PART I

Background

1 The musical world of Strauss's youth

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Born in Munich on June 11, 1864, Richard Strauss entered the world at a crucial time of change for the political and cultural environment in which he would develop as person and musician: three months earlier, Ludwig II had acceded to power over the Kingdom of Bavaria, while almost six weeks earlier, Richard Wagner had first arrived in Munich under the new king's aegis. That these related events did not have an immediate impact on Strauss in his earliest years does not diminish their ultimate real and symbolic significance for his life and career: he emerged as musician within a city where the revolution in music was a matter of public debate, especially to the extent that its progenitor Wagner directly influenced the monarch and indirectly had an impact on affairs of state.

Character of the city

However, of all German-speaking major cities, Munich may have been the least suited for artistic upheaval, given the nature of its institutions and the character of its citizens. In his study *Pleasure Wars*, Peter Gay paints a picture of a Munich that was hopelessly polarized, between the cultural offerings sponsored by the ruling Wittelsbachs and the middle class that preferred popular types of entertainment.[1] Notably absent during the reigns of Ludwig I, Maximilian II, and Ludwig II was a significant bourgeois involvement in the higher forms of art, which Gay attributes in part to what he calls the "habitual passivity" of Munich's *Bürger*,[2] formed by a nexus of the monarch's paternalist attitude towards his subjects and the residents' appetite for amusement. Ludwig I speaks from this position when he opined in 1842, "*opera seria* is boring, but the *Münchener* and their king love merry *Singspiele*."[3] Munich Intendant Karl von Perfall, writing as Theodor von der Ammer, takes a more cynical view of this attitude in his observation: "The Isar-Athenian is not and never was that which with greater refinement can be called artistic. He only possesses a great urge to amuse himself … Thus his theater visit is also only for the purpose of finding entertainment."[4] Edward Wilberforce's 1863 book *Social*

Life in Munich provides more detail about musical taste among the city's residents:

> To the people who frequent the concerts, the music seems only a secondary consideration … The crowd at every concert is a matter of fashion and of custom. Most people go because the rest go; a great many because they hope to be spoken to by the king; a great many more because their husbands have gone to their clubs, and they have nothing to do at home … The excellence of the orchestra, and the presence of the court, makes these [Musical Academy] concerts the principal ones in Munich.[5]

Wilberforce proceeds to contrast this artificial, elaborately staged concert hall experience with the "natural" outdoor culture of Munich's bourgeoisie:

> But we breathe a very different atmosphere from that of these gas-lit rooms, brilliant though the company, and brilliant the play, when we get out into the open air, to one of the many gardens about Munich. How pleasant it is to sit on a bench and listen to the music of some military brass band or society of instrumentalists![6]

Other nineteenth-century visitors similarly observed the city's two faces, whether traveller Theodore Child in calling Munich a "dolorous and incongruous patchwork,"[7] or an unnamed author in the opinion "Munich is the most artificial of all the cities of this world,"[8] or when – more positively reporting about the polarized artistic life there – Friedrich Kaiser remarked how theater director Carl Bernbrunn "significantly obtained both the support of the fun-loving [*lebenslustig*] Munich public and the favour of the royal court by staging … festivals."[9] Such assessments criticized the low artistic tastes of the Munich *Bürger*, whose "beer culture" figured prominently in travelogues and memoirs by visitors to the city. Still, city guides from the early 1860s could direct visitors to Munich's architecture and art collections as unique in Germany, the legacy of Ludwig I and (to a lesser extent) Maximilian II, even though Grieben's notes at the same time "the pleasant [*gemüthlich*], yet at times coarse [*derb*] lifestyle."[10]

In this light it is interesting to observe how travelers from the United States tend to judge the music offered in Munich's beer gardens favorably. Indeed, a certain trope appears to exist in American travel memoirs about central Europe: the visitor provides an extended description of Munich's architectural and artistic wonders, and then briefly portrays the city's beer culture and beer gardens, replete with a positive description of the accompanying music (the same writers tend not to refer to either operatic or orchestral performances in Munich). This applies to such diverse reminiscences as W. H. K. Godfrey's *Three Months on the Continent* (1874),

