschallin, lamenting that she must relinquish her young lover so soon, accepts the truth and gives the bewildered young man to Sophie. Alone, the lovers embrace, marveling at their dream come true. After they leave, Mohammed is sent in to retrieve Sophie's handkerchief.

Richard Strauss

Born: June 11, 1864, Munich, Germany; Died: September 8, 1949, Garmisch, Germany



Richard Strauss (no relation to the Viennese Waltz family) almost single-handedly carried the Wagnerian opera tradition and the Romantic Lisztian tone poem into the twentieth century. Outstanding in two major areas — tone poem and opera — he is also one of the great composers of Lieder (German classical art songs).

Strauss started composing by the age of six, having received basic instruction from his father, Franz, a virtuoso horn player. This was, however, his only formal training. The elder Strauss instilled in his son a love of the classical composers, and his early works follow in their path. Strauss' first symphony premiered when he was just seventeen, his second (in New York) when he was twenty. These early works showed serious miscalculations of form but, with each new work he showed an increasing mastery.

Strauss spent two terms at Munich University, studying philosophy, aesthetics and art history. He left the university to begin a conducting career and, in 1885, succeeded Hans von Bülow as conductor of the orchestra in Meiningen. From this vantage point he developed a sense for orchestration that was unrivaled. For the next forty years he conducted orchestras in Munich, Weimar, Berlin, and Vienna.

In 1885 Strauss met Alexander Ritter, a composer and poet, who turned him towards the school of Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner. It took him some time to master this new form, but the tone-poem *Don Juan* (1889) immediately established Strauss as an important figure. In it, he found his artistic self, particularly in the creation of astonishing, unheard-of orchestral effects, which were to occupy him throughout most of his career. He also developed a new sense of dramatic movement, which he derived from Wagner, but which was more quickly paced. *Don Juan* inaugurated a series of tone poems, which keep their hold in the standard repertoire: *Tod und Verklärung* (1889); *Till Eulenspiegels Lustige Streiche* (1894); *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1896); *Don Quixote* (1897), perhaps his most profound orchestral work, and *Ein Heldenleben* (1898), which influenced later generations of modernists in its orchestration and use of dissonance.

By the turn of the century, Strauss began to shift his focus to opera. While in Paris he was approached by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a Viennese poet and playwright. With Hofmannsthal as his librettist, they created two revolutionary and shocking works: *Salome*, based on Oscar Wilde's controversial play, and *Elektra*, Hofmannsthal's version of the classical Greek tragedy. In these works, the intense emotions and often lurid narrative elicited a more daring and demanding musical language, full of extreme chromaticism and harsh timbres. His next opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*, turned to a more focused, almost neoclassical approach.

By the twenties, Strauss seemed like a ghost from the past. His librettist, Hofmannsthal, had died suddenly, and Strauss was thrown to searching for new librettists, many of whom were of varied quality. As a result, the operas, as well as the instrumental works, became increasingly inconsistent in quality.

By the thirties Strauss settled into a comfortable place in German musical society. In 1933, when Hitler came into power Strauss was chosen to replace Bruno Walter and Toscanini in conducting engagements, and was appointed president of Reichsmusikkammer by Goebbels. He eventually broke with the Nazis on moral ground. The fact that his grandchildren were part-Jewish made him keep his criticisms to himself; however, the Nazis intercepted his private letters and he was forced to resign from his post. His silence and his continued residence in Germany caused him problems during the postwar de-nazification programs. Strauss's final work, *Four Last Songs* (1948), was a masterpiece and a culmination of his song-writing. Strauss died peacefully at the age of 85, following several heart attacks. He was left virtually penniless in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Der Rosenkavalier



Der Rosenkavalier was to become Strauss' fifth opera and remains one of the most popular operas in today's repertoire, despite being extremely long (all stage productions are cut to some degree, and even then it's three hours or more of music) and a storyline that, upon examination, is a trifle thin. It looks at the whole spectrum of love from every perspective — youthful idealism, consenting adultery, predatory lechery and autumnal regrets. Strauss' music is exquisite, with tenderness, sophistication and sentimentality, and a healthy dose of near-slapstick.

