

**2024–2025 | 125th Season**  
**Marian Anderson Hall**

# The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, May 1, at 7:30

Friday, May 2, at 2:00

**Tugan Sokhiev** Conductor

**Haochen Zhang** Piano

**Wagner** Overture to *Tannhäuser*

**Liszt** Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major

I. Allegro maestoso. Tempo giusto

II. Quasi adagio—Allegretto vivace—Allegro animato—Tempo I, allegro maestoso—

III. Allegro marziale animato—Alla breve. Più mosso—Più presto—Presto

## Intermission

**Strauss** *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, Op. 28

**Strauss** “Dance of the Seven Veils,” from *Salome*, Op. 54

This program runs approximately one hour, 45 minutes.

These concerts are sponsored by **Neal Krouse and Karl Fong**.

Tugan Sokhiev’s appearances are supported by **Nancy and Peter Grove**.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit [www.wrti.org](http://www.wrti.org) to listen live or for more details.



## The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music and furthering the place of the arts in an open and democratic society. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united. Today, The Philadelphia Orchestra and Ensemble Arts brings the greatest performances and most impactful education and community programs to audiences in Philadelphia and beyond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 13th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is embraced by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community. In addition to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers, Yannick and the Orchestra are committed to performing and recording the works of previously overlooked composers.

*Your* Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, around the community, over the airwaves, and online. The Kimmel Center has been the ensemble's home since 2001, and in 2024 Verizon

Hall at the Kimmel Center was officially rededicated as Marian Anderson Hall in honor of the legendary contralto, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community initiatives engage over 50,000 students, families, and community members of all ages through programs such as PlayINs; side-by-sides; PopUP concerts; Our City, Your Orchestra Live; the free annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Tribute Concert; School Concerts; sensory-friendly concerts; open rehearsals; the School Ensemble Program; All-City Orchestra Fellowships; and residency work in Philadelphia and abroad.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador and one of our nation's greatest exports. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Mann Center, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich touring history, having first performed outside Philadelphia in its earliest days. In 1973 it was the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China, launching a now-five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange.

Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 14 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit [www.philorch.org](http://www.philorch.org).

# Conductor



Internationally renowned conductor **Tugan Sokhiev** divides his time between the symphonic and lyric repertoire, conducting the most prestigious orchestras around the world. He regularly leads the Vienna, Berlin, and Munich philharmonics; the Dresden Staatskapelle; the Bavarian Radio Symphony; the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra; London's Philharmonia; and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome. Recent seasons have included a tour of Asia with the Vienna Philharmonic and a European tour with the Munich Philharmonic. He spends several weeks each season with the NHK Symphony in Tokyo and is invited to the finest orchestras in the United States, including the New York Philharmonic and the Boston and Chicago symphonies. He made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 2014.

As music director of the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse from 2008 to 2022, Mr. Sokhiev led several world premieres and a significant number of tours abroad, propelling the orchestra to international prominence. Passionate about his work with singers, he was music director and chief conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow from 2014 to 2022, conducting many new productions and premieres. He has guest conducted at the Metropolitan Opera and received critical acclaim for his performances of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, a production he subsequently took to the Teatro Real in Madrid. In addition to these current performances, highlights of the 2024–25 season include debuts with the Orchestre de l'Opéra National de Paris; tours in Asia with the Munich Philharmonic and Europe with the Staatskapelle Dresden; and the Summer Night Concert with the Vienna Philharmonic. He also conducts a new production of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* at the Vienna State Opera.

Mr. Sokhiev's discography includes recordings with the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse on Naïve and Warner Classics and winning the Diapason d'Or in 2020. His recordings with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester (DSO) Berlin, where he was principal conductor from 2012 to 2016, have been released on Sony Classical. He has collaborated with EuroArts on a series of DVDs with the DSO Berlin, the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, and the Berlin Philharmonic. One of the last students of legendary teacher Ilya Musin at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Mr. Sokhiev is eager to share his expertise with future generations of musicians. He founded a conducting academy in Toulouse and works with the young musicians of the Angelika Prokopp Summer Academy of the Vienna Philharmonic. He is honored to be a patron of the Philharmonic Brass Education Program, collaborating with musicians on their first recording.

