THE THREE LEADING FEMALE ROLES IN *DER ROSENKAVALIER* BY RICHARD STRAUSS

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CHAPTER I

RICHARD STRAUSS, A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

In Munich on June 11, 1864, a son, Richard Georg Strauss was born to Franz and Josephine Strauss. She was the daughter of the famous and wealthy Pschorr family of brewers, and Franz was the leading horn player in the Munich Court Orchestra. He was remembered by his son as a man of principle who, once having made an artistic judgement, would not change it.[1] He disliked the music of Richard Wagner with the exception of *Tannhäuser*, but he played the horn solos in *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger* as few others could. He often battled with Wagner and Hans von Bülow, the conductor of the Munich Court Orchestra, about these impossible passages, but Wagner, after hearing him play *Die Meistersinger*, complimented him saying, "Strauss is an unbearable fellow, but when he plays the horn, one cannot be cross with him."[2]

Richard Strauss received the ordinary education of a German boy, attending elementary school from 1870-74, then

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[1]Richard Strauss, *Recollections and Reflections*, ed. Willi Schuh, trans. L.J. Lawrence (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1953), 127.

[2]*Ibid*., 128.

the Gynmasium (the equivalent of a college preparatory high school), and the University of Munich during 1882-83. Until he was sixteen, he heard only the music of the classical masters with great emphasis placed upon Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven; under his father's supervision he was tutored in counterpoint by Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer and also received piano and violin lessons. When Strauss first heard performances of Tristan und Isolde and Siegfried, he was incapable of appreciating Wagner's music, but later, much to his father's distress, he became a Wagnerian devotee.

Strauss' first compositions at the age of six were a Christmas song and a piece for piano, "Schneiderpolka". Other compositions followed, including those for piano, voice, cello, chorus, horn, and violin. He also composed a string quartet, which received its premiere in March, 1881 played by a quartet of his uncle, Benno Walters. This was followed in the same month by the first performance of his Symphony in D minor by Hermann Levi and the Munich Musical Academy Orchestra at the Odeon. These two performances marked the first public performances of Strauss' compositions.

In December, 1883, Strauss was informed by Eugen Spitzweg, his music publisher, that Hans von Bülow wanted to perform his Serenade for Thirteen Wind Instruments, Op. 7, and Strauss journeyed to Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin to hear

it played by the touring Meinengen Orchestra. In Berlin he arranged to meet Bülow, and from the time of this meeting a long lasting relationship began between the two men. Bülow commissioned Strauss to write another similar piece for the Meinengen Orchestra. In the winter of 1884, during a surprise visit to Munich, Bülow informed Strauss that Strauss himself would conduct his own piece at a matinee before an invited audience. Overjoyed, Strauss asked when he might rehearse, since he had never conducted before, and was told that there would be no rehearsal--a touring orchestra had no time to rehearse. Bülow did not listen to Strauss' debut, but Strauss recalled, "I conducted my piece in a state of slight coma; I can only remember today that I made no blunders."[3]

Shortly after this occasion, Bülow appointed Strauss his second conductor, and he assumed the position in October, 1885. At Meinengen he faithfully attended Bülow's rehearsals and learned from him the fine points of conducting. When Bülow resigned in November of the same year because of a conflict with Johannes Brahms over the performance of Brahms' Symphony in E minor, Strauss took over Bülow's position until he in turn resigned to take the position of third conductor in Munich from August, 1886 to July, 1889. All of his life,

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[3]Strauss, Recollections and Reflections, 127.

Strauss was driven by a restless energy which caused him to move often to new positions. From this time until the end of his life, Strauss was always a prominent conductor as well as a composer. He conducted everywhere in his native Germany as well as in the rest of Europe and abroad.

Before Strauss went to Munich to assume his position, he went to Italy for a holiday and was inspired to write his symphonic fantasy "Aus Italiens". His compositions during this period from 1886 to 1900 were dominated by symphonic poems including, "Don Juan" (1888), "Macbeth" (1886-90), "Tod und Verklärung" (1889), "Kampf und Sieg" (1892), "Till Eulenspiegel" (1894-95), "Also Sprach Zarathustra" (1896-97), "Don Quixote" (1897), and "Ein Heldenleben" (1898). He also wrote the libretto and music for his first opera, Guntram (1892-93). It was not successful, and Strauss did not have the courage to write for the stage again for several years.

In August of 1887, Strauss met Pauline de Ahna at her home in Feldafing. She had studied voice at the University of Munich but had made no progress professionally. Enchanted by her, Strauss agreed to give her voice lessons and immediately recognized her potential. His orchestral poems, such as "Don Juan", and many of his songs were inspired by the love that grew between them from this time. In 1890, after their usual summer holiday in Feldafing, Pauline joined the Weimer Opera Company where Strauss was then conducting

and sang many roles, including Pamina in Die Zauberflöte, Elsa in Lohengrin, and Elisabeth in Tannhäuser. Cosima Wagner heard her and invited her to sing the latter role at the Bayreuth festival the following year. Strauss chose Pauline to sing the part of the heroine in the premiere of Guntram, but at the dress rehearsal, thinking she was being ignored, she became angry when he did not interrupt her as often as he had the tenor. She threw the piano score at him and stalked to her dressing room with Strauss in angry pursuit. When their shouts suddenly subsided, the orchestra leader went to the dressing room to see what might have happened and to tell Strauss that they were appalled at Fräulein de Ahna's behavior and that they would henceforth refuse to play for her in any opera in which she appeared. Strauss said he regretted that, for he and Pauline had just become engaged.[4] They were married September 10, 1894. Pauline's quick temper and waspish tongue became more and more her dominating feature after their marriage. This trait made others, including Strauss' own parents, and later his librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ill at ease in her presence. Strauss submitted gladly to her, and their marriage was long and happy, lasting over fifty years. Their only child, Franz Alexander, was born April 12, 1897.

