

# Performance Practice Review

---

Volume 10  
Number 1 *Spring*

Article 3

---

1997

## Richard Strauss: the Don Juan Recordings

Raymond Holden

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Holden, Raymond (1997) "Richard Strauss: the Don Juan Recordings," *Performance Practice Review*. Vol. 10: No. 1, Article 3. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199710.01.03  
Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol10/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Journals at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized editor of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

## Recordings and Performance

### Richard Strauss: the *Don Juan* Recordings

#### Raymond Holden

#### Background

As an executant musician, Strauss's repertoire was both wide and varied; however, outside of the German-speaking countries, he was primarily known for his readings of his own works. During his career as a conductor, 1884-1949, *Don Juan* (composed 1888)<sup>1</sup> continued to be of some importance to him. The work was heard regularly at his subscription concerts and at the performances that he directed as a guest conductor. From the outset, it was clear that this tone poem was conceived for a virtuoso orchestra. At the première,<sup>2</sup> conducted by Strauss, the provincial Weimar orchestra was tested to its limits. In a letter to his parents, dated 8 November [1889], he described his impressions of the first rehearsal:

Yesterday, I directed the first (part proof-reading) rehearsal of "Don Juan." . . . even though it is terribly difficult, everything sounded splendid and came across magnificently. I really felt

---

<sup>1</sup> Whilst it has been argued that *Don Juan* was composed between 1887 and 1888, Strauss stated that he "invented" the initial themes during a visit to the monastery of St. Antonio (Padua) in 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Weimar, 11 November 1889.

sorry for the poor horns and trumpets. They blew themselves completely blue . . . it's fortunate that the piece is short . . . the oboe's passage in G major, with the double-basses divided into four parts, sounded especially beautiful. The divided celli and violas, who play with mutes, along with the horns, who also play with mutes, sounded absolutely magical.<sup>3</sup>

At the rehearsal on 9 November, the orchestra continued to be challenged by the work:

Yesterday's two-hour rehearsal of "Don Juan" went off splendidly; the piece sounded wonderful; Lassen<sup>4</sup> was visibly moved. He felt that a work such as this will not be written again for another ten years. The orchestra puffed and gasped for breath but, nonetheless, did a wonderful job. A marvelous joke! After "Don Juan" one of the horn players, who was dripping with sweat and completely out of breath, asked: "Dear God, in what way have we sinned so as to cause you to send this scourge!" . . . We laughed till we cried.<sup>5</sup>

The first performance was a triumph, prompting Strauss to write the following:

"Don Juan" was a great success. The piece sounded enchanting and went wonderfully. For Weimar, it unleashed an unprecedented storm of applause.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Strauss, *Briefe an die Eltern 1882-1906*, ed. Willi Schuh (Zürich, 1954), 119.

<sup>4</sup> Eduard Lassen (1830-1904). Danish-born German composer and conductor. Music Director at Weimar between 1858 and 1895.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, *Briefe*, 120 (10 November 1889).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-21 (13 November 1889).



The work soon became part of the standard repertoire. The quality of the orchestration, along with the composer's well-judged effects, encouraged conductors to programme it on a regular basis.

Strauss's first recording of *Don Juan* was made in 1917<sup>7</sup> and was one of the composer-conductor's earliest orchestral recordings. This reading was one of five recordings that he made for Deutsche Grammophon that year; the others were: the suite from *Der Bürger als Edelmann*;<sup>8</sup> the overture to *Ariadne auf Naxos*;<sup>9</sup> *Till Eulenspiegel*;<sup>10</sup> and waltzes from *Der Rosenklavier*.<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, it seems strange that Deutsche Grammophon should undertake a series of recordings during the penultimate year of World War I. If, however, these are considered within the wider parameters of Berlin's concert-life as a whole, their function is clear. In Berlin, the Hofoper continued to present a full programme throughout the hostilities. Strauss maintained his usual heavy schedule during this period, conducting more than one hundred and forty performances at that house.<sup>12</sup> The war years saw German audiences increase, with most forms of professional music-making being sought out by the general public. Although resources were scarce and only a few new productions could be mounted, people attended concerts and opera in unprece-

---

<sup>7</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 1057-60 LC; single sides nos. 040872-5; first issue 69525-6; second issue 65856-7.

<sup>8</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 1047 LC, 1048 1/2 LC, 1049 LC, 1050 LC, 1053 1/2 LC; 1054 1/2 LC; single side nos. 040866-71, B20267; first issue 69522-4, 69658; second issue 65853-5, 66289.

<sup>9</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 1051 1/2 LC; single side no. 040869; first issue 69523; second issue 65854.

<sup>10</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 1061 LC, 1062 1/2 LC, 1063 LC, 1064 LC; single side nos. 040876-9; first issue 69527-8; second issue 65858-9.

<sup>11</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 1065-6 LC; single side nos. 040880-1; first issue 69529; second issue 65860.