# Soloist

Benjamin Edelovega



**Haochen Zhang** made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut as a winner of the Orchestra's Albert M. Greenfield Student Competition in 2006 and his subscription debut in 2017, the same year he received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, which recognizes the potential for a major career in music. Since winning the gold medal at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2009, he has appeared with many of the world's leading festivals and orchestras, including the China Philharmonic with Long Yu at the BBC

Proms; the Munich Philharmonic with Lorin Maazel in a sold-out tour in Munich and China; the Sydney Symphony and David Robertson in a tour to China; and the NDR Hamburg and Thomas Hengelbrock in a tour of Tokyo, Beijing, and Shanghai. In 2019 he joined Yannick Nézet-Séguin and The Philadelphia Orchestra for tours of China and Japan.

In addition to these current performances, highlights of Mr. Zhang's 2024–25 season include his recital debut at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, tours with the Munich and Hong Kong philharmonics, and a return to the Melbourne Symphony. He was appointed artist in residence at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Beijing, which includes an Asian tour with the NCPA Orchestra and concerts of the complete Liszt and Rachmaninoff concertos. In recent seasons he debuted with the New York and Luxembourg philharmonics, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. He has performed with the Filarmonica della Scala, the NHK Symphony, and the Staatskapelle Berlin. In October 2017 he performed at Carnegie Hall with the NCPA Orchestra, which was followed by his recital debut at Carnegie's Zankel Hall.

In 2019 Mr. Zhang released his debut concerto album on BIS Records, performing Prokofiev's Second Concerto and Tchaikovsky's First Concerto with the Lahti Symphony and Dima Slobodeniouk. His debut solo album, with works by Schumann, Brahms, Janáček, and Liszt, was released by BIS in 2017. These were followed by the complete Beethoven concertos with The Philadelphia Orchestra and Nathalie Stutzmann and a solo album of Liszt's Transcendental Etudes. He is also featured in Peter Rosen's award-winning documentary *A Surprise in Texas*, chronicling the 2009 Van Cliburn Competition. Mr. Zhang is frequently invited by chamber music festivals in the United States and collaborates with such colleagues as the Dover, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Brentano quartets. A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, he studied under Gary Graffman. He was previously trained at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Shenzhen Arts School, where he was admitted in 2001 at the age of 11 to study with Dan Zhaoyi.

# Framing the Program

## Parallel Events

**1845**  
**Wagner**  
Overture to  
*Tannhäuser*

**Music**  
Berlioz  
*The Damnation of Faust*  
**Literature**  
Mérimée  
*Carmen*  
**Art**  
Ingres  
*Portrait of Countess Haussenville*  
**History**  
Texas and Florida admitted as states

**1855**  
**Liszt**  
Piano Concerto No. 1

**Music**  
Bizet  
Symphony in C  
**Literature**  
Dickens  
*Little Dorrit*  
**Art**  
Millais  
*Autumn Leaves*  
**History**  
Paris World Fair

**1904**  
**Strauss**  
*Salome*

**Music**  
Falla  
*La vida breve*  
**Literature**  
Chekov  
*The Cherry Orchard*  
**Art**  
Rousseau  
*The Wedding*  
**History**  
Russo-Japanese War

The concert opens today with Richard Wagner’s magnificent Overture to *Tannhäuser*, whose subtitle is “The Song Contest on the Wartburg.” The opera explores the legend of the medieval knight Tannhäuser and his struggles between the forces of sensuality, represented by Venus, the goddess of love, and of sacred piety, embodied in the chaste Elizabeth.

At age 10 Franz Liszt left his native Hungary to study with Antonio Salieri and Carl Czerny in Vienna. During this time he was taken to meet Beethoven, a memory he cherished for the rest of his life. He began sketching ideas for this First Piano Concerto during his early years as a touring virtuoso in the 1830s, but only completed and premiered it in 1857, by which time he was himself an established master.

The concert concludes with two works by Richard Strauss. The great German composer conducted The Philadelphia Orchestra many times during his two trips to America (1904 and 1921) and on both occasions presented the delightful tone poem *Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks*.