P. B. Cogswell's *Glints from over the Water* (1880), Curtis Guild's *Over the Ocean* (1882), and Theodore Child's *Summer Holidays: Travelling Notes in Europe* (1889).[11] It appears that these aspects of Munich culture particularly struck the American visitor, whether out of novelty or familiarity.[12]

This ongoing question of artistic sensibility among the city's residents inspired critic Theodor Goering to ask in 1888, "[I]s Munich a musical city?" His answer was equivocal: "He acknowledged the city's fine orchestras, choirs, soloists, and singers … but … though times were beginning to change, Munich was still essentially dominated by 'princely hobbies' rather than by musical tastes freely developed by the educated middle classes."[13] The "princely hobbies" involved cultivating the higher forms of musical expression – the opera and symphonic music – which did not encourage the development of large-scale municipal musical institutions. In fact, the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra only came into existence in 1893, and then as the Kaim Orchestra (the current name dates from 1924). Considerably smaller than court cities Berlin and Vienna, which respectively numbered 702,500 and 663,000 inhabitants in 1869 and supported lively musical scenes outside court, Munich (with its 170,000 residents) failed to develop a middle-class public for "high-status" musical events (opera, symphonic and chamber music) comparable to those in Dresden and Leipzig, for example.[14] Yes, citizens of Munich did attend such performances, but – as we have already discovered – they were just as, if not more, likely to participate in "low-status" entertainment, as also reflected in the limited number of concerts offered during the season (thus the primary professional orchestra, the Musikalische Akademie, presented eight to twelve concerts annually).

Institutions of musical life: overview

These limitations of the scene notwithstanding, members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* could hear opera, symphonic music, and the sacred repertory in Munich at a high level of accomplishment. The primary high-status public institutions of musical life during Strauss's youth were the Hofoper (the Court Opera, which performed at the Hof-Theater and the Residenz-Theater), the Musikalische Akademie (in the Odeon), and the Königliche Vokalkapelle, the first two employing the Hoforchester (Strauss's father Franz was a horn player with the orchestra from 1847 to 1889). The amateur orchestra called "Wilde Gung'l" came into existence in late 1864 (conducted by Franz Strauss from 1875 to 1896), in response to Joseph Gungl's eighteen-member *Kapelle*, which had established itself earlier that year at the Englisches Café. The Königliche Musikschule (1867–73,

in 1874 reorganized as a state institution) provided concerts for the Munich community, while the Volkstheater presented operettas and ballet. Public presentations of chamber music did not prominently figure in the city's musical life during Strauss's formative years, but the nineteenth-century practice of music-making did continue to flourish in the homes and salons of Munich's *Bürger*. Needless to say, the city did not lack opportunities for hearing "popular music": in the 1867 edition of Grieben's guide to Munich and environs, author Adolf Ackermann indicates the city possessed over 300 beer houses and that at these and other *Vergnügungsorte* (entertainment venues) there was "music everywhere on an almost daily basis."[15] Daily at noon a parade with military music took place – a military band also played "every Weds. Evening 6–7 in the Hofgarten, and Sat. evenings by the Chinese tower in the English Garden."[16]

That the majority of the elite institutions stood under royal patronage – not only in name but also in deed – did leave a mark upon the musical life of Munich, ranging from the employment of musicians to the repertory performed at the Court Opera. After all, Franz Strauss remained in active court service for over forty years, during which time he developed a career and raised a family in the employ of the Wittelsbach monarchy. At the same time, the Bavarian kings of the nineteenth century exerted varying degrees of influence upon the selection of works for the Hof-Theater, the musical institution of the highest prestige in the city.[17] The operatic repertory cultivated after 1864 under Ludwig II proves that royal taste did not always take a conservative or (in the case of Ludwig I) popular direction, even though scholarly studies – including Willi Schuh's detailed account of Strauss's Munich years[18] – have neglected the more traditional operatic programming during the king's reign in the desire to foreground Wagner's contributions.

Indeed, the account by Schuh may well describe the domestic conditions under which the young Richard emerged as a musician, but his book (and other biographies that followed) fails to establish an adequate context for the composer's early development. Granted that Strauss would have been too young during the late 1860s and early 1870s to pay much attention to details of the city's musical life, let alone to understand the machinations at court, he did mature within a musical/cultural environment that – by his own admission – left a lasting mark upon the youth.[19] The milieu Strauss encountered was unique in Germany, with musical, cultural, and social polarities the order of the day: the conflict between Wagner/Ludwig II and the conservative musical establishment, the disparity between the tastes and character of the nobility/*Bildungsbürger* and the lower classes, and even the divide between "interior culture" (sites of privilege, whether the opera stage, concert hall, or domestic salon) and

"exterior culture" (military music, music in the beer gardens, street music), with the church and its music serving as intermediary.