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[4]Lotte Lehmann, My Many Lives, trans. Frances Holden (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1948), 196-7.

In 1900 Strauss began to write his second opera, Feuersnot, to a libretto by Ernst von Wolzogen. In the same year he was contacted by Hofmannsthal about a possible collaboration, but Strauss declined. Salome, which was inspired when Strauss attended Oscar Wilde's play, followed in 1905 and was his first successful, if somewhat controversial, opera. Elektra was similarly inspired when Strauss went to see the play written by Hofmannsthal, and Strauss approached him this time about adapting it for an opera libretto. Hofmannsthal agreed, and a partnership was formed which lasted until the poet's death in 1929. Der Rosenkavalier, Ariadne auf Naxos, Die Frau ohne Schatten, Die Aegyptische Helena, and Arabella are the fruits of their labors, and although Strauss wrote four more operas after Hofmannsthal's death, they were never works that engaged the close collaboration of poet and composer as the earlier operas had been.

Strauss, never a political figure, considered the two world wars that occurred during his life as frustrating interruptions in his musical pursuits, but he was always a loyal German patriot. In World War I he lost a sizable fortune when investments he had made in Britain were confiscated by the government--a mistake he did not repeat. Hofmannsthal entered the army, making it virtually impossible for them to complete Die Frau ohne Schatten. World War II

brought to him many more painful problems. He was criticized for not expatriating himself as so many other German musicians had done, and for performing under the Third Reich and not speaking out loudly against it. His health, age, and above all his concern for his daughter-in-law, who was Jewish, and his grandchildren kept him in Germany. Especially towards the end of the war, he was considered anti-Nazi by the secret police but was tolerated because of his music and was allowed to live in his Garmisch villa, which he had built after the success of Der Rosenkavalier. When the hostilities ended in 1945, Strauss was able to keep the sanctity of his home by declaring he was the composer of Der Rosenkavalier,[5] but Strauss' spirit had been saddened and weakened by the destruction caused by the air raids which had destroyed so many of the great music houses in his beloved Germany. He and Pauline journeyed to Switzerland, where they hoped to recover their health. There in 1946 he was operated on for appendicitis. He was making a steady recovery when his publisher, Ernst Roth, came to visit. Roth recalled that Strauss, who had little money, had been reduced to copying his scores to deposit with the hotel for security.[6] After this visit Roth was able to arrange some

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[5]Alan Jefferson, The Life of Richard Strauss (Newton Abbot, Great Britain: David and Charles, 1973), 220.

[6]Ibid., 222.

concerts for Strauss through Sir Thomas Beecham in London, and was warmly received. Strauss' reception in London in 1947 helped him in the denazification proceedings, and he was finally allowed to return to Garmish in May, 1949. He died peacefully on September 8 of the same year from complications caused by an inoperable kidney stone. He was cremated in Munich four days later, and the Trio from Der Rosenkavalier was sung at a brief memorial service in accordance with his wishes.

CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPTION OF *DER ROSENKAVALIER* AND THE STRAUSS-HOFMANNSTHAL COLLABORATION

Richard Strauss first met Hugo von Hofmannsthal in early March, 1900 while he was conducting in Paris. At this meeting Hofmannsthal suggested a possible collaboration on a ballet. He reiterated this suggestion in his first of many letters to Strauss in November of the same year, but after some consideration, Strauss declined. As it has been briefly stated in the previous chapter, Strauss renewed negotiations for a joint venture after he saw Hofmannsthal's play, *Elektra*, in 1904. Hofmannsthal agreed to a collaboration and presented him with the libretto in 1905, but Strauss began to have doubts as to whether he could write on so similar a topic after *Salome* and suggested they write something else first. He wrote to Hofmannsthal, "I would ask you urgently to give me first refusal with anything composable that you write. Your manner has so much in common with mine; we were born for one another and are certain to do fine things together if you remain faithful to me."[1] However,

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[1]Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss, *A Working Friendship, The Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, trans. Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers (New York: Random House, 1961), 3, March 11, 1906.

Hofmannsthal remained firm, and their first opera, Elektra, was premiered in Dresden on January 25, 1909.

Even before he had finished Elektra, Strauss was looking for a new story. He had had enough tragedy and wanted to write a "Mozart opera"--a comedy. Hofmannsthal, who often worked on many ideas at once, was considering a theme similar to that of Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro. He first approached Strauss with a plot based on Casanova's exploits, and although he wrote a play on this theme entitled Christinas Heimreise, they decided not to pursue it musically. Instead, after a visit with Count Harry Kessler in Weimer, Hofmannsthal presented what he called his "entirely original scenario for an opera, full of burlesque situations and characters... There are opportunities in it for lyrical passages, for fun and humour, even for a small ballet... It contains two big parts, one for a baritone and another for a graceful girl dressed up as a man, à la Farrar or Mary Garden. Period: the old Vienna under the Empress Maria Theresa."[2] This was more appealing to Strauss since he wanted a comedy which was written expressly for the opera stage and not one that would have to be adapted as Christinas Heimreise would have been. The idea for the opera, however, was not completely original since it was closely related to two French stories, Moliere's Les Fourberies de Scapin,

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[2]Ibid., 27, February 11, 1909.

and Louvet de Couvrey's novel Les Amours du Chevalier de Faublas.[3] At any rate, the two men began working on what was to be their easiest and most rewarding collaboration.