On the latter trip he also conducted “Dance of the Seven Veils” from his scandalous 1905 opera *Salome*. Strauss transformed Oscar Wilde’s recent French play about the beautiful princess Salome who desires the imprisoned John the Baptist. Her stepfather, King Herod, lusts after her and offers to grant any wish if she will dance for him.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM’s *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

# The Music

## Overture to *Tannhäuser*

Richard Wagner

Born in Leipzig, May 22, 1813

Died in Venice, February 13, 1883



It seems that Wagner had strong views on nearly every topic (not limited, unfortunately, to musical matters) and was uninhibited in expressing them in voluminous writings, as well as orally for others to record. He felt that opera had become disastrously degraded, mere entertainment, and that the contemporary German scene was almost as bad as the Italian and French.

One of the many components of the operatic experience was the issue of how to begin: the overture. In an essay he wrote and published in Paris at age 27, Wagner set forth his perspective on the history, aesthetics, and future of the overture. At first, they acted merely as a prologue, so that even in a wonderful composition like Handel's *Messiah*, the overture bears no relation to what follows. Mozart, Gluck, Beethoven, Weber, and a few others created successful ones linked musically to what followed dramatically. But the most recent history Wagner felt was one of decline. They had degenerated into mere potpourris of catchy tunes that would follow during the show, not much different from what we expect today in a Broadway musical.

Wagner argued that the overture should “reproduce the characteristic idea of the drama by the intrinsic means of independent music. ... In a very weighty sense the composer plays the part of a philosopher, who seizes nothing but the *idea* in all phenomena.” He had not realized this ideal in his own first attempts, which tended more to the medley model. His earliest operas—*Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, and *Rienzi*—were ultimately omitted from the approved Wagner canon of works that are mounted at the famed Wagner festival in Bayreuth. His next three operas, the first ones admitted to his ultimate legacy, all have magnificent overtures (or preludes, the term Wagner preferred when the music proceeded without interruption into the first act): *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. While each uses musical material that plays an important role in the opera, they are constructed so as to highlight the larger metaphysical point of the work, to capture the “drama’s leading thought,” not merely to preview the best tunes.

**Venereal Pleasures and Sacred Redemption** Wagner began sketching *Tannhäuser* in 1839, while living in Paris. After writing his own libretto (as he did for all of his operas), he composed the music from the summer of 1843 to January 1845, and tackled the Overture last, completing the entire work on April 13, 1845. The opera premiered in Dresden that year and underwent various revisions before its publication in 1860. The following year

Wagner extensively altered the opening of the opera, as well as some other sections, for an ill-fated production in Paris. He made final changes for a production in Vienna in 1875, and shortly before his death eight years later told his wife, Cosima, that he still owed the world a *Tannhäuser*. He was never entirely happy with it, and productions today must choose between the so-called Dresden and Paris versions. In the latter, the Overture is cut short and leads directly into the opera's opening scene, a bacchanal. The Dresden version is heard today.

The opera explores the legend of the medieval knight Tannhäuser and his struggles between the forces of sensuality, represented by Venus, the goddess of love, and of sacred piety, embodied in the chaste Elizabeth. Venus inhabits the realm of the Venusberg, surrounded by graces, cupids, and nymphs. Elizabeth is niece to the Landgrave of Thuringia and a dignified presence in his court.

Wagner combined various sources to tell his own unique version of the story, a fact reflected in the opera's dual title, *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* (Tannhäuser and the Song Contest on the Wartburg). "I added the title of the legend that I combined with the Tannhäuser myth," Wagner wrote, "although originally they had nothing to do with each other." Tannhäuser, like Orpheus before him, is a supreme lyric musician whose ability to compose and sing songs is unsurpassed. The middle section of the Overture prominently features his paeon to Venus. After leaving the Venusberg, Tannhäuser is told that he must seek forgiveness in Rome. But the pope provides no easy grace and it is only through Elizabeth's redeeming love and death that Tannhäuser is freed from his sensual bonds and can himself die in peace.

**A Closer Look** An instrumental sextet consisting of pairs of clarinets, bassoons, and horns softly intone a devotional melody to open—the tune is the hymn sung by the pilgrims on their return from Rome, which conveys a mood of penitence. The words of the chorus, as heard in the final act, begin "The grace of God to the sinner is given, his soul shall live with the angels in heaven." Warmly rich strings take up the melody, which eventually builds to a loud and full orchestral statement. While the woodwind and brass instruments play the chorale-like pilgrims' hymn, the upper strings have a wonderful ornamental effect of cascading triplets. The first section concludes with the original sextet presenting the simple and pious pilgrims' theme.