A closer study of the city's institutions of musical life and the individuals associated with them will provide an understanding of what it meant for Richard Strauss to be an aspiring musician in late-nineteenth-century Munich and, indeed, for a musician to develop in a central European city other than the leading centers of Berlin, Vienna, and Leipzig.

The Hofoper

After a long period of ascendancy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the climax of which many historians identify as the premiere of Mozart's *Idomeneo* in 1781, the Munich Hofoper went into decline in the early nineteenth century.[20] Not until Franz Lachner took over the musical leadership of the institution in 1836 – under Intendant Karl Theodor von Küstner – was the Munich Court Opera able to rise again to prominence. He improved the quality of performance and reformed the repertory, so that new works by Lortzing, Marschner, Flotow, Gounod, and Verdi received solid performances – Lachner also conducted the Munich premieres of *Tannhäuser* (1855) and *Lohengrin* (1858), despite his lack of sympathy for Wagner's music. In general, the Hofoper was quite active during Lachner's tenure, mounting over 100 performances per season.[21]

Musical scholarship has assumed that, with the arrivals of Ludwig II and Richard Wagner in Munich in 1864, the operatic scene there dramatically changed. Indeed, Wagner's ascendancy did lead to Lachner's eventual retirement, with Hans von Bülow briefly taking the helm. During the late 1860s, the Court Opera became the primary site for new Wagner productions, with the premieres of *Tristan und Isolde* (June 10, 1865) and *Die Meistersinger* (June 21, 1868), and the unauthorized first performances of *Das Rheingold* (September 22, 1869) and *Die Walküre* (June 26, 1870). None of these first performances would have influenced the very young Strauss, but it should be remembered that Wagner remained a staple in Munich after the initiation of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, with twenty-four performances in 1876 alone, twenty-three in 1877, and twenty-five in 1878 (including the individual evenings of the *Ring* cycle).

The scholar nevertheless is well advised to put these Wagner performances into a broader perspective. Thus in 1868, the Hofoper presented almost 120 full evenings of opera, mounting thirteen performances of Wagner (three of *Der fliegende Holländer*, one of *Lohengrin*, and nine of *Die Meistersinger*).[22] That same year, however, the stage offered Auber ten times (*Der erste Glückstag* five times, *Maurer und Schlosser* four times,

and *Die Stumme von Portici* once),[23] Lortzing nine times (*Der Wildschütz* twice, *Zar und Zimmermann* twice, *Der Waffenschmied* twice, and *Die beiden Schützen* three times), Boïeldieu nine times (*Die weiße Frau* five times, *Rothkäppchen* twice, *Der neue Gutsherr* twice), Weber six times (*Der Freischütz* five times, *Oberon* once), Halévy six times (*Die Jüdin* three times, *Die Musketiere der Königin* three times), Meyerbeer four times (*Die Hugenotten* three times, *Robert der Teufel* once), Gounod twice (*Faust*) and Verdi twice (*Der Troubadour*). Other opera composers represented on the repertory of calendar year 1868 include Beethoven, Cherubini, Dittersdorf, Donizetti, Flotow, Gluck, Krempelsetzer, Lachner, Méhul, Mozart, Nicolai, Rossini, Schubert, Schumann, Spohr, and Zenger.

In other words, opera-goers during 1868 in Munich would have enjoyed a rather complete cross-section of European opera of the nineteenth century, at the rate of one performance every third evening – this level of activity made the Hofoper the leading high-status musical institution in Munich of the time.[24] Of course, the opera performances of the late 1860s and early 1870s would not yet have a real effect on the child and youth Strauss, but they do represent the music his father played and the repertory that Richard himself would eventually experience at the Court Opera. Jumping ahead one decade to the late 1870s, and Strauss's first serious engagements with opera in performance, we discover that the number of evenings devoted to opera did not significantly vary from year to year during that period, and the representation of composers from the past and the proportion of works from the various national "schools" remained relatively stable. The seasons ranged from approximately 120 to 140 performances, although 1881 featured 150 and 1883 over 160, so that the son of an orchestral musician would have had ample opportunity to become familiar with staged opera.