When Strauss received the first act, he was delighted, and although he felt he might have some trouble shaping the antechamber scene, he could hardly wait to get to the finale, but he refrained "for the sake of symphonic unity."[4] He approached the rest of the opera this way, writing the music for each scene in sequence from beginning to end. He kept in mind Hofmannsthal's admonition to "think of an old-fashioned Viennese waltz, sweet, and yet saucy, which must pervade the whole of the last act."[5]

The first act flowed smoothly, and so did the second until Strauss came to the entrance of Baron Ochs auf Lerchenau. From here, he felt the act lacked dramatic climax. After much deliberation, he wrote Hofmannsthal a conciliatory letter dated July 9, 1909, in which he made many specific suggestions to consolidate the action. Hofmannsthal was receptive and made the alterations. Act II was the only major difficulty that the two men faced in Der

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[3]Norman Del Mar, Richard Strauss, A Critical Commentary on his Life and Works, 3 vols. (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), I, 337.

[4]Hofmannsthal and Strauss, A Working Friendship, 30, May 4, 1909.

[5]Ibid., April 24, 1909.

Rosenkavalier. There were minor changes in dialogue, but that was essentially their only other problem.

As Der Rosenkavalier progressed, the emphasis shifted from Baron Ochs as its central character to the Marschallin. Where Hofmannsthal had said that "only the title part" (at this point the opera was to be called Ochs auf Lerchenau) "requires a singer who is also a truly gifted actor,"[6] he now said, referring to the Marschallin, "She is the central figure for the public, for the women above all, the figure with whom they feel and move."[7] This role would also require a gifted actress and singer.

The poet, Hofmannsthal, cleverly showed the background of each character through their manner of speech. The Marschallin speaks a Viennese dialect which might have been heard in the court of Maria Theresa and uses many French phrases which also reflect the strong French influence during that period. Baron Ochs' speech is also aristocratic but pretentious and contains many grammatical errors. Octavian speaks cultivated German, but when he dresses as Mariandel, speaks as a Viennese servant girl would. Sophie's speech is simple and naive, with many second-hand expressions she has picked up at the convent or from her newly ennobled father, Faninal. Years later, in 1927, after hearing Der

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[6]Ibid., 31, May 12, 1909.

[7]Ibid., 57, June 6, 1910.

Rosenkavalier for the first time, Romain Rolland wrote about Hofmannsthal's libretto in his diary: "Even without music, it's a feast to be relished. What subtlety of touch, what grace, and what malice! It is almost too rich and too delicately shaded to be fully expressed in in the operatic theatre... Since divine Mozart's Nozze, never has music been so nobly served."[8]

As the work on Der Rosenkavalier drew to a close, Strauss began negotiations for its premiere, which took place in Dresden, January 26, 1911, but not before some difficulties had been overcome. Certain that Der Rosenkavalier would be a success, Strauss tried in his contract to assure performances of his other operas in the repertoire of Count Seebach's theatre. However, after some editorial notoriety, he had to settle for Seebach's promise in a letter that the other operas would be included. Then there was the problem of censorship. Offensive words had to be altered. Though these problems caused Hofmannsthal much frustration, the changes were made. That is, they were made in the libretto, vocal score, or piano score, but never in all three.

Hofmannsthal and Strauss were both very exacting men, and at times, they would correspond endlessly over some

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[8]Romain Rolland, Richared Strauss and Romain Rolland, Corrrespondence, ed. Rollo Myers (Los Angeles: University of California, 1968), 168-69.

minute point upon which they differed. There were few disagreements between them during their collaboration on Der Rosenkavalier, but one thing Strauss kept asking Hofmannsthal for was more raucous humor. He wrote to Hofmannsthal, "Don't forget that the audience should also laugh! Laugh, not just smile or grin! I still miss in our work a genuinely comical situation: everything is merely amusing, but not comic."[9] Hofmannsthal replied that he did not deny the difference between "what is merely gay and what is broadly comic," but told him to refer to "Meistersinger or Figaro, which contain little to make one laugh and much to smile at."[10] Strauss was not satisfied, though, and he continued to interject comments in his letters about where he thought more humor could be added. Hofmannsthal complied on some occasions; on others he did not. Both men were stubborn in their opinions, but they approached each other with businesslike good humor. The result in this case was a masterpiece.

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[9]Hofmannsthal and Strauss, A Working Friendship, 43, July 20, 1909.

[10]Ibid., 46, August, 1909.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF DER ROSENKAVALIER: CLASSICAL VIENNA OF MOZART

The period that Hofmannsthal chose for his story was the Vienna of Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria. She ruled from 1740 to 1780. This was a time of great affluence in the courts of Europe. French influence dominated the court life. The style of dress was French; the powdered wigs were French; the language of the nobility was sprinkled with French phrases; and court intrigue definitely had a French flavor.

Vienna was a city often visited by Mozart. He had gone there as a child to perform for the royal family. His compositions were favored by Maria Theresa, and it was in Vienna that Le Nozze di Figaro was premiered in 1786. Maria Theresa liked to sing and loved all sorts of entertainment. She was tireless and would often attend a ball or party until the early morning, only to rise a few hours later to attend to matters of state.

Maria Theresa became Empress through the right of Pragmatic Sanction[1] by which her father, Charles VI, sought to make her ascension more certain through a series of costly

[1]Pragmatic Sanction, written in 1813 by Charles VI, was a document written to assure the right of ascension for his daughters should there be no male heirs.

treaties. Even her fiancé, Francis Stephen of Lorraine, had been forced to forfeit his family's lands in Lorraine to France and was given the Duchy of Tuscany instead to insure the Pragmatic Sanction. They were married in 1838, and unlike so many other alliances in those times, they were very much in love.