The contrasting allegro that follows represents the secular world of venereal delights. The music is playful, wild, and fantastical, as well as extremely sensual in its repetitive statements of themes that mount in intensity and ardor. Eventually we hear the music associated with Tannhäuser's song to Venus—one could say his hymn to her—which commences: "Praise be to Love for pleasure never ending; Love by whose power man's heart is set ablaze!" The middle section of the Overture alternates between various musical ideas associated with the Venusberg (including a solo violin passage for the goddess herself) and an even more passionate restatement of the hero's hymn to Venus. Wagner again uses strings to ornamental effect, but while it was the higher violins for the sacred world, the rambunctious lower strings accompany the secular realm. The sensual world

reaches an orchestral climax with a battery of percussion (cymbals, tambourine, triangle), before returning to the pilgrims' chorus, now in 4/4 rather than 3/4 meter, to conclude.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

*Christopher H. Gibbs is James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music at Bard College and has been the program annotator for The Philadelphia Orchestra since 2000. He is the author of several books on Schubert and Liszt, and the co-author, with Richard Taruskin, of The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition.*

*Tannhäuser was composed from 1843 to 1845.*

*Fritz Scheel was the conductor for the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Tannhäuser Overture, in February 1903. The most recent subscription performances were in November/December 2017 with Donald Runnicles.*

*The Philadelphians have recorded the Overture seven times: in 1921, 1929, and 1937 for RCA with Leopold Stokowski; in 1953, 1959, and 1964 for CBS with Eugene Ormandy; and in 1973 for RCA with Ormandy. All except the 1921 and 1964 recordings also included the “Venusberg Music.”*

*The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (cymbals, tambourine, triangle), and strings.*

*The piece runs approximately 14 minutes in performance.*



# The Music

## Piano Concerto No. 1

Franz Liszt

Born in Raiding, near Sopron (Hungary), October 22, 1811

Died in Bayreuth, July 31, 1886



Many 19th-century composers writing in the wake of Beethoven sought to extend his innovations in unifying large-scale compositions. The idea was to construct cyclic connections whereby different parts and movements relate one to another. The prevalence, for example, of the three shorts and a long rhythm at the start of the Fifth Symphony provided a particularly influential and inspiring model. Central to the procedure is the transformation or metamorphosis of a theme through the course of a piece, so that the musical

material evolves, emerging in a fresh form at each new stage of its development. Such unifying transformations eventually allowed composers to write continuous large-scale works containing what would traditionally have been separate movements.

Although elements of this technique are found throughout music history, Franz Liszt's immediate models were works of Beethoven and Schubert. The latter's "Wanderer" Fantasy for piano, for example, is a four-movement sonata structure with no movement breaks, in which a single motivic germ is transformed into a variety of themes. The piece made a deep impression on Liszt, who performed it often and wrote an impressive arrangement for piano and orchestra.

**A 19th-Century Rock Star** Liszt probably had this sort of model in mind when he first began to conceive his own piano concertos during the late 1830s. His early attempts remained unfinished for many years as Liszt, the foremost keyboard virtuoso of the day, toured Europe and beyond. As a young man he had witnessed violinist Niccolò Paganini dazzle audiences in Paris with his technical prowess. This inspired not only some of Liszt's own piano compositions, which broke new ground in "transcendental" technique, but also provided a concrete model of what a solo virtuoso could do with his career.

For 10 years, beginning in 1838, Liszt led what was essentially the 19th-century version of the life of a touring rock star. (Ken Russell's 1975 movie *Lisztomania* shrewdly cast the Who's Roger Daltrey in the title role.) Liszt published mainly solo piano works and enjoyed a brilliant social life hobnobbing with Europe's bohemian elite. But by the late 1840s he decided to settle down and prove himself as a composer by writing more substantial pieces. He took a prominent position in Weimar, something of a musical backwater, but historically the city of Goethe and Schiller, and a place where he was given virtual carte-blanc to program what he wanted and to experiment with his own compositions.

Liszt's responsibilities in Weimar as conductor of the orchestra made continual demands for fresh orchestral music and this must have prompted him to look back to his concerto sketches once again. Progress was slow. Having composed chiefly virtuosic solo piano music up to this time, he at first lacked confidence in writing for orchestra. Liszt employed the assistance of Joachim Raff (1822–82), a composer and excellent orchestrator, with whose help he completed a first version of the E-flat Concerto in 1849. Shortly after this he began composing a series of symphonic poems in which he quickly mastered a delicate but rich orchestral palette. With renewed confidence he revised the First Concerto again in 1853. The successful premiere took place in Weimar in February 1855, with the composer at the piano and no less than his friend Hector Berlioz conducting.

