

Richard Strauss, Don Juan, Op. 20

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was a German composer and conductor, born in Munich to a musical family; his father was the principal horn player at the Court Opera. Strauss' love of this instrument could be traced back to his father, who helped him with his compositions. His musical studies began at age 4 on the piano and then violin at age 8, with his first composition written at age 6. From ages 11 to 16, he studied composition with Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer. However, he only attended one year at the University of Munich to study philosophy and art history, not music.



Strauss' conducting career began in 1883 as an assistant conductor to Hans von Bülow in the Meiningen Court Orchestra, where von Bülow heavily influenced his conducting style. He then served as the third conductor of the Munich Opera from 1886 to 1889, director of the Weimar Court Orchestra from 1889 to 1894, second and then chief conductor at Munich from 1894 to 1898, conductor, and later director of the Royal Court Opera in Berlin from 1898 to 1919. He also served as the musical codirector

of the Vienna State Opera from 1919 to 1924. Strauss was appointed as the president of Germany's *Reichsmusikkammer* (Chamber of State Music) from 1933 to 1935, during which he had to comply with the Third Reich. He moved to Switzerland in 1945, but returned to Germany in 1949, where he passed away at the age of 85.

Strauss is most well known for his mastery of orchestral writing, which includes his skilled instrumentation, rich harmonies, and ability to describe ideas through music (i.e., programmatic writing). He is part of the German Romanticism era, along with Gustav Mahler. Strauss was heavily influenced by the music of Richard Wagner, as well as Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt.

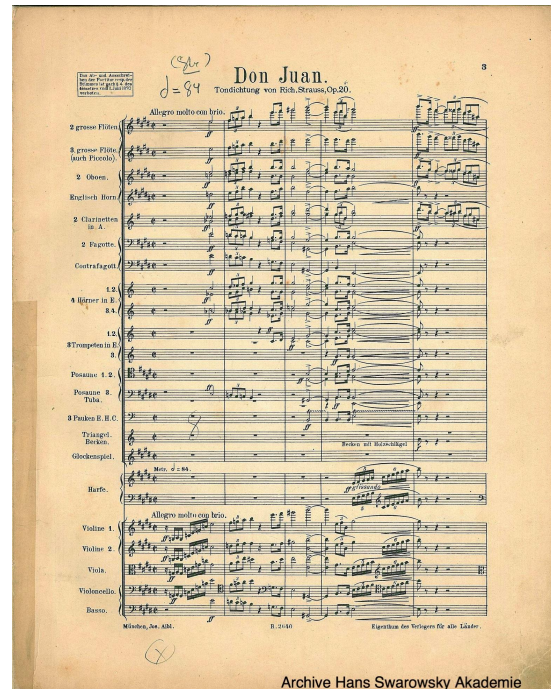
He embraced the tone poem genre, which was influenced by composer and violinist Alexander Ritter. *Don Juan* cemented his success as a composer, and he was referred to as Wagner's heir. His other tone poems include *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, *Ein Heldenleben*, *Symphonia Domestica*, and *An Alpine Symphony*.

Don Juan, Op. 20, is a tone poem for orchestra that he composed in 1888. Its premiere took place in Weimar on November 11, 1889. This was Strauss' first big success, which he achieved at only 25 years old, while serving as *Court Kapellmeister* and conducting the orchestra of the Weimar Opera. He continued to

conduct it throughout his career and even included it in his first recordings in 1917.

The piece is based on the character of Don Juan, a fictional character who spent his life seducing women. Don Juan is also known as Don Giovanni, famously portrayed in Mozart's opera of the same name. Strauss' tone poem is based on the play *Don Juans Ende*, which itself is based on an unfinished retelling of the Don Juan story by the Austrian poet Nikolaus Lenau. Lenau's story depicts Don Juan's promiscuity as a result of his determination to find the ideal woman. Failing to do so, he ultimately surrenders to melancholy and wills his own death.

Strauss expertly showcases the story through the evocative music. The piece uses a full orchestra, including auxiliary/extra instruments such as English horn, contrabassoon, and harp. The music uses both rondo and sonata form principles. The story is expertly showcased through the evocative music. The first theme, showcased in the opening of the piece, is full of vigor and spirit. Following this is a romance played by a solo violin. Next is the oboe, playing a melody that represents a liaison between Don Juan and his lover. This is interrupted by horns, playing a more heroic theme. These themes start weaving together but then the piece veers into quieter and more melancholic music, illustrating Don Juan's tragic fate. There is no grand ending, just like in Lenau's tale. The music paints the picture of Don Juan's death at the hands of his lover's father, who is avenging his daughter's honor.



