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PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MANFRED HONECK, MUSIC DIRECTOR

A black and white studio portrait of Richard Strauss. He is seated in an ornate chair, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He has a mustache and is wearing a dark, double-breasted suit jacket over a patterned vest, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. His hands are clasped in his lap. The background is a dark, mottled studio backdrop.

Richard Strauss, 1904

Elektra Symphonic Drama and Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier* Drama Old and New

This recording presents two orchestral suites based on two of the most significant operas in history. Written in succession, only two years separate Richard Strauss' *Elektra* (1909) and *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), but in reality, they could not be more different. The former is complex, incredibly dramatic, and pushes the limits of tonality and harmony, while the latter is melodious and widely considered to be the most popular of Strauss' operas. It is for this reason that *Der Rosenkavalier* found its place in the concert hall from the very beginning, first with two waltz sequences and later with the famous 1944 Suite. *Elektra*, on the other hand, remained purely on the opera stage.

When I first played *Elektra* in the 1980s under the baton of Claudio Abbado at the Vienna State Opera, I was impressed and overwhelmed by the sheer power of the orchestral tapestry. I was intrigued by how truly symphonic the opera sounded and somehow had the feeling that throughout, it is the orchestra that plays the leading role. At that moment, it was clear for me that *Elektra* can be seen as the most symphonic of Strauss operas, although it must be recognized that all Strauss operas have a strong orchestral profile.

The question then came to my mind: why hadn't anyone made a full-length symphonic suite of this astonishing music for the concert hall? Was it the complexity and extreme drama of the opera? I, myself, cannot give a definitive answer, but perhaps one of the major reasons

is the sheer size of the orchestral forces required. Strauss wrote this opera for an enormous orchestra, the original score calling for no less than 110 musicians, and thus one of the largest orchestras of any opera in the repertoire. Here, Strauss makes use of four Wagner tubas, three sections of violins, and three sections of violas with additional passages where the first viola section switches to become a fourth violin section. The music is multi-layered with highly intricate polyphony, a hallmark of this score.

Perhaps another reason may be the daring harmonic language. At the time, *Elektra* was considered to be at the edge of what the ear could comprehend. Radical and complex tonalities, unresolved harmonies and cold sound blocks are all striking features and together, give a certain weight and heaviness to the music. Strauss also walks on the border of atonality which he, himself, expressed in this way: "Both operas, (*Salome* and *Elektra*), stand alone in my life's work. I went with this until the very extreme border of harmony, psychological polyphony (*Dream of Klytaemnestra*) and capacity that the ears can bear nowadays." Musicologists have gone on to theorize that the power of expression, vivid emotions and dramatic intensity within *Elektra* reaches a new dimension and high point among Strauss operas, one that is unmatched even in his later operas.

And yet, the idea of creating an *Elektra* orchestral suite persisted in my mind. In deciding to make my own symphonic adaptation, my third such collaboration with Czech composer Tomáš Ille, I was

naturally confronted with the above questions in considering the structure and overall organization of the music. As it is clear that the role of the orchestra in *Elektra* is far more than just accompanimental, I felt strongly that it was necessary to preserve the magnificence of a large orchestra in the suite, yet tailor it to a certain degree. I therefore left the instrumentation quite opulent, but without ever exceeding the orchestral size used in the famous Strauss tone poems. (In this suite, for example, the three violin parts become the usual two). Additionally, I came to realize that instrumental tone color was among my most important means to bring to life the extreme dramatic narrative and searing emotional intensity of the story. Dissonance and tonal complexities were not merely decorative, but powerful tools by which to convey this Greek tragedy's gripping drama. And thus, I set out to create a kind of symphonic tone poem where I tell the story of *Elektra*.

The story is cruel and complex. Elektra is the daughter of the Greek hero, Klytaemnestra. It is her mother's lover, Aegisth, who has murdered Agamemnon. Both Klytaemnestra and Aegisth treat Elektra poorly and Elektra, in turn, does not accept their reign on account of her father's death. It is only when Orest, Elektra's brother who was thought to be lost, comes back to seek Agamemnon's revenge, that Elektra's rage translates into action. Orest kills both Klytaemnestra and Aegisth. After the final murder, Elektra driven to madness, dances in ecstasy until she dies.