<sup>12</sup> This covers the period 18 October 1914 to 8 November 1918 inclusive, and includes Strauss's subscription concerts with the Hofkapelle. The Berlin Hof-/Staatsoper's records are incomplete: parts of 1913, 1914, and 1918 are missing.



dented numbers, hoping, perhaps, to forget the rigors or their day-to-day existence. The new medium of sound recording also attracted the public's interest. While the market for gramophone records was limited, they provided a further means of escape. As Strauss's music was a regular feature of concert-life in the German capital, and was considered by many to be the quintessence of German art, Deutsche Grammophon's decision to record these works at that time seems logical.

For these recordings, Strauss used the Berlin Hofkapelle. The composer-conductor's relationship with this orchestra was long and fruitful. In 1898, Strauss was appointed Hofkapellmeister at the Berlin Hofoper. After being promoted to Generalmusikdirektor in 1908, he took charge of the Hofkapelle's subscription concerts. During his years with the Berlin Hof[Staats]kapelle, 1908-35,<sup>13</sup> he directed at least 116 concerts with this orchestra. Although his repertoire was large, some of his concerts included performances of his own works.<sup>14</sup> As a direct result of his relationship with this ensemble, many of his recordings were made with them.<sup>15</sup> The exact date of the 1917 sessions is unknown. On *Don Juan*'s record label,

the following information is given: "gespielt von der Königlichen Kapelle, Berlin" ["played by the Royal Orchestra, Berlin"]. Further, Strauss is described as "Generalmusikdirektor." It is clear, then, that the recording was made before the fall of the monarchies at the end of World War I. After the conclusion of this conflict, the orchestra of the Berlin State Opera became known as the Berlin Staatskapelle.

---

<sup>13</sup> This period covers his years as Generalmusikdirektor (1908-18), Intendant (1919), and guest conductor (1920-35).

<sup>14</sup> Only 23% of the concerts that Strauss directed with this ensemble during the period 1908-35 contained one of his own works. During the same period, 80% contained a work by Beethoven.

<sup>15</sup> With this orchestra he also recorded the following: Mozart's Symphonies K.543, K.550 (1927 and 1928), K. 551 and the overture to *Die Zauberflöte*; and Beethoven's Symphonies nos. 5 and 7. See notes 29 and 30.



Moreover, Strauss's contract as Generalmusikdirektor came to an end in 1918. Even though he returned for a further interregnum year as Intendant, his former title would not have been used on a post-war recording.

Strauss's coupling of *Don Juan* and *Till Eulenspiegel* for these sessions is indicative of his programming policy as a whole. These comparatively early works were heard regularly at his concerts during the course of his career, and his interest in them was not confined to the concert hall: he made four recordings of *Don Juan* and three of *Till Eulenspiegel*. The 1917 recording of *Don Juan*, however, has, for the purposes of this article, limited value: sides 1 and 2 were recorded by Strauss's assistant, George Szell. The latter's discographer, Jack Saul, recalled:

In the late 'sixties . . . [Szell] wanted me to locate performances of Mozart's Symphony No. 39 and two sides of *Don Juan*, released under Richard Strauss' name by the Polydor Company of Germany. These works were recorded by George Szell in 1917, but being an apprentice conductor he received no credit on the labels for them. The Berlin State Opera Orchestra was listed as being conducted by its chief conductor, Richard Strauss. It is my regret that to this day I have as yet not located them.<sup>16</sup>

Szell's involvement in the 1917 recording of *Don Juan* was also described in the May 1968 issue of *The Gramophone*:<sup>17</sup>

. . . the recording of Strauss' *Don Juan* issued in either 1916 or 1917 and labelled as the work of the composer was in fact conducted by his young assistant. The great man had this session, and being busy had asked young Szell to go down to the studios and prepare the orchestra and generally to make ready, which included the cutting of the music on to four sides.

---

<sup>16</sup> Jack Saul, "A Personal Account of George Szell," *Le grand baton* 9, nos. 1, 2 (1972), 86.

<sup>17</sup> *The Gramophone* became the *Gramophone* from the June 1969 issue.



When all was prepared and there was still no sign of Strauss the recording director instructed Szell to take the session, since he was not prepared to waste his company's money. After much protest the young man launched the orchestra into the greatest manifestation of a young man ever written. After completing the third side he saw Strauss standing in the doorway in his overcoat, his face wreathed in smiles. Both he and the director were delighted with the way things were going "and that is how my first records appeared under the name of Dr Richard Strauss".<sup>18</sup>

The above, however, does not correspond fully with Szell's own account of the session:

May I say that I very definitely remember having conducted only sides 1 and 2 of that 1917 recording of 'Don Juan' which came out under the name of Richard Strauss. He himself did sides 3 and 4. If The Gramophone writes that Strauss was in the recording studio at the end of side 3, it may be a misprint or a mistake. I very clearly remember that he had arrived when I was approaching the end of side 2.<sup>19</sup>

*The Gramophone's* version of the 1917 recording session is ambiguous, suggesting that Szell was given the responsibility for editing the tone poem, so that it could fit onto four sides of a 78 rpm gramophone set. It seems unlikely that Strauss would have allowed his twenty year old assistant to undertake this task. As this was the first opportunity that the former had to set down this work in recorded sound, any excisions would have been the responsibility of the composer.

