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# STRAUSS

## Symphonic Poems

*Eine Alpensinfonie Op. 64*

*Tod und Verklärung Op. 24*

*Ein Heldenleben Op. 40*

*Don Juan Op. 20*

Royal Scottish National  
O r c h e s t r a

# NEEME JÄRVI

DIGITAL

**CHANDOS**



# RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

## COMPACT DISC ONE

### Eine Alpensinfonie Op. 64

*An Alpine Symphony; Une Symphonie alpestre*

[1]	Nacht — <i>Night; Nuit</i>	3:23
[2]	Sonnenaufgang — <i>Sunrise; Soleil levant</i>	1:16
[3]	Der Anstieg — <i>The Ascent; L'ascension</i>	2:14
[4]	Eintritt in den Wald — <i>Entry into the Wood; L'entrée dans le bois</i>	5:24
[5]	Am Wasserfall — <i>Waterfall; Cascade</i>	0:16
[6]	Erscheinung — <i>Apparition; L'apparition</i>	0:54
[7]	Auf blumigen Wiesen — <i>Flowering Meadows; Prairies en fleur</i>	0:52
[8]	Auf der Alm — <i>Alpine Pasture; Pâturages alpestres</i>	2:03
[9]	Durch Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrwegen — <i>In thicket and undergrowth on the wrong path</i> <i>Dans les bois et sous-bois sur le mauvais chemin</i>	1:28
[10]	Auf dem Gletscher — <i>On the Glacier; Sur le glacier</i>	0:56
[11]	Gefährliche Augenblicke — <i>Dangerous moments; Moments dangereux</i>	1:28
[12]	Auf dem Gipfel — <i>On the Summit; Sommet</i>	4:37
[13]	Vision — <i>Vision; Vision</i>	3:11
[14]	Nebel steigen auf — <i>Mists rise; Le brouillard se lève</i>	0:17
[15]	Die Sonne verdüstert sich allmählich — <i>Sun fades; Le soleil décline</i>	0:49
[16]	Elegie — <i>Elegy; Elégie</i>	1:58
[17]	Stille vor dem Sturm — <i>Calm before the Storm; Calme avant la tempête</i>	3:04
[18]	Gewitter und Sturm, Abstieg — <i>Storm and Descent; Tempête et descente</i>	3:55
[19]	Sonnenuntergang — <i>Sunset; Soleil couchant</i>	2:30
[20]	Ausklang — <i>Waning tones; Tons déclinants</i>	6:18
[21]	Nacht — <i>Night; Nuit</i>	2:31

## [22] Tod und Verklärung Op. 24

*Death and Transfiguration; Mort et Transfiguration*

23:59

TT = 73:32

## COMPACT DISC TWO

### Ein Heldenleben Op. 40

*A Hero's Life; La vie d'un héros*

46:20

[1]	Der Held — <i>The Hero; Le héros</i>	4:23
[2]	Des Helden Widersacher — <i>The Hero's Adversaries; Les adversaires du héros</i>	3:22
[3]	Des Helden Gefährtin — <i>The Hero's Companion; La compagne du héros</i>	12:58
[4]	Des Helden Walstatt — <i>The Hero's Deeds in Battle; Les hauts faits du héros à la bataille</i>	9:57
[5]	Des Helden Friedenswerke — <i>The Hero's works of Peace; Les œuvres de paix du héros</i>	6:01
[6]	Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung <i>The Hero's Retirement from the World and the Fulfilment of his Life</i> <i>Le retrait du monde de héros et l'accomplissement de sa vie</i>	9:39

## [7] Don Juan Op. 20

18:06

DDD TT = 64:36

## ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Edwin Paling, leader

NEEME JÄRVI, conductor

Strauss was working on his **Alpensinfonie** in 1911 when he heard of Mahler's death. The words he wrote in his diary — 'Purification through one's own strength, emancipation through work, adoration of eternal glorious nature' — could equally have come from Mahler and they explain the pantheistic exaltation which is as much a fundamental element of the symphony as its graphic pictorialism. Until recently only the latter has received much attention in consideration of the *Alpine*; lately there has been more disposition to listen for the deeper qualities in the music and to find them. The work was completed in 1915 and first performed, under the composer's direction, in Berlin on 25 October of that year. 'It is really quite a good piece!' he told his librettist and friend Hugo von Hofmannsthal. It requires an orchestra of over 150 players, including 20 horns and quadruple woodwind.