Strauss wrote the opera during an era when Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis shed light on the deep abysses of the human psyche. Every character in the opera is portrayed in full psychological

complexity: the guilt-filled mother, the sinister traitor Aegisth, the caring but helpless sister Chrysothemis, the calculating brother Orest, and the tragic heroine Elektra.

Let me give you a brief overview of the music I have selected:

1: As is the case in the opera, the suite starts with the main theme, the dramatic theme of Agamemnon, which I present twice. This is one of the major leitmotifs that can be found often throughout the opera and suite.

2: Elektra appears for the first time (0:20) singing, "Lonely, alas so lonely", within the Agamemnon motive. She imagines her Father reestablished as King, crying for revenge (1:50) in what I call the king-revenge theme, depicting Agamemnon's brutal murder. Elektra then wistfully expresses her love for her Father in the father-love theme, "Father I long to see you" (2:52).

3: The following scene belongs to Chrysothemis who feels imprisoned and alone (4:25). She wants to conceive a child and live a family life. Here, the music gets exuberantly optimistic in the style of a dance (5:43).

4: The music moves *attacca* (without pause) into Elektra's triumphant dance (6:22). She speaks of Agamemnon's victory (motive in the horns).

The father-love theme (6:28) and king-revenge theme (6:41) return.

5: Klytaemnestra, Elektra's mother, meets her daughter (6:59). Klytaemnestra has nightmares filled with guilt and despair, and despite sacrifices to the Gods, she cannot sleep. The mother wonders what remedy can restore her sleep and Elektra reveals that a sacrifice may be able to alleviate the nightmares. The queen, now full of hope, asks who needs to be killed, and Elektra replies that it is Klytaemnestra, herself, who has to die. "What has to bleed - Here I stand and finally I see you die" (7:20). Here, the music sounds rather unpleasant and distracted.

6: In the next scene (8:52), Klytaemnestra is jubilant as she has just learned that Orest, whom she fears is longing for revenge, is said to be dead.

7: Orest appears, "I must wait here" (9:42), though he does not yet reveal his identity to Elektra. One can feel in the music the presence of a mysterious stranger. The music is rather dark, set mostly in the lower registers.

8: In the opera, an orchestral intermezzo (13:25) depicts Klytaemnestra arriving with her full entourage of slaves and servants. It is a colorful spectacle and it is possible to hear in the music the scene that Strauss

describes in the score: the “dragging of animals...a suffocated cry-out...the crack of a whip”.

9: Orest and a Nurse prepare to carry out the murder (14:30). Strauss and librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal prescribe very precise stage instructions for this scene: “A maid appears with a torch and a confidante bows to these two seemingly unknown people. Orest closes his eyes for a moment, the door closes behind them”. Klytaemnestra is then killed by Orest in one of the most dramatic musical passages ever composed.

10: Orest reveals himself to Elektra (17:32). Elektra’s surprise can be heard in the jubilant calls, “Orest, Orest, Orest” in the horns and timpani. The music is now filled with enormous passion, joy and gratitude as the orchestra expresses Elektra’s overwhelming emotions, “Oh, let me see your eyes”, (19:14) “I will die more blessed than I have lived” (21:09). Consequently, the father-love motive returns (21:47).

11: The second murder takes place here and Aegisth is killed (22:26). Stage instructions are also explicitly outlined: “Aegisth is dragged away” and Elektra cries out, “Agamemnon can hear you” (23:08), “He has found revenge”.

12: After the second murder, the full Finale follows, without any cut.

The music and words illustrate the joy of the scene. Both sisters express their extreme happiness, while interestingly, Orest, the hero, does not appear. Chrysothemis, who did not yet know about Orest's presence at court, wants to tell Elektra enthusiastically, calling her by name (23:35). Later, she remarks that "everybody is gleaming" (24:53) while Elektra sings in ecstasy, "We are with the Gods" (27:07), "I was a dead dark body among the living, but in this hour, I am the fire of life" (27:18). Chrysothemis continues, "Who has ever loved us?" (28:28), "Now the brother is here and love flows on us like oil and myrrh" (29:04). Elektra answers, "Love kills, but nobody leaves without knowing love." This final, intensifying scene finds Elektra dancing in ecstasy, "a dance without a name" (29:37), "as happy as we are, there is only one thing that is appropriate: to be quiet and dance." The triumph of fulfilled revenge gains more and more intensity. Elektra dances until she utterly collapses, at last lying still (32:29). The Agamemnon theme from the opening reappears at the end, thus closing the arc.