**“A Triangle Concerto”** Despite the admiring reception accorded these two celebrated musicians at the first performance, the Concerto faced a much less sympathetic response when heard in Vienna the following season. Eduard Hanslick, the powerful anti-Wagnerian critic, called the piece a “triangle concerto” because of the prominent role the instrument plays in the second half of the piece. His views were enough to banish the work from Vienna for some years to come.

Liszt defended what he had done in an amusing letter:

As regards the triangle, I do not deny that it may give offense, especially if it is struck too strongly and not precisely. A preconceived disinclination and objection to percussion instruments prevails, somewhat justified by the frequent misuse of them. ... Of Berlioz, Wagner, and my humble self it is no wonder that ‘like is drawn to like,’ and, as we are all three treated as impotent *canaille* [rabble] among musicians, it is quite natural that we should be on good terms with the *canaille* among the instruments. ... In the face of the most wise proscription of the learned critics I shall, however, continue to employ instruments of percussion and think I shall yet win for them some effects little known.

**A Closer Look** The Concerto is cast in several fluidly interwoven movements that are played in a seamlessly continuous gesture. Allegedly, Liszt fitted the loud opening motif (**Allegro maestoso**), scored for full strings to which the woodwinds and brass respond, with these humorous words: *Das versteht ihr alle nicht, ha-ha!* (This none of you understand, ha-ha!). Just after comes an extended virtuoso passage for the soloist; the first movement builds to a furious climax before giving way to a tranquil second movement (**Quasi adagio**), with a theme in low muted strings. Into this is interpolated an animated scherzo-like section (**Allegro animato**), as well as the infamous emergence of the triangle. The finale begins with a lively **Allegro marziale animato** and gradually draws the themes together into an organic synthesis.

In this Concerto, one of his first large-scale orchestral compositions, Liszt tried to achieve the kind of unity he so admired in Schubert's “Wanderer” Fantasy. As he remarked in a letter concerning the last movement, it “is only an urgent recapitulation of the earlier material with quickened, livelier rhythm, and it contains no new motifs, as will be clear to you from a glance through the score. This kind of binding together and rounding off a piece

at its close is somewhat my own, but it is quite organic and justified from the standpoint of musical form.”

—Christopher H. Gibbs/Paul J. Horsley

*Paul J. Horsley is performing arts editor for the Independent in Kansas City. Previously he was program annotator and musicologist for The Philadelphia Orchestra and music and dance critic for the Kansas City Star.*

*Liszt's First Piano Concerto was composed from 1835 to 1856.*

*Josef Hofmann was the soloist in the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the work, in December 1901; Fritz Scheel conducted. The Concerto appeared most recently on subscription concerts in September/October 2022, with pianist Daniil Trifonov and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.*

*The Philadelphia Orchestra has recorded Liszt's First Piano Concerto three times, all with Eugene Ormandy: in 1952 with Claudio Arrau for CBS; in 1959 with Philippe Entremont for CBS; and in 1968 with Van Cliburn for RCA.*

*The score calls for solo piano, piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion (cymbals, triangle), and strings.*

*Performance time is approximately 20 minutes.*

# The Music

## *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*

**Richard Strauss**

**Born in Munich, June 11, 1864**

**Died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, September 8, 1949**



Like most young composers honing their art, Richard Strauss began his long career writing relatively conventional music. Raised in a musical household—his father played principal French horn in the Munich Court Orchestra—Strauss's early compositions were firmly anchored in traditional forms. As a precocious teenager he wrote two symphonies that were allied, according to his father's arch-conservative tastes, with such "Classical Romantics" as Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. Within the fraught musical politics of the time the

alliances of the Strauss family were clear, as was the enemy: the program music of the New German School, epitomized by Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner.

Then came his "conversion," as Strauss would later call it. The composer and musician Alexander Ritter, 31 years Strauss's senior and someone who had known both Liszt and Wagner, became like a second father, as well as an artistic mentor. Largely under Ritter's influence, Strauss turned to the Lisztian domain of the "Symphonic Poem," or what he would call "Tone Poems." In certain respects these program works, usually in one extended orchestral movement, are descendants of the concert overtures of Beethoven and Mendelssohn. The common starting point is an extra-musical source—a poem, novel, play, legend, historical event, natural phenomenon, philosophical idea, or some other inspiration—that is used as the basis for musical illustration or reflection.