When Charles VI died in 1840, Maria Theresa was pregnant with her fourth child, and even before she could be crowned, the treaties her father had made were being broken. She proved to be a good ruler, and found that she had a persuasive gift as an orator. She surrounded herself with loyal, competent generals and ministers and set out with pure strength of will to hold her empire together. She also gave her people new hope by giving birth to a healthy boy, Joseph II.

Franz Joseph (obviously his name had been changed from Francis to Franz when he left France to marry Maria Theresa) was not as gifted a ruler as his wife, and she soon left him out of affairs of state. As the years passed, Maria Theresa began to lose her beauty. Her golden curls faded, and she became stout from bearing sixteen children. The Emperor began to have more than a casual flirtation with some of the ladies at court. When Maria Theresa became aware of this, she set up the Chastity Commission in 1853 to police the morals of her subjects in public and private. Of course, Franz was not alone. It was a common practice, and the whole

Commission became laughable. Lady Mary Wortly Montagu wrote this description of the situation in Vienna: "'tis the established custom for every lady to have two husbands, one who bears the name, and another who performs the duties."[2]

When Baron Ochs calls for the Sittenpolizei in Act II of Der Rosenkavalier, he is calling for the police of the Chastity Commission. This nearly backfires on him, adding to the comedy of the situation. The Empress Maria Theresa, except for her puritanical views on love affairs, could very easily have been a model for the Marie Therese of Der Rosenkavalier, for she also had an eye for a handsome young man and was vain about her own beauty.

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[2]Dorothy Gies McGuigan, The Hapsburgs (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 235.

CHAPTER IV

THE MARSCHALLIN AND SOPHIE: A COMPARISON

Marie Therese, Princess von Werdenberg, and Sophie von Faninal are the two heroines in Der Rosenkavalier. The Marschallin, whose age Strauss placed at no more than thirty-two years,[1] is the wife of Feldmarschall Prince von Werdenberg, who seems to prefer military campaigns and hunting to the company of his wife. He is probably at least twenty years her senior, and while theirs is a loveless marriage, the Marschallin fears him and respects his position. Although the Feldmarschall never appears in the opera, the presence of his character is felt in the first scene of Act I. The Marschallin, while spending the night with her young lover, Octavian, has dreamed of her husband and is troubled by the dream. When she and Octavian hear someone's forceful approach outside her private doors, she fears her husband has returned early from his hunt. They soon can hear it is not her husband, but she remembers "Once,..." but does not continue. This causes a string of reproachful comments from Octavian, but the Marschallin

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[1]Stella Roman and Richard Strauss," Opera News XIII (January 31, 1949), 29.

soothes him. The visitor is only her cousin, Baron Ochs auf Lerchenau. He is to wed Sophie von Faninal, and since he may not present it himself, he needs an envoy to give her the Silver Rose of betrothal. The presentation of this rose was a custom among the nobility.

Sophie's father, Herr von Faninal, is a rich merchant, recently ennobled. He, no doubt, has acquired his twelve houses on the Weiden and palace at the Hof with money earned by supplying the armies of the Empress Maria Theresa. Sophie, a pretty young girl, about sixteen years of age, has been educated in a convent. She knows little of the nobility except what she has read in "Ehrenspiegel Österreichs" (Austria's Mirror of Honor), which she takes to bed with her every night. Her character is simple and naive. Neither Strauss nor Hofmannsthal were very sympathetic with her character, and as a result, her importance definitely ranks below the Marschallin and even Octavian. Sophie is a girl much like any other, and the fact that Octavian, forgetting the Marschallin, falls in love with the first pretty face he sees is part of the simple humor of the comedy.

The Marschallin's character is marked by her maturity, kindness, and acceptance of life for what it is. She may question her fate as she does in her monologue in Act I, but she does accept it. She looks in the mirror, noticing the first lines around her eyes, and asks where the young girl "Resi" (her youthful nickname) has gone. "How can this come

about? How can our dear Lord make it so when I am still the same person, and if He must make it so, why does He let me see it all so clearly?" But the Marschallin will not remain unhappy and continues, "It is all a mystery, so very much a mystery. And we are here to bear it. And in the how--there lies the whole difference." The Marschallin remembers herself as "a young girl, who was ordered, fresh from the convent, into holy wedlock." Sophie's fate, it appears, will be the same. And later, when the Marschallin lets Octavian go, she may be wishing that a young rose cavalier had come for her.

Many sopranos who have sung the role of the Marschallin first sang Sophie. Such legendary Marschallins as Lotte Lehmann, Eleanor Steber, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf began their long associations with Der Rosenkavalier as Sophie. It is also interesting to note that Lehmann as well as Lisa Della Casa have sung all three roles of the Marschallin, Sophie, and Octavian. Other memorable Marschallins include Régine Crespin, Stella Roman, Margaret Siems, who created the role in Dresden, and Frieda Hempel, who sang the first Marschallin in Berlin and New York. Each Marschallin has added her own dimension to the role, but many have had to compete with the legend of a previous one.