Immediately after the premiere of *Elektra*, which Strauss wrote in his new house in Garmisch, he began work on *Der Rosenkavalier*. Strauss felt that after the successes of the harmonically complex and serious *Salome* and *Elektra*, there was a need for something different. "Now I will write a Mozart opera," he said. And this was understood instantly by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the librettist with whom Strauss had forged a special working relationship akin to that which Mozart had with his own librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte.

Premiered on January 26, 1911, *Der Rosenkavalier* was performed an incredible fifty times that same year. It quickly became Strauss' most famous opera, with trains from Berlin to Dresden organized just for the purpose of seeing *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Although *Der Rosenkavalier* is set in Vienna at the time of Empress Maria Theresia (around 1740), what is heard in the music is the Vienna of 1911. It is therefore no surprise that the most recognized music in *Der Rosenkavalier* is a Viennese waltz. "Try to think of an old fashioned Viennese waltz, sweet and saucy, which should pervade the whole of the last act", Hofmannsthal wrote to Strauss. The main theme of the waltz was inspired by the waltz of Josef Strauss, *Dynamiden*. For this modern-day 'Mozart-opera,' Strauss abandoned his avant-garde *Salome/Elektra* style which was seen as complicated and modern for its time, now using more traditional stylistic elements.

As is the case with *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* requires a truly virtuosic orchestra. Additionally, *Der Rosenkavalier* calls for the use of an empathetic *rubato* (push and pull) style, typical for Viennese music in general, and the Johann Strauss dynasty in particular. In this context, it is useful to mention that Hofmannsthal often used a Viennese dialect for the libretto, which also somehow encouraged Strauss to write lighter and more familiar melodies.

Upon the great success of *Der Rosenkavalier* in the opera house, there arose a strong desire to also hear this music in the concert hall. Strauss himself arranged the "First Waltz Sequence". The Suite on this recording was put together by conductor Artur Rodzinski who premiered

it himself in New York City in 1944, thirty-three years after the opera's first performance and five years before the death of Richard Strauss.

In the opera, the aristocratic Marschallin has an affair with the young Octavian. The bankrupt and ill-mannered Baron Ochs auf Lerchenau tries to arrange his marriage with Sophie, daughter of the rich Faninal. Count Octavian is chosen to hand Sophie a silver rose on behalf of Baron Ochs. Both Octavian and Sophie, shocked by Baron Ochs' behavior, fall in love with each other. At the end, the Marschallin loses her lover Octavian, and Baron Ochs is embarrassed and empty-handed, while Sophie and Octavian remain happily together.

Let me share a brief overview of the music and scenes that Artur Rodzinski selected for the Suite:

1: Opening of Act 1: The grandeur of the opening sets the tone for the whole piece. Strauss shows once more that he is a master of great beginnings, starting almost like fireworks with the full orchestra, and particularly the horn section, in full splendor. This section ends with a short love-duet between the Marschallin and Octavian (1:36).

2: Act 2: There is a brief introduction (3:10), followed by the silver rose scene (4:11). Here, the color of the oboe represents the sound of the soprano, Sophie, while the clarinet symbolizes the mezzo soprano, Octavian. A beautiful moment takes place at 5:04 where I ask for rubato, as the tempo should mirror the pace of the lyrics.

3: Continuing in Act 2, there is a tumultuous moment (9:37) where the servants of Baron Ochs report that Octavian and Sophie have been seen together. The music sounds scandalous and dissonant.

4: The most famous waltz in all of opera history follows (10:26), with Baron Ochs promising one of the maids that “with me no night is too long.” In this traditional Viennese waltz, Noah Bendix-Balgley plays the violin solo.

5: The short interlude (15:05) is taken from the opening of the second act with Faninal preparing for the wedding of his daughter, Sophie.