---

<sup>18</sup> Roger Wimbush, "Here and There," *The Gramophone* (May 1968), 585.

<sup>19</sup> Written in response to a request for verification by Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings. Peter Morse, "Richard Strauss' Recordings: a Complete Discography," *Journal of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections* 9, no. 1 (1977), 12.



Strauss's next orchestral recordings were made during his 1921-22 tour of the United States. In November 1921, he recorded "Tanz der sieben Schleier" from *Salome*<sup>20</sup> and the Menuett<sup>21</sup> and Intermezzo<sup>22</sup> from *Der Bürger als Edelmann*. Though the orchestra is anonymous, it seems likely, given the date of the recording, that it was the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. En route back to Germany, Strauss gave three concerts in England; this was his first visit to Britain after World War I. There, he directed concerts in London and Manchester,<sup>23</sup> and recorded a number of his own works for Columbia. In the capital, he conducted the London Symphony Orchestra on 17 January 1922. The programme, with the soprano Ethel Frank as soloist, included a selection of songs with orchestra<sup>24</sup> and three tone poems that were now part of the standard orchestral repertoire: *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, and *Tod und Verklärung*. The concert was poorly attended, with the stalls of the Royal Albert Hall remaining half empty. Given that Strauss was one of the first major German artists to visit Britain after the war, one suspects that anti-German feeling, along with a programme that had become too familiar, dissuaded the public from attending. At least one critic was disappointed that the composer-conductor felt either unwilling or unable to perform any of his more recent works, such as *Eine Alpensinfonie*.<sup>25</sup> If he had included his latest tone poem in the concert, much valuable rehearsal time would have been used in its preparation. As he was recording *Don Juan*<sup>26</sup> with the same orchestra on the following day at Columbia's London studio,<sup>27</sup> one presumes that he organized the allocated

---

<sup>20</sup> Brunswick 50002 (matrix X7001 and X7004).

<sup>21</sup> Brunswick 50017 (matrix 7005).

<sup>22</sup> Brunswick 50017 (matrix 7007-2).

<sup>23</sup> 21 January 1922 (Hallé Orchestra).

<sup>24</sup> These included: *Die heiligen drei Könige*, *Cäcilie*, *Ständchen*, and *Morgen*.

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, 18 January 1922.

<sup>26</sup> Columbia L 1419-1420 (matrix 75034-7).



time in favor of this early work.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, this recording is not totally representative of the previous day's concert, as it has a cut and various orchestral voices are doubled in an unorthodox manner; these issues will be considered more fully below.

Seven years elapsed before Strauss's next recording of *Don Juan*. As in 1917, his 1929 reading was coupled with *Till Eulenspiegel*; again, the orchestra was the Berlin Staatskapelle. Between 1926 and 1930, the composer-conductor undertook a series of recordings with this orchestra that not only involved his own works but, also, some by other composers. Of these, the only other major symphonic works that he recorded were by Mozart<sup>29</sup> and Beethoven.<sup>30</sup> From the

---

<sup>27</sup> On 19 January, Strauss was again in the studio with the London Symphony Orchestra, recording, on this occasion, the waltzes from Act 2 of *Der Rosenkavalier* (Columbia L 1421 matrix 75038-9) and the "Tanz der sieben Schleier" from *Salome* (Columbia L 1422 matrix 75040-1).

<sup>28</sup> From the recording, it is clear that the London Symphony Orchestra had difficulty meeting some of the technical demands presented by the tone poem.

<sup>29</sup> (i) K. 543 (1926): Deutsche Grammophon Matrix 347bg-352bg; single side nos. B20640-1-2-3-4-5; Polydor 69833-69835; Heliodor LP re-issue 88022; Koch CD re-issue 3-7076-2H1.

(ii) K. 550 (1927): Deutsche Grammophon Matrix 250bi-255bi; single side nos. B20858-20863; Polydor 69864-69866; Thomas L. Clear's vol. 1; LP re-issue TLC-2584; Koch CD re-issue 3-7076-2H1.

(iii) K. 550 (1928): Deutsche Grammophon Matrix 296be-302be; single side nos. B20974-20980; Polydor 69869-69872; Polydor re-issue 95442-95445; US Brunswick 90082-90085; Deutsche Grammophon LP re-issue 642.010; Heliodor LP re-issue 88022; Deutsche Grammophon LP re-issue sets 2721.070 and 2563.248; Koch 3-7119-2H1; Deutsche Grammophon CD re-issue DG 431874-2.

(iv) K. 551 (1926) Deutsche Grammophon Matrix 180bm-186bm; Polydor 69845-69848; US Brunswick 25017-25020; Koch CD re-issue 3-7076-2H1; Deutsche Grammophon CD re-issue DG 431874-2.