Each of the 21 linked sections has a title describing an event in the 24 hours in the mountains covered by the symphony. *Night* begins with a unison B flat for the strings from which a powerful motif for trombones and tuba emerges. This unifying theme is the mountain itself and it gleams on wind and brass in the rays of the *Sunrise*, with its noble melody for four horns. After this slow introduction comes the *allegro*: bustling strings as the climbers begin *The Ascent* to a march-like theme followed by fanfares on the brass and 12 off-stage horns as a hunt is heard in the distance. After the *Entry into the Wood*, a contrapuntal episode, Strauss evokes Alpine lowland scenery, with its birdsong and yodelling. The climbers are soon wandering by the stream and their march takes them to a *Waterfall* where the oboes conjure up the *Apparition* of the Alpine sprite which, legend has it, appears in the rainbow created by the spray. These three sections explain Strauss's remark at the final rehearsal in 1915: 'At last I have learned to orchestrate.'

An expressive new melody on horns and violas takes the climbers to *Flowering Meadows* and later to the *Alpine Pasture*, where Mahlerian cowbells contribute to the pastoral atmosphere. The next three sections are more strenuous. Woodwind shriek a warning as the climbers find themselves *In thicket and undergrowth on the wrong path* and struggle out to arrive *On the Glacier*. Here the mountain theme and the march return, to erupt into a climax. When it subsides, the fanfare motif is broken into short phrases for trumpet and clarinets over a menacing pizzicato — *Dangerous Moments*. But the fanfare theme leads the way to the Summit and a sumptuous passage in which Strauss weaves together all the principal themes.

This majestic episode gives way to an eerie *Vision* in F sharp. With trills, harp *arpeggiandos* and chromatic sequences for woodwind, the *Mists rise* and the organ makes its first entry as the *Sun fades* and mountain themes return as if veiled. The music is tense; muted strings and the organ create an *Elegy*. But staccato D flats on the oboe disrupt the *Calm before the Storm*, and are the raindrop heralds of a violent and terrifying *Storm*, with thunder and the wind-machine contributing to the din. This section merges into the *Descent*, as various incidents on the ascent are recapitulated.

The clouds clear, the Straussian strings soar eloquently and the symphony's tripartite coda begins with *Sunset* and *Waning tones*. The latter is a passage of remarkable inner radiance, to be played 'in soft ecstasy'. Gradually the the home key of B flat minor returns and we leave the great mountain as we found it, enveloped by *Night*.

While he was still engaged as third conductor at the Munich Opera in 1888, the 24 year old Richard Strauss began to compose his third tone-poem, **Tod und Verklärung** (*Death and Transfiguration*). He had finished the sketch in short score by April 1889 and the full score was completed seven months later, on 18 November, by which time Strauss had moved to Weimar as third conductor of the court opera there. Exactly a week earlier he had conducted the first performance of *Don Juan*.

According to Strauss, the idea for *Tod und Verklärung* was purely imaginative. It did not originate in anything he had read, he had not been at anyone's deathbed and he had had no serious illness. (His severe bout of pneumonia did not occur until nearly a year after *Tod und Verklärung* had been performed.) 'It was an idea just like any other', he said in 1931, 'probably ultimately the musical need... to write a piece that begins in C minor and finishes in C major!'