Stella Roman, who coached the role with Strauss, recalled his conception of the role in an interview in 1949. He said the monologue is "an introspective talk she has with

herself, veiled by the melancholy which always pervades a human being at any age who is losing a lover."[2] Strauss felt that in the third act the public should really feel sorrier for Octavian because "the Princess is a great lady...with an understanding of life and love which Sophie does not possess. And she is such a good sport about giving him up that Octavian as a result does not quite survive as the perfect gentleman."[3]

The Marschallin is a product of her time--a time when an affair, if you were discreet, was not frowned upon. Since she has found no happiness in her marriage, the Marschallin has found solace in the arms of other men, and as Eleanor Steber observed, "one of those affairs must have been intense and of deep, long-lasting effect to have occasioned such a sharp transition from the innocent and unhappy young bride, to the generous and philosophical Marschallin of the opera."[4] Octavian is probably the Marschallin's first young lover, and she is not accustomed to his youthful ardor and naïveté. She finds herself at one moment in the role of lover--in the next in the role of mother, but she is always in charge. In her detailed synopsis of Der Rosenkavalier, Lotte Lehmann described the Marschallin as being "fatigued by

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[2]"Stella Roman and Richard Strauss," 30.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Marcia G. Sloat, "The Marschallin Muses," Opera News XIV (November 28, 1949), 9.

his youthful ardour," and that her behavior should be "governed by this pleasantly tender and relaxed fatigue."[5] Although Lehmann is considered by many to have been the greatest Marschallin, this description seems too melancholy for Act I. Lotte Lenya gave this appraisal of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's Marschallin: "Whereas Lotte Lehmann was resigned from the start, Schwarzkopf is happily in love at the beginning and only becomes resigned--and tragic--at the end."[6] This portrayal of the Marschallin is more in keeping with Strauss' and Hofmannsthal's intent.

Upon her arrival in Act III, the Marschallin is quick to appraise the situation and once again takes charge for Octavian. When she told her Quinquin (the Marschallin's nickname for Octavian) that "today or tomorrow you will leave me for another," she did not think it would literally be so soon, but now, that it has happened, so be it. She tells him to go to Sophie. She will take care of Sophie's father. The Marschallin converses with Faninal and as they prepare to leave, Faninal remarks, "That's how they always are, young people!" The Marschallin's reply is a deep sigh for her own lost youth.

Schwarzkopf said, "The Marschallin is for a soprano what Sachs is for a baritone or Hamlet for an actor; you always

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[5]Lotte Lehmann, Singing with Richard Strauss, trans. Ernst Pawel (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 113.

[6]Gustl Breuer, "Everything in Its Time," Opera News XXIX (December 19, 1964), 28.

discover new facets."[7] A singer can lay the foundations for this role, but the character must grow within the actress. She must be both an excellent singer and an accomplished actress. It is fitting that so many great Marschallins have matured into the role from that of Sophie.

Sophie must be played with youthful innocence, excitement, and charm. Hofmannsthal felt the first Sophie, Minnie Nast, conveyed more than even he could write into the part. She, for him, was "a person of infinite charm...so touching, so helpless."[8]

Sophie is so very young. For her, time is an endless commodity that will never run out. Her biggest concern in life is memorizing the family trees in the Ehrenspiegel Österreichs. And she is so very naive. After the presentation of the rose, she tells Octavian that she is looking forward to being married. "It is so different from being single! You are a man, you are what you are. But I need a husband before I can be anything." How quickly she becomes disenchanted when she meets her husband-to-be. Sophie has dreamed of the moment when she will be betrothed, but Baron Ochs examines her like he is buying a horse. Fortunately for Sophie, Octavian comes to her rescue, and through his plotting and the Marschallin's kindness, he

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[7]Ibid.

[8]"Model for the Marschallin?" Opera News XXXVIII (February 23, 1974), 21.

whisks Sophie away to live happily ever after. Whether or not they remained true to each other is doubtful. Hofmannsthal made this observation in some remarks he made after the first Vienna performance,[9] and William Mann made a similar observation in his study of Der Rosenkavalier.[10]

There are, in fact, several questions left to the audience. Will the two young lovers remain together? Who will be the Marschallin's next lover? Will Octavian ever return to visit the Marschallin?

In a novel called Marschallin, It Is Evening, Jacoba von Stettendorf (a pen name used by Julda Eggart-Hofmiller) wrote what she thought might have happened to the Marschallin after her exit in Act III. Through entries in her diary, we realize that the Marschallin misses Octavian and thinks of him more than she would like to confess. Octavian, who is now pursuing a military career, has written occasional polite notes which have brought her great joy. Once he came to her bedside after she became ill from a heart condition. On another occasion Sophie visited her, and the Marschallin could not help liking the girl. Baron Ochs and the Marschallin have become close friends since her husband's death, and he visits her when he can get away from his country estate. The entries become more irregular, and the

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[9] Robert Breuer, "Epilogue for the Marschallin," Opera News (March 20, 1976), 36.

[10] William Mann, Richard Strauss, A Critical Study of the Operas, (London: Cassell, 1964), 141.

last one lets the reader know that the Marschallin is lonely but ready to face what will come.[11] This, of course, is all conjecture.

Elisabeth Schumann, who created the role of Sophie in Hamburg, made the role completely her own. She played the role many times with Lotte Lehmann, who wrote that Schumann gave emphasis "to the shy reticence of a girl just emerged from convent school, a pristine innocence that like a silver halo hovered above her delightful dark curls."[12] Author and critic, Richard Specht, gave this account of Schumann's performance in Vienna, September 2, 1919: "We have never seen Sophie better acted (this does not say much and, incidentally, no singer, including Frau Schumann, has yet done full justice to the opening scene by bringing out the excitement of the young girl who would like to say her prayers and hold herself in check but cannot...)."[13] Lehmann also remembered another Sophie, Anneliese Rothenberger of the Vienna Opera, who "was a charming creature, both tender and innocent, truculent and temperamental, fighting with true Viennese passion for her love and for her rights."[14] These are qualities that must

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[11]Robert Breuer, "Epilogue for the Marschallin," 36-38.

[12]Lehmann, Singing with Richard Strauss, 185.

[13]Alfred Mathis, "Elisabeth Schumann," Opera XXIV & XXV (1973 & 1974), XXIV, 786.