Sergei Prokofiev, Orchestral Suites, No. 1,2,3, Op. 64 bis, 64 ter and 101, from ballet Romeo and Juliet

- I. Suite No. 2 Movement 1, Montagues and Capulets
- II. Suite No. 2 Movement 2, Juliet as a Young Girl
- III. Suite No. 1 Movement 6, Romeo and Juliet
- IV. Suite No. 1 Movement 7, Death of Tybalt
- V. Suite No. 2 Movement 5, Romeo and Juliet Before Parting
- VI. Suite No. 2 Movement 7, Romeo at Juliet's Grave
- VII. Suite No. 3 Movement 6, The Death of Juliet

Sergei Prokofiev was a prominent 20th-century composer who was born, in what is now Ukraine, on April 23, 1891, and passed away on March 5, 1953. His



father was an agronomist from Moscow, and his mother was a pianist from Saint Petersburg who was deeply committed to music. Prokofiev's early musical talent was evident, as he composed his first piece at age five and his first opera at age nine. His prodigious talent led him to attempt his first symphony at age 11, under the guidance of composer and pianist Reinhold Glière.

Prokofiev continued his musical education at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, where he studied piano, harmony/counterpoint, conducting, and orchestration. His association with Alexander Glazunov, a composer and former director of the Conservatory, was pivotal in securing his admission to the

institution at age 13. A student at the Conservatory, he won the Anton Rubinstein Prize as the best piano student. During the First World War, he returned to the Conservatory to study organ to avoid conscription.

Throughout his career, Prokofiev was regarded as a musical rebel due to his pioneering use of chromaticism, dissonance, and polytonality in his early works. However, he is now generally known primarily as a neoclassical composer. He initially supported himself by performing his compositions on the piano and became closely affiliated with Sergei Diaghilev, a ballet impresario, and founder of the Ballets Russes, with whom he worked first in London and then whenever he was in Paris.

In 1927, after returning from a concert tour in Russia, Prokofiev embraced "new simplicity" rather than modernism, culminating in his increased commissioning and premiere performances under the auspices of the Soviet Union, including film music. He composed music for several, including *Lieutenant Kijé*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Ivan the Terrible*. Some of his other famous compositions include the *Classical Symphony*, his *Piano Concerti*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Flute Sonata in D major*, and his *Violin Concerti*.

Prokofiev's compositions for ballet include *The Prodigal Son*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Cinderella*, among others. Prokofiev's contributions to the world of classical music continue to be celebrated, and his innovative approach to composition has had a lasting impact on the development of contemporary music. Stravinsky called him the greatest Russian composer of his day, after himself.

Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64 is a ballet and orchestral composition by Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev, created in 1935. The work was the first ballet Prokofiev

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Classe d'/Class of: Jonathan Dagenais

wrote for production in the Soviet Union. Based on Shakespeare's play from 1597, the libretto was created by Adrian Piotrovsky, Sergei Radlov, Leonid Lavrovsky, and Prokofiev himself. However, the production faced several issues from the beginning. Initially, the Kirov Ballet (now known as the Mariinsky Ballet) was supposed to produce it, but the collaboration fell through. Prokofiev then offered it to the Bolshoi Ballet, but the dancers said it would be impossible to perform. As a result, he converted the score into two orchestral suites, which were performed in 1936 and 1937.

The ballet version of Romeo and Juliet was finally performed in 1938 in Czechoslovakia and then in 1940 in the Soviet Union at the Kirov Theatre. This version was a single-act production with music mainly from the first two suites. The work was composed in the style of "drambalet," dramatized ballet, officially promoted at the Kirov Ballet to replace works based primarily on choreographic display and innovation.

The composition uses a full orchestra, as well as less standard instruments, such as tenor saxophone, voice, cornet, viola d'amore, and mandolins.

The ballet was supposed to have a happy ending, contrary to the tragic ending in Shakespeare's play, which provoked controversy with Soviet cultural officials. The ending was changed back to the tragic version. A film version of this ballet was made in 1955, winning the Best Lyrical Film and being nominated as Palme d'Or in the 1955 Cannes Film Festival.

The three orchestral suites, which contain selected parts of the complete score, were published separately from the ballet. Suite No. 1, Op. 64 bis, includes Folk Dance, Scene (the Street Awakens), Madrigal, Minuet (the Arrival of the Guests), Masks, Romeo and Juliet (Balcony Scene and Love Dance), and Death of Tybalt. Suite No. 2, Op. 64 ter, includes Montagues and Capulets (The Prince Gives His Order and Dance of the Knights), Juliet as a Young Girl, Friar Laurence (Romeo at Friar Laurence's), Dance (Dance of the Five Couples), Romeo and Juliet Before Parting, Dance of the Girls with Lilies, and Romeo at Juliet's Tomb (Juliet's Grave). Suite No. 3, Op. 101, from 1946, includes Romeo at the Fountain (Introduction & Romeo), Morning Dance, Juliet (Juliet's Variation & Juliet at Friar Laurence's), The Nurse (Preparing for the Ball & The Nurse), Aubade (Morning serenade), and The Death of Juliet.

Today's selection of movements was inspired by the 1994 album Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet - Excerpts from Suites No. 1-3, performed by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and conducted by Myung-Whun Chung. The album reorders excerpts from the suites to match the original storyline.



Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours. These program notes are written by the student performing, and are presented by the student in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their course.