**The Path to *Till Eulenspiegel*** Strauss cautiously moved in the direction of program music with a four-movement descriptive symphony called *Aus Italien* (Out of Italy; 1886). For his first tone poem, the 23-year-old composer turned to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and next wrote *Don Juan* (1887) and *Death and Transfiguration* (1889). With these works he had found his mature voice and they marked an important stage in early musical Modernism.

Strauss next turned his attention to opera, writing the neo-Wagnerian *Guntram*, which proved an utter failure at its premiere in May 1894. This experience most likely discouraged him from continuing work on another dramatic project for which he had been writing a libretto, namely a "folk opera" about the popular 14th-century character Till Eulenspiegel. "I have already put together a very nice scenario," Strauss wrote in a letter, "although the figure of Master Till Eulenspiegel does not quite appear before my eyes. The book of folk tales outlines only a rogue, with too superficial a dramatic personality. The developing of his character along lines more profound than his trait of contempt for humanity also

presents considerable difficulties.” Strauss decided to use the character instead for his fourth tone poem, which he began composing in 1894 and finished in May of the next year. Franz Wüllner conducted the premiere in Cologne in November 1895. The work immediately became a popular favorite, displaying a humorous side of the composer not always apparent in his other orchestral works.

**A Closer Look** Strauss was reluctant to spell out the program in detail—he wrote a brief telegram to Wüllner, who had asked for background about the piece: “Analysis impossible for me. All wit spent in notes.” But over time he divulged more information, identifying two prominent themes associated with the title character “that run through the whole piece in the most varied disguises and moods and situations until the catastrophe where he is hanged after the death sentence has been spoken over him.” The full title of the work is *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, After the Old Rogue's Tale, Set in Rondeau Form for Large Orchestra*.

The opening two ideas come in parts—first a lilting string theme that Strauss said was meant to convey “Once upon a time there was a roguish jester,” followed by a horn solo, one of the most famous themes in all orchestral music, that identifies the prankster “whose name was Till Eulenspiegel.” A third theme associated with Till is mockingly put forth by the clarinet (“He is a wicked goblin”). Till goes through various adventures, some of which Strauss specifically identified: He rides on horseback through a market crowded with women (represented by clarinets sweeping up); disguises himself as a minister and “oozes unction and morality,” but because of his mockery “feels a sudden horror of his end.” The gallant hero comes across a group of pretty girls and woos them (with a lilting version of the initial horn call); he debates with pompous philistine philosophers (four bassoons and bass clarinet). At the climax of the piece he is put on trial—the death sentence is pronounced, he “nonchalantly whistles” (the clarinet theme again), and is executed. The opening “once upon a time” music returns to conclude this “old rogue’s tale.”

—Christopher H. Gibbs

*Richard Strauss composed Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks from 1894 to 1895.*

*Strauss conducted The Philadelphia Orchestra in its first performance of Till Eulenspiegel, in March 1904. He returned to Philadelphia in 1921 for another performance of the piece. Most recently on subscription concerts, the Orchestra played it under Christoph Eschenbach's baton in January 2015.*

*The Orchestra recorded the work four times: with Eugene Ormandy in 1952 and 1963 for CBS; with Ormandy in 1974 for RCA; and with Wolfgang Sawallisch in 1993 for EMI.*

*The work is scored for piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, field drum, ratchet, snare drum, triangle), and strings.*

*Performance time is approximately 15 minutes.*

# The Music

## “Dance of the Seven Veils,” from *Salome*

Richard Strauss



The “Dance of the Seven Veils” is one of the two most famous and often performed orchestral excerpts from any of Richard Strauss’s 15 operas and it is indeed a dazzling showpiece. (The other is a suite drawn from *Der Rosenkavalier*.) Salome’s dance was the finishing touch of what was a truly scandalous event in 1905. Alma Mahler later recounted its backstory. Strauss asked her husband, Gustav, if he might play through the manuscript score for them, which he did in a piano shop in Strasbourg:

The room had big gleaming windows on all sides, with people constantly walking past or stopping to look in—pressing their noses against the window as they tried to catch the sound. Strauss sang and played incomparably well. Mahler was enthralled. We came to the dance. It was missing. “I haven’t done that yet!” said Strauss and after this big hiatus played on to the end. Mahler asked, “Isn’t it risky simply to leave out the dance and do it later when one is no longer in the mood of the work?” But Strauss laughed in his carefree way, “I’ll manage.”