<sup>30</sup> (i) Symphony no. 5 (1928): Deutsche Grammophon Matrix 1383bmI-1386bmI and 1402bmI-1405bmI; single side nos. B21121-8; Polydor 66814-7; US



matrix numbers, *Till Eulenspiegel*<sup>31</sup> was recorded in advance of *Don Juan*.<sup>32</sup> As the matrices for both tone poems are non-consecutive, it could be argued that these recordings were made on separate occasions. If, however, one takes into account the working practices and schedules of both conductor and orchestra, this seems unlikely. An important issue that emerges in relation to these works was the record industry's continued interest in them, in preference to some of his later compositions. By the time of these sessions, Strauss had completed all his major tone poems. Yet, by 1929, his only other recordings of these works were that of *Ein Heldenleben*,<sup>33</sup> with the Berlin Staatskapelle in 1926, and *Tod und Verklärung*,<sup>34</sup> with the same orchestra later that year. The majority of his other recordings of his own music were given over to excerpts from his operas and the suite from *Der Bürger als Edelmann*. The lack of interest shown by both the composer and the record industry in recording works such as *Don Quixote* and the *Sinfonia Domestica* at that time is an enigma.<sup>35</sup> The public's interest in these tone poems had not diminished and the Berlin orchestra's expertise in realizing Strauss's

---

Brunswick 90172-5; LP re-issue Rococo 2015; CD re-issue Koch 3-7115-2H1 and Classical Disk Company 880453.

(ii) Symphony no. 7 (1926): Deutsche Grammophon Matrix 339(1-2)bg-346bg; single side nos. B20649-20656; Polydor 69836-9; US Brunswick 25010-3; LP re-issue thomas L. Clear volume I TLC-2584; CD re-issue Koch 3-7115-2H1.

<sup>31</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 779 1/2 Bi I, 780 1/2 Bi I, 781 Bi I, 782 Bi I; single side nos. B 21177-80; Polydor 66887-8; US Brunswick 90044-5; CD re-issue Pearl GEMM CD 9366.

<sup>32</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 791-4 Bi I; single side nos. B21191-4; Polydor 66902-3; US Brunswick 90046-7; CD re-issue Pearl GEMM CD 9366.

<sup>33</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 360-4 bg, 6 bm and 366-9 bg; single side nos. B 20657-66; Polydor 69840-4; US Brunswick 25000-4.

<sup>34</sup> Deutsche Grammophon matrix 219-24 bm; single side nos. B 20733-8; Polydor 69849-51; US Brunswick 25026-8.

<sup>35</sup> Strauss recorded *Don Quixote* in 1933 and 1941. No commercial recording was made of Strauss directing the *Sinfonia Domestica*; the 1944 recording was for Austrian Radio.



intentions was not in question. One suspects, therefore, that, due to their length, the record companies felt that these works were not viable commercially.

Vienna celebrated Strauss's 80th birthday in June 1944 by mounting his important operas at the Staatsoper and a series of concerts and radio recordings with the Philharmonic. It was during these celebrations that he made his last recording of *Don Juan*. The composer's association with Vienna dates back to his youth; he gave the first performance of his Violin Concerto there on 5 December 1882, accompanying his father's cousin, the leader of the Munich Hofkapelle, Benno Walter,<sup>36</sup> at the piano. His first concert with the Vienna Philharmonic was at Salzburg, on 17 August 1906. On that occasion, he substituted at short notice for an indisposed Karl Muck.<sup>37</sup> As the concert was a success, the orchestra invited him to direct four of their subscription concerts at the Musikvereinsaal over the next two years. He continued to work with the Philharmonic for a further forty years; the 1944 radio recordings reflect the mutual understanding that had developed between them during that period. The works that he recorded for Austrian Radio<sup>38</sup> were: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the suite from *Der Bürger als Edelmann*, *Don Juan*, *Ein Heldenleben*, *Sinfonia Domestica*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Tod und Verklärung* and the overture to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Of these, only the *Sinfonia Domestica* and the Wagner overture were not previously recorded by Strauss. Whilst he continued to perform the former on a regular basis, its place in the general repertoire has always been tenuous. Nonetheless, the works chosen are indicative of his performance aesthetic as a whole. Even though he continued to include some of his less-known compositions in his concerts, his preference, during the course of his conducting career, was for the music that he composed between 1888 and 1903. The exception, however, was the suite from *Der Bürger als Edelmann*. This unlike-

---

<sup>36</sup> Benno Walter (1847-1901). Leader of the Munich Hofkapelle and Strauss's violin teacher.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Muck (1859-1940). German conductor.