6: The beautiful trumpet solo (15:38) represents the consignment of the silver rose and opens the touching trio between the Marschallin, Octavian and Sophie (16:02). Here again, the orchestra carries long melodies and plays the leading role, whereas the singers, in part, reflect on their own personal situations. The Marschallin sings, “I vowed to love him, but to love him right,” expressing that she is ready to let Octavian go.

Sophie and Octavian look deeply into each other’s eyes with the words, “I sense only you” (19:09). In this emotional and intimate moment of love, the music cannot be more exalted and exuberant, moving from climax to climax. The Marschallin comments, “Might he be happy the way men think they are happy” and leaves the scene disappointed, yet resigned.

The final duet between Octavian and Sophie, embracing each other (20:54), finds the two alone and united with the words, "Is it a dream, is it true that we are staying together?" (21:34). The music is simple, almost like a folksong. This famous scene, one of the most emotional and touching in all of opera literature, has a unique place in the work of Richard Strauss.

7: In contrast to the opera, the Suite ends with a waltz (22:21). Incidentally, in a moment of light humor, Ochs finds himself penniless on the stage, yet surrounded by people demanding money for their services, for example, the hardworking Viennese Fiaker, preparing the horses. Here, the music traditionally slows down and therefore takes on an almost rustic character (23:05).

The final bars (24:20) are not part of the original opera, but were added by Artur Rodzinski.

It is clear that the magnificence of *Der Rosenkavalier* has long enchanted audiences around the world, and incidentally, held a special place in Strauss' own heart, as well. It has been said that Strauss, when American soldiers stood at his doorstep in 1945, proclaimed, "I am Richard Strauss, the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome*". Richard Strauss would die on September 8, 1949. Fittingly, the beautiful Rosenkavalier Trio was played at his memorial service.

In bringing to life these two Strauss orchestral suites, one old (Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*) and one new (the first commercial release of the *Elektra Symphonic Drama*), I have often wondered whether Strauss' mastery of operas would have been the same, had he not composed his enormously successful tone poems years before. As is the case in the tone poems where the orchestra is pushed to the edge in both virtuosity and sheer brilliance, the operas likewise demand the same. It is for this reason that the orchestra can be seen as the true star of the operas. After presenting Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* on my first recording (Exton), and then the three Strauss tone poems (*Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration*, and *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*) on my first disc with Reference Recordings, it is somehow fitting to now have the chance to bring these two important Strauss opera suites to life with the wonderful musicians of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Together, these works encompass great drama in music, and allow us a look into the larger than life mastery of the operatic and symphonic genius of Richard Strauss.

—MANFRED HONECK

Renowned for his distinctive interpretations, **Manfred Honeck** has served as music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra since the 2008-2009 season. He and the orchestra are consistently recognized for their performances and are celebrated both in Pittsburgh and abroad. To great acclaim, they regularly perform in major music capitals and festivals, among them the BBC Proms, Musikfest Berlin, Lucerne Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival, Beethovenfest Bonn, Grafenegg Festival, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony also have built a close relationship with the Musikverein in Vienna. Following a week-long residency in 2012, they returned for three performances in the course of an extensive tour of Europe in spring 2016. Their next tour, in summer 2017, will again lead them to Europe's most prestigious music festivals.

Honeck's successful work with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra has been extensively documented on recordings with the Reference and Exton labels. All SACDs released by Reference Records, among them Strauss tone poems, Dvořák's Symphony No. 8, Bruckner's Symphony No. 4, Beethoven Symphonies No. 5 and 7 and, most recently, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, have received numerous rave reviews and honors. The recording of Dvořák's Symphony No. 8 and the Symphonic Suite from Janáček's opera *Jenůfa*, conceptualized by Honeck, was nominated for a Grammy Award, as was Bruckner's Symphony No. 4. Several recordings, including Mahler's Symphony No. 4, which won a 2012 Interna-



Felix Broede

tional Classical Music Award, are also available on the Japanese label Exton.