Before composition, its subject matter was hotly debated by Strauss and his librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Originally Strauss had intended to write a third in his series of tragic operas, coming at the heels of his controversial operas, *Salome* and *Elektra*. The two settled, however, on a romantic comedy, a work he described more in the style of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Hofmannsthal collected characters and scenarios with which to construct the libretto for *Der Rosenkavalier*. He lifted material from 17th and 18th-century playwrights (and from the diary of Empress Maria Theresa), and from several of Molière's plays, with their parallels to domestic social farces and class struggles. For this somewhat "light" fare, however, Strauss composed some of his most luxuriant music, filled with colorful waltzes and some lovely ensemble pieces. Though gavottes and minuets would have been more in keeping with the period, the waltz themes give the work that subtle thing called atmosphere, and make passages, like the finale to Act II, the most significant music for the stage of opera that has been penned in Germany since Wagner.

Following its 1911 Dresden premiere, *Der Rosenkavalier* became the operatic sensation of the year — the reaction was nothing short of triumphant. The opera was a complete success with the public and was a great financial boon for the house; it is reported that tickets were sold out almost immediately. The response from music critics was overall very positive, although some responded negatively to Strauss' use of waltzes, a music form that was out of fashion at that present moment. Despite this, the opera became one of Strauss' most popular works during his lifetime, remaining a part of the standard repertory today.

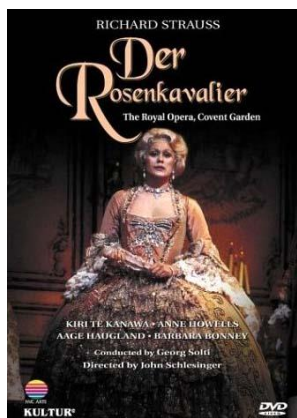
With the exception of Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Der Rosenkavalier* was the only opera to come out of Germany since the death of Wagner, and which also appeared to secure a definite hold upon the opera repertoire. But, in the season of 1917-18, it was taken out of the repertoire on account of the war in Europe. It had been given twenty-two times at the Metropolitan Opera, since its production there late in 1913.

As a consequence of *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss' music changed from the rich, tonal, romantic expressions of the late nineteenth century to astringent modernism. It also marked the beginning of a rich period of collaboration with the Austrian writer, Hugo von Hofmannsthal. After *Der Rosenkavalier* the team completed four great operas and worked together on several smaller projects.

Strauss called *Der Rosenkavalier* a "comedy for music" and, so far, it is the one opera by Strauss which, after being heralded as a sensation, has not disappeared through indifference. Critics have belittled Strauss' music from the 1920s and 1930s but, in recent years, we now listen to the mature Strauss with a new appreciation. *Der Rosenkavalier* remains a part of the standard opera repertory to this day with a total of 17 different productions in 15 cities being planned for the 2009-2010 international opera season.

Der Rosenkavalier: The Video (1986)

Starring Kiri Te Kanawa, Anna Howells, Aage Haugland, Barbara Bonney



This 1985 opulent production from Covent Garden marked the 25th anniversary of Sir Georg Solti's spectacular debut at Covent Garden, conducting this very opera. The production is a nearly perfect combination of music, singers, staging and conducting. Directed by Oscar-winning film director, John Schlesinger (*Midnight Cowboy*), everything on display here is excellent — the singing, Strauss' characteristically rich and luxurious music, Solti's brisk and refreshing pace, the traditional, gorgeous costumes and magnificent sets (Covent Garden is positively extravagantly decked out). Even the camerawork is great.

This is Kiri Te Kanawa's first performance in London in the role of the Marschallin, and it deserves to be ranked among her finest achievements. She literally steals the show, even though the entire cast is superbly chosen and works together as a fine-tuned ensemble. Te Kanawa is stunning in terms of her acting and her singing — and she's so beautiful to look at. The final trio brings

tears to your eyes.



*Der Rosenkavalier (with Pavarotti)
Art print by Al Hirschfield*