[14]Lehmann, Singing with Richard Strauss, 184-85.

be exhibited by any Sophie, in addition to having a fine voice.

CHAPTER V

OCTAVIAN

Octavian is the fickle hero of Der Rosenkavalier. In Act I he is the Marschallin's ardent young lover; in Act II he becomes Sophie's valiant protector; and in Act III he is torn by his feelings for the two women, but a gentle nudge from the Marschallin pushes him into Sophie's arms.

Hofmannsthal created Octavian as a trousers role in the tradition of Cherubino in Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro. Both characters are young men, who need only experience and maturity for others to see what they already imagine themselves to be--men! The parts are similar, but where Cherubino is shy and flirtatious throughout (he probably is still a virgin), Octavian is romantically very active, especially in the first scene. The climactic overture that Strauss wrote for Der Rosenkavalier, with its leitmotifs representing Octavian, the Marschallin, and her enduring love, leaves no doubt in the listener's mind what pleasures have taken place the previous night. The curtain rises, and it is here that the problems for the actress begin. Octavian kneels before the Marschallin, who is dressed in a negligee and still in bed (or on the sofa where some censors have placed her). Perhaps William Mann sums up the difficulties of this scene best: "It seems distasteful that Hofmannsthal

should have cast so sexually virile a figure as a female role, particularly in the opening scene which demands overt demonstrations of the most passionate love--it is seldom that the two actresses involved manage to avoid suggesting a repellent sort of Lesbianism as they hug and caress one another, crooning torrid endearments."[1]

For any woman to portray a convincing male role, it is necessary for her to subordinate any inherent feminine features. Cosmetics can solve some of the problem, but a woman, unless she is very carefully coached, will still walk like a woman. Richard Specht, in the review cited in the previous chapter, said Lotte Lehmann's Octavian was "young, affectionate, ardent, and gay-hearted; occasional touches of boyish chivalry would not hurt, nor ought we to see how much more at home Octavian is in the maid's disguise than in his own riding-breeches."[2] No doubt, there have been similar criticisms voiced about other Octavians.

The actress may also find Octavian's virile nature troublesome. Yvonne Minton, who has sung most of the trouser roles, admitted that she had never thought of "problems about sex", but when onstage became inhibited. For her, the key to Octavian was found by watching actors, such as Laurence Olivier, and trying to emulate them. She found that "...the

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[1]William Mann, Richard Strauss, A Critical Study of the Operas, (London: Cassell, 1964), 104.

[2]Alfred Mathis, "Elisabeth Schumann," XXIV, 786.

combination of aping a real masculine image and your own sex equals an adolescent boy."[3]

On a few occasions Octavian has been sung by a tenor, and vocally, this would be possible. However, the quality of a mezzo-soprano and tenor voice differ, and what each voice would give to the ensemble passages would be quite different. For instance, the close harmony in thirds which Strauss wrote for the final duet would now be over an octave apart. Also, the resolution of the beautiful suspension created when Sophie joins Octavian in the final phrase, "Spür' nur dich allein," would not be nearly as effective. Her line continues up the scale, and they join in ascending thirds at the end. The harmony is the key. While a male actor portraying the role of Octavian would eliminate one problem, it would create new ones which betray Strauss' music. The interplay of harmony that he wrote throughout the opera and especially in the final trio and duet can only be fully realized when three strong sopranos sing the roles.

Marie Gutheil-Schoder, who created the role in Vienna and was slim when most other Octavians were not, gave the role depth and realism. She was one of the great Octavians, and coached another, Risë Stevens. Max Graf wrote, "In this role Schoder was as if she had stepped from a French etching, the boy-cavalier of aristocratic bearing, of a spirited charm

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[3]Speight Jenkins, "Strawberry Blonde," Opera News XXXVII (April 14, 1973), 15.

that has remained unmatched."[4] The role of Octavian must be carefully coached and carefully played to create that boyish charm.

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[4]Gustl Breuer, "Drama Coursed Through the Veins of Marie Gutheil-Schoder, Vienna's First Octavian," Opera News XLII (January 7, 1978), 16.

CHAPTER VI

THE THREE SOPRANOS AND THE THEMATIC RELATIONS IN DER ROSENKAVALIER

It has been discussed that the three sopranos of Der Rosenkavalier are bound together through the progressive action of the play. The Marschallin sees herself in the youthful Sophie and can sympathize with her plight. Upon the Marschallin's arrival in Act III, Sophie realizes just how delicate her own situation is. She feels threatened by the Marschallin, would like to be defiant, but knows somehow that her fate will be determined through the Marschallin's benevolence. Octavian stands between the two women, not knowing which way to go. The Marschallin has opened a new world of experience for him. He loves her passionately, but Sophie has given him something, too. As her protector, Octavian sees himself fulfilling his role of manhood in a different way.

Strauss' music brings the three roles together through leitmotifs which represent the characters and their emotions.[1] These relations, as they apply only to these characters, will be discussed in the three acts of the

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[1]Two sources were used for the study of the thematic relations in Der Rosenkavalier: Vol. 1 of Richard Strauss, A Critical Commentary on his Life and Works by Norman Del Mar, and Richard Strauss, A Critical Study of the Operas by William S. Mann.

opera. Many of the other characters in <u>Der Rosenkavalier</u> have motifs, but these motifs, as a rule, do not apply to the Marschallin, Octavian, or Sophie and will not be included.

The overture of <u>Der Rosenkavalier</u> is a love scene which the curtain discreetly hides from view. The listener will mistake neither Octavian's first motif, which is played by the French horns [Ex. 1], nor the Marschallin's yielding reply played by the strings and woodwinds [Ex. 2]. Two themes follow [Ex. 3 and 4] which represent Octavian (again in the horns) and then his passion marked **agitato und sehr überschwenglich im Vortag** (agitated and very extravagant in execution) played by the violas.