Born in Austria, Honeck received his musical training at the Academy of Music in Vienna. Many years of experience as a member of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra have given his conducting a distinctive stamp. He began his career as assistant to Claudio Abbado and as artistic leader of the Vienna Jeunesse Orchestra. Subsequently, he was engaged by the Zurich Opera House, where he was bestowed the prestigious European Conductor's Award in 1993. Other early posts include Leipzig, where he was one of three main conductors of the MDR Symphony Orchestra, and Oslo, where he assumed the post of music director at the Norwegian National Opera on short notice for a year and was engaged as principal guest conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. From 2000 to 2006, he was music director of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Stockholm and, from 2008 to 2011 and again from 2013 to 2016, principal guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

From 2007 to 2011, Honeck was music director of the Staatsoper Stuttgart where he conducted premieres including Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Mozart's *Idomeneo*, Verdi's *Aida*, Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*, Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* and Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, as well as numerous symphonic concerts. His operatic guest appearances include Semperoper Dresden, Komische Oper Berlin, Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, Royal Opera of Copenhagen, the White Nights Festival in St. Petersburg and the Salzburg Festival. Moreover, he has been artistic director of the International Concerts Wolfegg in Germany for more than 20 years.

As a guest conductor, Honeck has worked with the world's leading orchestras including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Staatskapelle Dresden, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de

Paris, Accademia di Santa Cecilia Rome and the Vienna Philharmonic. Orchestras he has conducted in the United States include the New York Philharmonic, The Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and Boston Symphony Orchestra. He is also a regular guest at the Verbier Festival. His successful debut with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra resulted in a CD recording of works by Dvořák for Deutsche Grammophon together with Anne-Sophie Mutter, which received an Echo Klassik award in 2014. In the 2016-2017 season, he will return to Berlin and also continue his regular collaboration with the orchestras in Bamberg, Stockholm, Oslo, Prague and Rome. Other guest engagements include San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Israel Philharmonic and Shanghai Symphony Orchestra.

Honeck has received honorary doctorates from Carnegie Mellon University, St. Vincent College and the Catholic University of America. Most recently, he was awarded the title of honorary professor by the Austrian Federal President.



THE PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

With a more than 120-year history, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra is credited with a rich history of the world's finest conductors and musicians, and a strong commitment to the Pittsburgh region and its citizens. Past music directors have included Fritz Reiner (1938-1948), William Steinberg (1952-1976), Andre Previn (1976-1984), Lorin Maazel (1984-1996) and Mariss Jansons (1995-2004). This tradition of outstanding international music directors was furthered in fall 2008, when Austrian conductor Manfred Honeck became music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony.

The orchestra has been at the forefront of championing new American works, and gave the first performance of Leonard Bernstein's *Symphony No. 1 "Jeremiah"* in 1944 and John Adams' *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* in 1986. The Pittsburgh Symphony has a long and illustrious history in the areas of recordings and radio concerts. As early as 1936, the Pittsburgh Symphony broadcast on the airwaves coast-to-coast and in the late 1970s it made the ground breaking PBS series "Previn and the Pittsburgh."

The orchestra has received increased national attention since 1982 through network radio broadcasts on Public Radio International, produced by Classical WQED-FM 89.3, made possible by the musicians of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

With a long and distinguished history of touring both domestically and overseas since 1900, including international tours to Europe, the Far East and South America—the symphony was the first American orchestra to perform at the Vatican in January 2004 for the late Pope John Paul II, as part of the Pontiff's Silver Jubilee celebration—the Pittsburgh Symphony continues to be critically acclaimed as one of the world's greatest orchestras.

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Italicized names

are substitute musicians

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Technical Recording Notes

We at Soundmirror believe, that in a good and successful recording, the sound has to serve the music. While an important goal is to truthfully represent the acoustical event in the hall, another is to capture the composer's intention reflected in the score and its realization by the performer. To achieve these goals, extensive collaboration and communication between the artists and the recording team are of utmost importance.

Based on our long experience of recording the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in Heinz Hall, we chose five omnidirectional DPA 4006 microphones as our main microphone array. Supplementing those with "spot mics" to clarify the detail of the orchestration, we worked toward realizing above goals. Extensive listening sessions with Maestro Honeck and orchestra musicians were crucial in refining the final balance.

This recording was made and post produced in DSD256 on a Pyramix workstation to give you, the listener, the highest sound quality possible.

**We hope you will enjoy listening to this recording
as much as we enjoyed making it!**

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