<sup>38</sup> These recordings were some of the earliest made on tape.



ly work continued to fascinate Strauss, who recorded it on four occasions.<sup>39</sup>

As in 1917, the 1944 recordings had a wider social significance. The exact nature of Strauss's activities during the Third Reich has been a source of interest to both historians and musicologists alike. Given his association with Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Stefan Zweig, along with his concern for the well-being of the Jewish members of his family throughout this period, the hostile stance of some commentators seems difficult to justify. Moreover, during the course of World War II, the Nazis actively set out to damage his credibility. On 24 January 1944, six months before the composer's 80th birthday celebrations, Martin Bormann issued the following communiqué:

... The personal association of our leading men with Dr. Strauss shall end. However, the Führer, to whom Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels has referred the matter, has decided that the performance of his works should not be hindered.<sup>40</sup>

Though Strauss's works continued to be played, his inability to associate with some senior colleagues caused him concern. Even so, the Vienna Philharmonic was unaffected by this ban and fellow musicians continued to support him throughout this difficult period. Hitler's decision not to prohibit Strauss's music was shrewd. At this time, the German authorities were concerned by the decline in public morale. As Strauss was considered by many to be Germany's leading musician, the administration's decision to record these works for broadcast throughout the Reich supported the increasingly shaky illusion of social and artistic normality. More important, the 1944 recording provide today's listener with a means by which to compare and contrast Strauss's evolving performance aesthetic over a period of some 30 years.

---

<sup>39</sup> 1917, 1921 (excerpts), 1930, and 1944.

<sup>40</sup> A communiqué issued on 24 January 1944 by the Partei-Kanzlei (party headquarters) of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei.



### The Readings<sup>41</sup>

Two issues that set the 1922 recording of *Don Juan* apart from those made in 1929 and 1944 are Strauss's cut from bar 208 to bar 232 and his modifications to the existing orchestration. Whilst the composer was against the use of cuts, both in his own works and those of others,<sup>42</sup> the necessity for excisions in recordings during this period was not uncommon. For example, when he came to record Beethoven's Symphony no. 7 in 1926 with the Berlin Staatskapelle,<sup>43</sup> a work that was central to his repertoire, he made a cut in the last movement: bar 247 to bar 421.<sup>44</sup> It appears that this cut was employed so that the recording could be issued on eight, rather than nine sides.<sup>45</sup> The excision in *Don Juan* was made for a similar reason: to allow the music to fit onto four sides of a 78 rpm gramophone set. For the modern listener, this cut is unsettling. As the

---

<sup>41</sup> As Strauss only recorded sides 3 and 4 of the 1917 reading, it has not been used in this comparative analysis of his performances.

<sup>42</sup> Regarding cuts in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss made the following comment: "After I had borne my annoyance at Schuch's ineradicable cuts for some time, I wrote to him saying that he had forgotten one important cut; the trio in the third act only impeded the action, and I suggested the following cut: D major: "*Ich weiß nix, gar nix*" to G major: beginning of the last duet! This offended him, but at last he was cured to some extent of the Dresden disease [Dresdner Krankheit]. Schuch's predecessor once came to Draeseke and said: "I hear, Herr Draeseke, that your new opera is ready." Draeseke: "Well, the opera itself is ready, only the cuts have still to be composed . . ." Richard Strauss, "Erinnerungen an die ersten Aufführungen meiner Opern," *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, ed. Willi Schuh (Zürich, 1949), 191-92.

<sup>43</sup> See note 31 ii.

<sup>44</sup> The bar numbers are the same as those found in the Eulenberg Edition, as used by Strauss.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Raymond Holden, "Richard Strauss: the Mozart Recordings" and "Richard Strauss: the Beethoven Recordings," *Richard Strauss-Blätter* (Vienna, June 1996), 59-60.



tone poem is now part of the standard repertoire, there are set expectations as to how the music should sound; the sudden shift to G major at bar 232, rather than the repetition of the G minor passage from bar 208, as first heard in bars 197 to 200, disturbs both the tonal and structural symmetry of the section. Even so, when one comes to listen to early recordings, there must be an awareness of the difficulties faced by artists and record companies during that pioneering period. Although these recordings do not provide today's listeners with the digital encounter that they have come to expect, they are historical documents. In general, this aphorism has come to apply simply to the performance heard; however, it should also include recording techniques and practices.

Even though research into 19th- and 20th-century performance trends has been progressing apace, the exact extent to which performers modified existing orchestrations is yet to be explored fully. Strauss, unlike many of his contemporaries, was circumspect when it came to altering the printed text, both in his own music and that of others. For musicians such as Gustav Mahler<sup>46</sup> and Felix von Weingartner,<sup>47</sup> their modifications to scores from the 18th and early-19th centuries are a means by which to improve and strengthen the printed material.<sup>48</sup> Strauss, however, did not share their views. If, for

---

<sup>46</sup> Gustav Mahler (1860-1911). As a conductor: début Bad Hall, 1880; Ljubljana, 1881; Olomouc, 1882-83; Kassel 1883-85; Prague, 1885-86; Leipzig, 1886-88; Budapest, 1888-91; Hamburg, 1891-97; Vienna, 1897-1907; Metropolitan Opera and New York Philharmonic, 1907-11.

<sup>47</sup> Felix von Weingartner (1863-1942), Austrian conductor and composer. As a conductor: Königsberg, 1884-85; Danzig, 1885-87; Hamburg, 1887-89; Mannheim, 1889-91. As chief conductor: Berlin, 1891-98; Vienna Court Opera, 1908-11; Hamburg, 1912-14; Darmstadt, 1915-19; Vienna Volksoper, 1919-24, Vienna State Opera, 1935-36.