[Example 1]

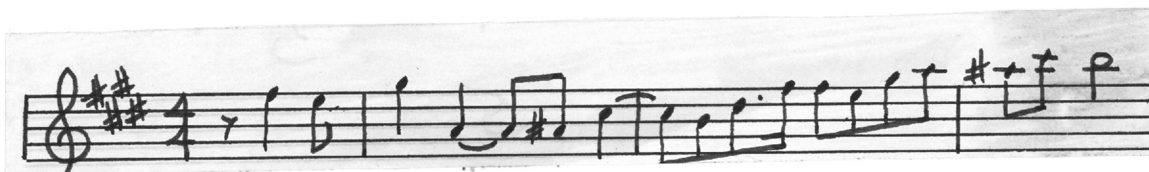
[Example 2]

[Example 3]

[Example 4]

These themes intertwine and are marked accelerando, bringing the music to a climax with the French horns heard above all. With a downward, side-slipping progression, the music builds again until a molto ritardando marks the introduction of three more themes [Ex. 5, 6 and 7].

[Example 5]



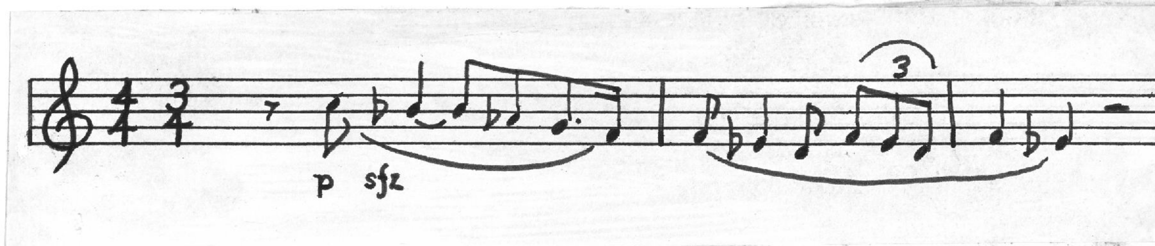
[Example 6]

[Example 7]

The first is poignant, associated later with the Marschallin's sadness over the inevitable loss of Octavian. The others are quietly filled with love. The curtain rises, and the story begins with the music, as well as their conversation filled with reminders of the preceding night.

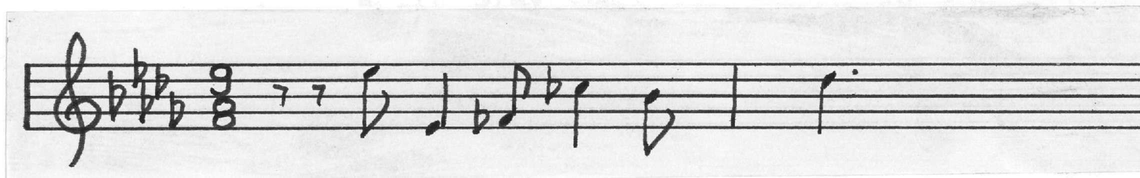
There are many memorable moments in the Marschallin's monologue at the end of Act I, but this music is not repeated. Although there is reference to other characters in the play, she is not relating to them. She, in a moment of self-pity, is talking to herself. When Octavian returns, so do the themes which relate to them, but her mood has changed and so has her attitude toward Octavian. One new theme [Ex. 8] is added as the Marschallin repulses Octavian's advances, calling him Taverl, the diminuitive of Octavian, instead of Quinquin.

[Example 8]



In Act II, as Octavian's carriage approaches Sophie's house, his first motif echoes everywhere. Sophie is represented by two motifs. The first [Ex. 9] is heard immediately, and the second is heard as the Silver Rose is presented [Ex. 10]. (This theme was actually suggested in Act I when Baron Ochs mentioned the name of his bride-to-be.)

[Example 9]



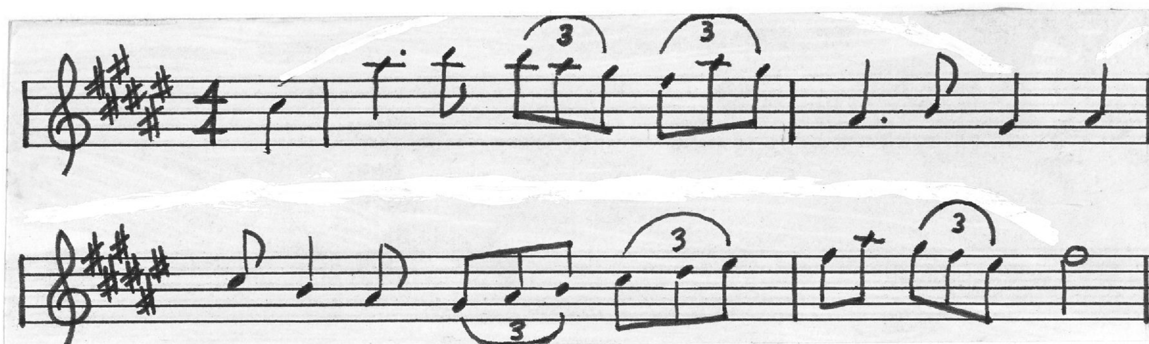
[Example 10]

The Presentation of the Rose, with its shimmering melody [Ex. 11], creates one of the most beautiful moments in the opera. There is also a secondary theme which represents Baron Ochs, but it takes on a new character when he arrives and Sophie becomes disenchanted by him.