Moreover, the repertory was surprisingly diverse, especially considering that Wagner's shadow hung over the institution through both his influence upon Ludwig II and his intervention through conductor Hans von Bülow. Needless to say, Wagner's music dominated every season, with at least twice, if not three times the works by the second-most performed composers. For the entire period from 1868 to 1892, Perfall counted a total of 742 Wagner performances at the Hofoper, followed by Mozart (241), Weber (226), Lortzing (213), Verdi (170), Auber (160), Meyerbeer (136), Beethoven (135), Rossini (132), and Gounod (116).[25] It is enlightening to observe how large a role the works of Lortzing played, but even more interesting to consider the significant presence of Italian and French composers of the past and present, especially Meyerbeer, Gounod, and Verdi, none of whose operas Wagner felt was of artistic value.

Turning specifically to the theater's repertory from the period 1877 to 1883, the formative years for the young Strauss, one can note similar proportions among these leading composers, yet with some informative variants. For example, Auber was particularly well represented during these years, with twelve performances in 1877 (ten percent of the repertory),[26] while Meyerbeer's four main operas received thirty-four performances (*Die Hugenotten* accounting for over half that number) and Lortzing's five leading works fifty-eight performances between 1877 and 1883.[27] Both *Aïda* and *Carmen* entered the Munich repertory several years after their premieres – *Aïda* in 1877, *Carmen* in 1880 – but once on the program, they would play dominant roles for years to come: Verdi's opera opened with ten performances, the most for any one work in 1877, and the Hofoper consistently staged Bizet's work five times per year into the late 1880s. Other favourites during this period – operas that annually received multiple performances – include Adam's *Der Postillon von Longjumeau*, Auber's *Die Stumme von Portici*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Boïeldieu's *Die weiße Frau*, Gounod's *Faust*, Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied*, Mozart's *Don Juan* and *Die Zauberflöte*, Rossini's *Wilhelm Tell* and *Der Barbier von Seville*, Schumann's *Manfred*(!), Verdi's *Der Troubadour*, all of Wagner's operas (including the individual evenings of the *Ring*), and Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Among new operas, the theater repeatedly staged the very successful *Das goldene Kreuz* by Ignaz Brüll (which Strauss himself would later conduct in Munich), *Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung* by Carl Goetz, *Die Folkunger* by Edmund Kretschmer, and the perennial favourite *Katharina Cornaro* by former Kapellmeister Franz Lachner.

Of course, just because he came into contact with an opera through the Hofoper does not mean that Strauss valued the work, then or at a later date: for example, Strauss famously attacked Gounod's *Faust*, calling its German success "one of the greatest blots of shame."[28] After his "conversion" to Wagner, Strauss by and large adopted the party line of the New German School in his tastes, although his repertoire choices for Weimar and Munich can be said to reflect the eclectic operatic programming of the Hofoper during the reign of Ludwig II. It was during those early, formative years, while his father's anti-Wagnerian position still held sway with the boy, that Strauss acquired an intimate knowledge of the standard repertoire of the time, as documented in his letters to Ludwig Thuille.[29] There the young Strauss reports at length to his friend about his (positive) impressions from such works as Auber's *Die Stumme von Portici*, Boïeldieu's *Die weiße Frau*, and Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmermann*.[30] Needless to say, Strauss was also able to obtain an early, close familiarity with those staples of the nineteenth-century German stage – the operas of Mozart and Weber's *Der Freischütz* – as a result of his exposure at the Hofoper. He may have come to

maintain a musical and ideological allegiance to Bayreuth, but the foundations of Strauss's opera aesthetic were laid in the Court Opera of Munich.

Observing such opera conductors as Hans von Bülow (as guest), Hermann Levi, and Franz Wüllner also contributed to the young composer's musical training, whether they were conducting the standard repertoire or Wagner's operas. The audience member of the Hofoper not only benefited from its first-rate conducting, but also was able to hear some of the leading voices of the day on stage, which included sopranos Mathilde Mallinger (the first Eva) and Therese Vogl (the first Sieglinde), tenor Heinrich Vogl (the first Loge and Siegmund), and bass Kaspar Bausewein (the first Fafner and Hunding). Starting in the Lachner years, the orchestra for the opera (the Hofkapelle) maintained a high level of artistic accomplishment, which carried over into its concert activities (see below).