<sup>48</sup> According to Otto Klemperer, Mahler stated: "At first, of course, you will conduct the work [Beethoven's Symphony no. 6 ("Pastoral")] as it is written. But later on you will see that some instrumental retouching has to be done." Peter Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer: His Life and Times, Volume 1: 1885-1933* (Cambridge, 1996), 48.



example, one examines his marked scores of Mozart,<sup>49</sup> there are no amendments to be found. This literalist approach dominated his performance philosophy as a whole, and, unlike Mahler,<sup>50</sup> he seems to have been against the modification of his own scores by others. This, then, begs the question: why, in the 1922 recording of *Don Juan*, did he feel it necessary to alter the printed orchestration? The answer is simple: this was an acoustic recording. During this period, conductors were often required to make certain modifications to the work's orchestration for reasons of clarity. These adjustments should not be viewed in the same way as those of Mahler and Weingartner: the former were limited acoustic imperatives, the latter were attempts at improvement. The most obvious modification to *Don Juan*'s orchestration in the 1922 recording is the addition of an extra trombone; this instrument doubles the basses in selected passages throughout the score.<sup>51</sup> Equally, between bars 197 and 200, the composer-conductor strengthens the violas and celli with a clarinet. These amendments are an understandable attempt at greater clarity, but his reorchestration of bars 201 and 202 is a conundrum. Here, the wind material is doubled by the brass. From an extant photograph of the 1922 session, it seems that the recording was made in a small hall, and that some adjustments to the orchestra's usual seating arrangements had been necessary. This being so, the position of the winds may have caused an acoustic problem; Strauss's reorchestration of these bars may have been an attempt at resolving this dilemma.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Strauss's preferred edition of Mozart was Breitkopf & Härtel's *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Werke. Kritisch durchgesehene Gesamtausgabe*, issued between January 1877 and December 1883 in 24 series.

<sup>50</sup> At a rehearsal of his Eighth Symphony in Munich (1910), Mahler is reported to have said, "If, after my death, something doesn't sound right, then change it. You have not only a right but a duty to do so." Heyworth, *Klemperer*, 48.

<sup>51</sup> All comments pertaining to the printed score of *Don Juan*, including metronome marks, refer to that by Edition Peters, Leipzig (Nr. 4191b).

<sup>52</sup> Although this hypothesis is likely, the present writer recognizes the possibility that this photograph might have been posed.



Whilst one must be cautious when making comments about orchestral balance from early recordings, they do provide some useful information. As the 1922 recording was made using the acoustic method, its value is limited; but, from the 1929 and 1944 recordings, a clearer picture emerges. One might assume from the composer-conductor's tongue-in-cheek remarks, concerning the brass in his *Zehn goldene Regeln* [*Ten Golden Rules*],<sup>53</sup> that he would have reduced the trumpets' dynamic in certain key passages; this is not the case. Strauss's strict observance of the brass dynamics, and his literalist approach in general, is a feature common to both his 1929 and 1944 recordings. For example, in passages, such as bars 353 to 355, where the first trumpet is marked "Solo. con sord. *giocoso*," its melodic role is undiminished. Equally, in bar 542 (beat 3), where the second and third trumpets' fanfare-like figure is marked *forte*, he follows the printed dynamic. Some conductors, such as George Szell,<sup>54</sup> give this motif prominence. For Strauss, the trumpets' figure is of textural, rather than melodic, importance; by observing the existing *forte* he maintains the motif's function. In bars 85 to 89 inclusive, the balance between the first bassoon and the first violins presents a problem for the interpreter. As the acoustic quality of both the 1922 and 1929 recordings is primitive, one must look to Strauss's 1944 reading for guidance. From this performance, it is clear that he weights the balance in favor of the bassoon. In the bars that follow, his manipulation of the orchestral voices is, again, of interest. The music from bar 90 has been described by Norman Del Mar as a love scene.<sup>55</sup> Del Mar's assertion seems to be confirmed by Strauss's orchestration, where the first clarinet and first horn come together musically, as if in a passionate duet; but, for the composer-conductor, this duet is a one-side affair: the first clarinet is the dominant figure.

---

<sup>53</sup> Rule 6 states: "When you think that the brass are not playing loud enough, bring them down by two notches." Richard Strauss, "Zehn goldene Regeln," *Betrachtungen*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Sony Classical SBK 48272.

<sup>55</sup> Norman Del Mar, *Richard Strauss; a Critical Commentary on His Life and Works*. Vol. I (London, 1986), 71.