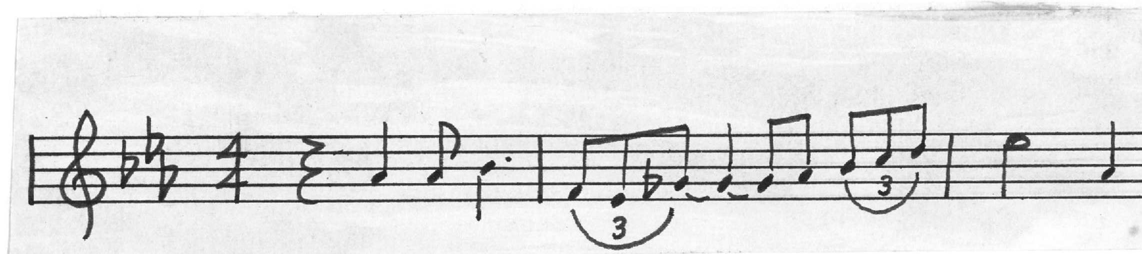
[Example 11]

The rose motif with its shifting harmonies is played by three flutes, three solo violins, celeste, and two harps. This motif and Sophie's motif play back and forth as the Silver Rose is given to Sophie, and she, in rapture, sings of the rose [Ex. 12]. Octavian bends to smell the rose and then looks upon Sophie. Is this the moment of first love? It would seem to be so. Another haunting theme, representing both of them, is heard [Ex. 13]. They continue to converse with the rose motif quietly fading. Baron Ochs enters, and in a few moments, Sophie's world seems to come crashing down around her. Everyone exits to witness the signing of the marriage agreement except Octavian, Sophie, and her duenna, and soon the duenna is called away to attend to some urgent business of the house. The two young people are left alone to discover they have fallen in love with each other.

[Example 12]



[Example 13]



The ensuing duet is not as passionate as Strauss would have liked it to have been, but Hofmannsthal would not have it so. He wrote to Strauss: "What I would wish to avoid at all costs is to see these two young creatures, who have nothing of the Valkyries or Tristan about them, bursting into a Wagnerian kind of erotic screaming.[2] The duet is dominated by Octavian's motif [Ex. 1], but also includes Sophie's two motifs. The resulting music creates a tranquil mood which gives the two young people "the quality of Dresden China lovers which...returns again at the end of the

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[2]Hofmannsthal and Strauss, A Working Friendship, 49, September 2, 1909.

opera."[3] The two are discovered by Valzacchi and Annina, conspirators in Ochs' employ, and pandemonium breaks loose. Sophie declares to her father that she would rather return to the convent than marry the Baron. Octavian has derived a plan of his own, and a note is delivered to the Baron inviting him to a private meeting with Mariandel. (This is the name Octavian assumed in Act I when he pretended to be a female servant.) Although it is not covered in the action of the story, Octavian persuades the two money-minded intriguers, Valzacchi and Annina, to join him.

Taking place at a local inn, the supper scene of Act III proves the undoing of Baron Ochs, and he is forced reluctantly to leave without Sophie or her dowry. He is loudly harangued by the various people who appear at unexpected times and in unexpected places. Since the Marschallin would never come to such a place, her timely entrance is somewhat of a mystery. Perhaps she has heard some court gossip and has come to fetch Octavian. At any rate, Strauss advised Stella Roman to wear a "gala gown" because he was convinced that she was on her way to a ball or the theatre.[4]

The trio begins and Strauss weaves into it the motifs associated with the three characters. Examples 2, 3, 5, 7,

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[3]Norman Del Mar, Richard Strauss, A Critical Commentary on his Life and Works, I, 390.

[4]"Stella Roman and Richard Strauss," 30.

8, 9, and 13 are included, as well as another which Octavian sang as Mariandel in the beginning of Act III [Ex. 14]. It [Example 14]

is this last haunting theme and the Marschallin's theme of loss [Ex. 5] which dominate the close of the trio. The Marschallin begins "Hab' mir's gelobt, ihn lieb zu haben in der richtigen Weis'," (I chose to love him in the right way). The crossing harmonies of Sophie's entrance create a momentary suspension in which the emotions of the two women seem to tug at each other. The Marschallin is resigned to the fact that the two young people love each other, and that Octavian is lost to her. Sophie is at first hesitant but finally joins Octavian in his ecstatic declaration of love. The crossing harmonies of the sopranos move away from the key of D-flat and up the scale to the climax where Strauss moves them back to the original key with a side-slipping progression. The Marschallin sings her blessing for the two, "In Gottes Namen," and leaves the stage. The music becomes very tranquil, and a recapitulation of the Presentation of the Silver Rose is heard as they sing their gentle duet. At the end of the first stanza, we hear the Marschallin's theme

of loss as she reenters with Faninal. They observe Sophie and Octavian and take their leave. Sophie and Octavian sing the second stanza which ends with rising harmony in thirds that has been described.

In their collaboration of Der Rosenkavalier, Strauss and Hofmannsthal created one of the best-loved operas in the whole repertoire. In the opera, through the libretto and music, they wove their characters tightly together. When an actress creates one of these roles, she must be acutely aware of the other two characters in order to properly present her own character. The voices for these roles should be carefully chosen, not only for their fine solo quality, but for each voice's ability to blend with the other two. This is important especially in the trio where, if one voice is of secondary quality, the music suffers. This trio is one of the masterpieces in music. Karl Böhm, a fellow conductor, once asked Strauss what he considered to be the best music he had written. Strauss replied, "I love all my children, otherwise I would not have created them. But my best music, I believe, is the ending of Der Rosenkavalier, beginning with Ochs' departure."[5]

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[5]Karl Böhm, "The Strauss I Know," Opera News XXXIII (March 8, 1969), 16.

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