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Richard Strauss in 1925

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MICHAEL KENNEDY



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*For my friend Stephan Kohler,
in Straussian fellowship*

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P R E F A C E

My intention in writing this book was originally to expand upon my book on the composer in the Master Musicians series and to explain why I love the music of Richard Strauss so much, but that I understand why many people are either antipathetic to it or strongly hostile. But as I wrote, I decided that the first part of my intention was repetitive and boring and the second part negative and a waste of the reader's time. If people do not like Strauss's music, let *them* write a book to say why.

It then occurred to me that there is no detailed and extensive biography of Strauss in print written in English. The most recent was the translation of Kurt Wilhelm's splendid personal portrait, published in Britain in 1989. Norman Del Mar's three volumes contain much biography, but a generation has passed since Volume 3 was published; and admirable though Del Mar's achievement is, I take issue with most of his opinions both about the man and the music, especially the later music.

I also wanted to tackle fully the thorny subject of Strauss and the Third Reich. The only way to explain Strauss's position, I believe, is to set down the facts in perspective and in context. It is significant that in the latest large biography of Strauss to be published in German – Franzpeter Messmer's *Richard Strauss: Biographie eines Klangzaubers* – 481 pages of text are devoted to the life. Of these, 410 take the story up to 1933. The crucial and critical last sixteen years from 1933 to 1949 are dismissed in fifty-four pages. I have not gone so far as totally to reverse this disproportion, but the 1933–49 period occupies a substantial percentage of the book. I lived through the whole of the Nazi period, although I was a schoolchild when Hitler came to power, but I have vivid recollections of the years from 1933 to the Munich agreement of 1938 and know how different attitudes to the Nazis were up to the point where Hitler began his 'territorial demands'. I find insufferable the

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smug holier-than-thou attitude of people who know with such certainty exactly how honourably and courageously they would have behaved in Germany after 1933. Strauss was no hero; he was weak in many ways, immensely strong in others. He was centred almost exclusively on his family and on his work. He can be judged only against the full background of the time.

There is no shortage of superb books and monographs on Strauss's music so, while I have discussed the works, particularly the later operas which have been generally underrated until recent years, I have not gone into analytical detail. When we have Del Mar's volumes, William Mann's and Charles Osborne's books on the operas, the various Cambridge and ENO opera guides on individual operas and such marvellous monographs as Bryan Gilliam's *Elektra*, there is less need for another book in this field than there is, I believe, for a comprehensive biographical study. This I have attempted to provide as a tribute to his memory in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of his death. I shall not be alive when the bicentenary of his birth is celebrated in June 2064 but those who are will, I am convinced, reap the benefits of the further researches of Strauss scholarship. More will have emerged from the Garmisch archive and by then, I hope, there will be (in German and English) a complete edition of his vast correspondence. Also much needed is a critical edition of his works which will eradicate many of the textual errors in the printing of several of his scores and will take account of some of his unpublished revisions.

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My first debt of gratitude is to the composer's grandsons, Richard Strauss and Dr Christian Strauss, for permission to quote from Strauss's letters and writing and for their hospitality in granting me access to the wonderful archive at Garmisch. I would also like to thank Dr Christian Strauss for his patience and frankness in answering my queries about his grandfather and father. I am deeply indebted to Stephan Kohler, director of the Richard-Strauss-Institut in Munich, for his generous help and advice, not only in many conversations about Strauss but in providing me with photocopies of material held by the Institut and for answering many questions. I have been helped with translations by Elizabeth Mortimer and Arthur Tennant, to both of whom I offer my heartfelt thanks as I do to Dr Delia Kühn for the many family reminiscences and other help. I am grateful for his assistance regarding the 1933–4 *Parsifal* to Dr Sven Friedrich, Director of the Richard-Wagner-Museum, Haus Wahnfried, Bayreuth. I very much appreciate help from Dr Günter Brosche, Director of the Music Collection of the Austrian National Library, Vienna. For permission to quote from his translation of *Intermezzo*, I am indebted to Mr Andrew Porter. To Joyce Bourne, who has typed the book, offered advice and had to endure my constant preoccupation with Strauss, my deepest gratitude.

No writer on Strauss can fail to acknowledge indebtedness to his predecessors. I have mentioned Norman Del Mar and other authors in the Preface. To their names I would add that of Kurt Wilhelm, whose *Richard Strauss persönlich* (1984) is indispensable (it is a pity it was insensitively cut for its English version). The first volume of Willi Schuh's unfinished official biography is the authoritative source for the early years. Also indispensable are Franz Trenner's catalogues of the works and of the Garmisch sketch-books. A treasure trove is the collection of letters published as *Eine Welt in*

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Briefen (which is long overdue for an English translation) and other volumes of Strauss's correspondence. The various monographs on Strauss's operas published by Cambridge University Press are a source of insight into the works' history and musical structure. For permission to quote from the Strauss-Hofmannsthal correspondence and from Willi Schuh's *Richard Strauss: a Chronicle of the Early Years, 1864-1898*, I acknowledge the kindness of Cambridge University Press.