A central feature of Strauss's performance style was his manipulation and integration of tempi. If one examines his speeds in his recordings of Mozart and Beethoven and, in the case of the latter, compares them with the tempo indications that he annotated in his scores of that composer's works, one is struck by his highly organized approach.<sup>56</sup> This is no less true for his readings of his own works. From the table of metromonic speeds found at the end of this section, his intentions concerning *Don Juan* are clear; but, before they can be considered in detail, a brief discussion of the tone poem's form is essential. The work is in a modified sonata form and its structure is organized in the following manner: first subject, bars 1 to 36 inclusive; transition passage, bars 37 to 89 inclusive; second subject I, bars 90 to 159 inclusive; transition passage, bars 160 to 231 inclusive;<sup>57</sup> second subject IIa, bars 232 to 312 inclusive; second subject IIb, bars 313 to 350 inclusive; development, bars 351 to 473 inclusive; recapitulated first subject, bars 474 to 509; recapitulated second subject IIb, from bar 510; and the coda, from bar 586. This cursory structural overview differs from some commentators' vision of the work by incorporating the G major section, bars 232 to 350 inclusive, into the second subject, rather than as part of an extended development. Moreover, by making this distinction, the Carnival Scene, bars 351 to 473 inclusive, is defined as the true development section. Further, two other important issues are rationalized by this approach: first, the ambiguous tonality of the first subject area, caused by the juxtaposition of C major and E major in the opening bars, is balanced tonally by a two-part second subject that uses the conventional keys of B major and G major respectively; and, secondly, the restatement of second subject IIb, from bar 510, acts as a recapitulated second subject in the traditional manner. This interpretation of *Don Juan*'s structure seems to be verified by the way in which Strauss manipulated the sonata structure within his performance aesthetic as a whole. In his

---

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Holden, "The Mozart and Beethoven Recordings," 39-70.

<sup>57</sup> For those commentators who believe that this tone poem is in rondo form, the passage between bar 160 and 196 inclusive is central to their argument.



readings of sonata movements from the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, he applied a *meno mosso* at the onset of the second subject in fast movements; in slow movements, he increased the tempo at the bridge passage, returning to the *tempo primo* at the second subject, creating the illusion of a reduced tempo at the subsidiary theme. At these junctures in his marked scores of Mozart, he regularly annotated either an *espressivo* or a *molto espressivo*. If one compares the printed score of *Don Juan* with Strauss's recordings of that work, it is clear that he applies these criteria to both parts of the second subject.<sup>58</sup>

For those performers who are familiar with Strauss's practices, a reduction in tempo at second subject I might seem obvious, but, as there is no printed metronome mark at the beginning of this section, this must remain as assumption. From the evidence gleaned from his recordings, his tempi for second subject I are h.n. (half note) =72 (1922) and h.n.=63 (1929 and 1944). All three readings underline the need for a reduced tempo at this point. More important, both the 1929 and 1944 recordings share the same pulse for this passage. As his later readings were made under more favorable circumstances than that from 1922, one must presume h.n.=63 to be Strauss's preferred tempo. From the composer-conductor's strict observance of h.n.=84[+] at each statement and restatement of the first subject material in the three recordings considered, one might assume that his tempo for second subject IIa would be in accord with the printed metronome mark; this is not the case. In each of the recordings, his tempo from bar 232 is h.n.=60[-]. Over this measure the printed instruction states "a tempo ma tranquillo"; above the solo oboe at bar 235 "sehr getragen und ausdrucksvoll" is inserted. By adopting h.n.=60[-] Strauss underlines the tranquil and expressive elements of the material. At bar 447, he, again, realizes the score by using a different tempo from the h.n.=72 indicated. In 1922 and 1929 he directed this passage at h.n.=63, while in 1944 he conducted it at h.n.=60. The reason for these reductions is simple: tempo integra-

---

<sup>58</sup> The printed instructions are as follows: bar 90, *molto espress.* [clarinet I and horn I]; bar 235, *sehr getragen und ausdrucksvoll* [oboe I]; and bar 314, *molto espr. e marc.* [horns].



tion. This passage is derived from second subject I. As noted above, in the 1929 and 1944 recordings, second subject I is taken at h.n.=63. Even though his tempo from bar 447 in 1944 is marginally slower, it is, nonetheless, an attempt to align both speeds. A problem arises when one examines this relationship in the 1922 recording. Here, second subject I is taken at h.n.=72, while the tempo from bar 447 is h.n.=63. The only logical reason for such a difference is the nature and quality of the recording as a whole. When one listens to his reading, one is left with the clear impression that this was not the composer-conductor's ideal finished product; this lack of pulsual symmetry is indicative of the problems faced by artists when working under difficult circumstances. Conversely, Strauss manipulates with ease the tempi that link the first subject and second subject IIb. If one compares the score with this recordings, it is clear that whenever the figure of Don Juan is being depicted,<sup>59</sup> the composer-conductor integrates the musical and poetic elements of the work by observing h.n.=84. By applying this tempo to both the first subject and second subject IIb, Strauss not only underlines the symmetry of the work's musico-poetic thesis, but, also, eases the transition from the speed at bar 232, h.n.=60, to that of the development, h.n.=92.