Musikalische Akademie

Established in 1811, the Musikalische Akademie was the symphonic arm of the Court Opera Orchestra, consisting of Hofoper performers and led by its conductor.[31] While not as prominent a Munich institution during Strauss's youth as the opera, the orchestra nevertheless maintained a season of subscription concerts in the Odeon, divided into two series of four-to-six concerts each, the first finishing by Christmas, the second occurring during the Lenten season. Strauss regularly attended the Musikalische Akademie concerts – in fact, his letters to Thuille more substantially refer to the orchestra concerts than to the opera performances, and in greater detail.

During his formative years, Strauss would have experienced the concerts under the direction of Hermann Levi (conductor 1872–96), who presented exemplary orchestral programs that reflected both his early, close friendship with Brahms and his strong support for the music of Wagner.[32] The 1864 season under the direction of Franz Lachner reflects the orchestra's conservative repertoire before the arrival of Bülow and Levi: five compositions by Lachner himself; four by Mendelssohn; three by Beethoven; two by Mozart, Schumann, and Spohr; and one by Bach, Cherubini, Haydn, and Schubert. The season featured four new works: Lachner's Psalm 63 and Orchestral Suite No. 2, J. J. Abert's *Columbus* Symphony, and Wilhelm Taubert's Overture to *Tausend und eine Nacht*.

By the time Strauss was regularly attending the Musikalische Akademie concerts – his father had been a member since 1847 – the program contents had dramatically changed. Writing to friend Thuille in March, 1878, the thirteen-year-old already expressed in some detail his opinions about visiting composer Saint-Saëns and his *Rouet d'Omphale*, which Levi

had programmed in the second subscription concert beside Mozart's Symphony No. 38, three songs by Max Zenger from *Der Trompeter von Säckingen*, three duets by Schumann, and Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3.[33] The other concerts of the Lenten series brought subscribers mixed programs of old and new compositions: Beethoven, Symphony No. 5; Brahms, Piano Concerto No. 1 and Symphony No. 1; Wagner, *Siegfried-Idyll*; Raff, Violin Concerto in A minor; Spohr, Overture to *Jessonda*.

The second series of the 1880–1 season is particularly noteworthy because it featured works by all three composers of the New German School (Berlioz's *Harold en Italie*, Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*, and Liszt's *Orpheus*), which are balanced by the usual assortment of symphonies by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, and by Brahms's *Variationen über ein Thema von Haydn*. This was also the series in which Strauss's Symphony in D minor received its premiere, while the first half of the season brought recent compositions by Raff (Symphony No. 9, *Im Sommer*), Dvořák (Slavonic Rhapsody), Svendsen (Swedish Rhapsody), and Goldmark (*Ländliche Hochzeit* Symphony).

Thus the resident of Munich could have heard some of the newest orchestral music at the Musikalische Akademie concerts, while enjoying the established figures from the Classical and Romantic eras. Not unlike the Opera, these concerts reveal a more mixed repertoire than the scholar might suspect – Levi programmed leading composers whatever their musico-political direction, which led to quite interesting juxtapositions – for example, Brahms and Wagner on the same night. It must be borne in mind that the post-1872 repertoire is more a product of Levi's personal predilections than of any pressure exerted by Ludwig II or Wagner, since friend Brahms received more performances at the Odeon than did Wagner, Liszt, or Berlioz. This situation in Munich is unique and should not be interpreted as characterizing orchestral symphonic repertoires in other major central European cities, which – with the exception of Weimar and similar New German "outposts" – tended towards more conservative concert offerings. As a result, however, it provided the young Strauss with a greater familiarity with the totality of recent central Austro-German orchestral composition (conservative and progressive) than he might have acquired in other cities, including Berlin and Vienna.

Wilde Gung'l

More important for Strauss – and possibly also for the citizens of Munich – was the amateur orchestra called "Wilde Gung'l," which took life in the year of Strauss's birth.[34] As Bryan Gilliam observes,