**An Operatic Triumph** By the time he composed *Salome*, Strauss was 41 and a musical celebrity. His orchestral music, the magnificent tone poems that remain central to the late Romantic repertory, had made him famous (and infamous) in the 1890s, but operatic success had been elusive. *Guntram*, a Wagnerian concoction set to his own libretto, failed in 1894, although its successor, the light-hearted *Feuersnot*, fared better in 1901.

Strauss’s breakthrough came in December 1905 with the triumphant premiere of *Salome* in Dresden. Among the reasons for this triumph were the compelling libretto, a somewhat abridged translation into German of Oscar Wilde’s French play about the beautiful princess Salome, who desires the imprisoned John the Baptist (Jochanaan in the opera). Her stepfather, King Herod, lusts after her and offers to grant any wish if she will just dance for him, which leads to her famous striptease, the “Dance of the Seven Veils.” Following this sensual orchestral section, Salome demands the severed head of Jochanaan, which she kisses. In disgust, Herod orders her death: “Go, kill that woman!” Curtain.

Mahler was wildly enthusiastic about *Salome*, writing to his wife: “It is absolutely brilliant, a *very powerful* work and without a doubt one of the most significant of our time! Beneath a pile of rubble smolders a living volcano, a subterranean fire—not just a display of fireworks.” Mahler hoped he might give the premiere in Vienna but the ecclesiastical authorities refused to give permission. Other cities also shunned the controversial work because of its use of a biblical story and its extraordinary decadence. It was pulled from

the Metropolitan Opera after just one performance in 1907. Strauss, however, was laughing all the way to the bank as endless controversy sparked attention and interest. The opera earned him a lot of money; he was fond of saying it allowed him to construct a posh Bavarian villa in Garmisch where he lived for the rest of his life.

And more than a century later, the shocking drama, brilliant music, and awesome performing demands (both orchestral and vocal) continue to make for an experience of searing intensity. The Philadelphia Orchestra's long association with Strauss's music includes multiple appearances of the composer conducting the ensemble during both of his trips to America, in 1904 and 1921. During the latter he led the "Dance of the Seven Veils."

**A Closer Look** From the outset of the project Strauss hoped to create "a true Oriental color and scorching sun" in the opera. For some decades already Orientalism had been all the rage—box office gold—in Russia and France, but German composers had for the most part resisted. Salome's dance is the most explicit such moment in the opera: an exotic evocation of a distant time and place featuring the oboe, long associated in music with the snake-charmer's pipe, and unusual scales. Over the course of the nine-minute dance various themes from earlier in the opera pass in review, all unfolding as a distorted waltz—the Orient meets Vienna.

Strauss indicated in the score exactly how he wanted to dance to unfold on stage:

The musicians begin a wild dance. Salome stands motionless. Salome rises to her full height and makes a sign to the musicians. They subdue the wild rhythm instantly and lead on to a soft and swaying tune. Salome dances the Dance of the Seven Veils. At the climax of the dance Salome seems to faint for a moment, then she pulls herself together as if with new strength. Salome remains for an instant in a visionary attitude near the cistern where Jochanaan is kept prisoner, then she throws herself at Herod's feet.

Herod exclaims "Ah, heavenly! Wonderful, wonderful!" and thus begin the negotiations for Salome to claim her monstrous reward.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

*Strauss composed Salome between 1904 and 1905.*

*Leopold Stokowski conducted the first Orchestra performances of the "Dance of the Seven Veils," in March 1913. The piece has rarely appeared on subscription programs since then, the most recent being in April/May 1999, with Wolfgang Sawallisch.*

*The Orchestra has recorded the work five times: in 1921, 1929, and 1937 with Stokowski for RCA, and in 1947 and 1962 with Eugene Ormandy for CBS.*

*The work is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, heckelphone, four clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, castanets, cymbals, orchestra bells, snare drum, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle, xylophone), two harps, celesta, and strings.*

*Performance time is approximately nine minutes.*

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