Strauss's recordings of *Don Juan* are carefully crafted readings by a master musician. For those interested in performance history, performance practice, the history of recorded sound or the editing and performance of Strauss's works, his recordings of this tone poem are of central importance. The methods used by the various record companies and broadcasting organizations exemplify the trends, practices and means of dissemination that were common during the first half of the 20th century. By contrast, Strauss's own performance aesthetic, with its emphasis on literalism, was, for the period, atypical. Whilst it would be wrong to suggest that the modern conductor should adopt his methods *en masse*, much can be gained by a detailed study of his readings.

---

<sup>59</sup> The first subject and the material from bar 313 are accepted generally as being representative of Don Juan.



Table of Metronomic Speeds: 1922, 1929, and 1944

Bar/Section	Printed metr. mark	Superscription and printed instructions	1922 recording	1929 recording	1944 recording
1 [first subject]	$\text{♩} = 84.$	Allegro molto con brio	$\text{♩} = 84.$	$\text{♩} = 84+.$	$\text{♩} = 84.$
71 [transition passage]		tranquillo/dolce [winds and brass]	$\text{♩} = 76.$	$\text{♩} = 63.$	$\text{♩} = 63.$
90 [second subject I]		tranquillo/molto espress. [clarinet I and horn I]	$\text{♩} = 72.$	$\text{♩} = 63.$	$\text{♩} = 63.$
149 [second subject I]	$\text{♩} = 60.$	un poco più lento.	$\text{♩} = 60.$	$\text{♩} = 60.$	$\text{♩} = 60.$
153 [second subject I]	$\text{♩} = 76.$	a tempo, vivo.	$\text{♩} = 76.$	$\text{♩} = 76.$	$\text{♩} = 76.$
156 [second subject I]	$\text{♩} = 72.$	poco sostenuto.	$\text{♩} = 66.$	$\text{♩} = 63.$	$\text{♩} = 63.$
166 [transition passage]	$\text{♩} = 84.$	a tempo, molto vivace.	$\text{♩} = 84+.$	$\text{♩} = 84+.$	$\text{♩} = 84.$
197 [transition passage]	$\text{♩} = 92.$	a tempo/molto appass. [violins and celli]	$\text{♩} = 92.$	$\text{♩} = 92.$	$\text{♩} = 92(-).$
232 [second subject IIa]	$\text{♩} = 76.$	a tempo ma tranquillo./sehr getragen und ausdrucksvoll [oboe I from bar 235 second half]	$\text{♩} = 60.$	$\text{♩} = 60-.$	$\text{♩} = 60.$
305 [transition passage]	$\text{♩} = 69.$		$\text{♩} = 56.$ [bar 306]	$\text{♩} = 56.$ [bar 306]	$\text{♩} = 56.$ [bar 306]
313 [second subject IIb]	$\text{♩} = 84.$	a tempo/molto espr. [horns from bar 314 second half]	$\text{♩} = 84.$	$\text{♩} = 84.$	$\text{♩} = 84.$
351 [development]	$\text{♩} = 92.$	a tempo, giocoso.	$\text{♩} = 92.$	$\text{♩} = 92.$	$\text{♩} = 92.$
421 second half [development]	$\text{♩} = 63.$	sempre molto agitato	$\text{♩} = 60-3.$	$\text{♩} = 60-3.$	$\text{♩} = 60.$



447 [development]	$\text{♩}=72.$		molto tranquillo	$\text{♩}=63.$	$\text{♩}=63.$	$\text{♩}=60.$
457 [transition passage]			a tempo primo	$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84.$	$\text{♩}=84.$
474 [recap. first subject]				$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84+.$
510 [recap. second subject IIb]			<i>molto espr.</i> [horns and celli bar 510 second half]	$\text{♩}=84.$	$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84.$
569 [transition passage]	$\text{♩}=100.$		stringendo [from bar 570]	$\text{♩}=100.$ [from bar 564]	$\text{♩}=100.$ [from bar 564]	$\text{♩}=96.$
586 [coda]	$\text{♩}=72.$		tempo primo, poco a poco più lento (ma sempre alla breve.)	$\text{♩}=76.$	$\text{♩}=63.$	$\text{♩}=58.$



447 [development]	$\text{♩}=72.$		molto tranquillo	$\text{♩}=63.$	$\text{♩}=63.$	$\text{♩}=60.$
457 [transition passage]			a tempo primo	$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84.$	$\text{♩}=84.$
474 [recap. first subject]				$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84+.$
510 [recap. second subject IIb]			<i>molto espr.</i> [horns and celli bar 510 second half]	$\text{♩}=84.$	$\text{♩}=84+.$	$\text{♩}=84.$
569 [transition passage]	$\text{♩}=100.$		stringendo [from bar 570]	$\text{♩}=100.$ [from bar 564]	$\text{♩}=100.$ [from bar 564]	$\text{♩}=96.$
586 [coda]	$\text{♩}=72.$		tempo primo, poco a poco più lento (ma sempre alla breve.)	$\text{♩}=76.$	$\text{♩}=63.$	$\text{♩}=58.$