Writing to Friedrich von Hausegger in 1895, Strauss said that the idea which occurred to him in 1888 was 'to represent the death of a person who had striven for the highest artistic goals, therefore very possibly an artist... The sick man lies in bed asleep, breathing heavily and irregularly; agreeable dreams charm a smile on his features in spite of his suffering; his sleep becomes lighter; he awakens; once again he is racked by terrible pain, his limbs shake with fever — as the attack draws to an end and the pain lessens, he reflects on his past life, his childhood passes before him, his youth with its strivings and passions, and then, while the pain resumes, the results of his journey through life appear to him, the idea, the Ideal which he has tried to realise, to represent in his art, but which he has been

unable to perfect, because it was not for any human being to perfect it. The hour of death approaches, the soul leaves the body, in order to find perfected in the most glorious form in the eternal cosmos what he could not fulfil here on earth.'

Illness and pain apart, there is little reason to doubt that there is autobiographical substance behind the above 'programme'. Any highly gifted young creative artist will be aware of his idealistic strivings and of how far behind them he falls in his life and work; and it is significant that Strauss, who had no religious impulses or leanings, should have visualised an 'eternal cosmos' for his soul rather than a Christian after-life. We may also deduce how important *Tod und Verklärung* was to him personally from the number of times he quoted from it in later works.

Strauss conducted the first performance of *Tod und Verklärung* at Eisenach on 21 June 1890. After one of the rehearsals he wrote excitedly to his sister Johanna: '*Tod und Verklärung* has dealt death to everything else, the players were flattened and flabbergasted, it made a remarkable impression'. It was not performed in Vienna until 1895, when Hans Richter conducted. This occasion drew a prophetic review from the critic Eduard Hanslick, in which he wrote that the nature of Strauss's talent, 'is really such as to point him in the direction of music drama'. Strauss had told his publisher in 1890, five years before Hanslick's article, that he was 'turning his back' on absolute music in order to 'seek my salvation in drama'. It was to be over five years before his next orchestral work, *Till Eulenspiegel*. In the meantime he wrote draft libretti for operas on the subjects of *Don Juan* and *Till Eulenspiegel*, neither of which progressed any further, and completed the libretto and music of his first opera, *Guntram*.

The oppressive atmosphere of a sickroom is evoked at the opening of the tone-poem *Tod und Verklärung*. The dying man's faltering pulse is represented by the rhythmical motif shared between strings and timpani. Strings and woodwind sigh wearily. Harp, flute and oboe lighten the mood as the man begins to dream of happier times. A drum-beat begins an *allegro* section in which the patient's sufferings are depicted. Towards the end a slowly mounting phrase is heard — the first hint of the Idealism theme. This section ends on a high D for the violins and is followed by a development in G major in which the themes of childhood are dominant until, with a modulation to E flat and horns and strings, the sick man recalls his early heroic struggles. A B major episode, obviously amorous, follows, although it is twice interrupted by reminders from trombones and timpani of the scene in

the sickroom — death knocking at the door. It ends with three varied statements of the Idealism theme, each in a different key. This is the work's principal subject. As Strauss said, '*Tod und Verklärung* makes the main theme its point of culmination, and does not state it until the middle'.

The work's opening is now recapitulated, though not in full. The man's death is marked by a stroke on the tam-tam, and the Idealism theme returns on horns and high woodwind. Soon its 'transfiguration' into C major begins, becoming harmonically richer as the soul is freed for its flight for eternity.

The tone-poem **Ein Heldenleben** was completed in December 1898. Strauss wrote much of it at the same time as he was working on *Don Quixote* and conceived them as complementary. He conducted the first performance in Frankfurt on 3 March 1899. From the start there was controversy about the work's autobiographical element: was Strauss his own Hero, and was he presenting himself as the musical symbol of Kaiser Wilhelm's militaristic Berlin, where he lived and worked at the time? 'Only partly true', was Strauss's comment. 'I'm no hero, I'm not made for battle'. The point about this Hero's life, and where it parallels Strauss's, is that it portrays the life of a composer who adores his capricious and captivating wife and whose 'adversaries' are the music critics with whom he is prepared to do battle for his 'works of peace' (his compositions). Eventually, like Don Quixote, he retires into the country (as Strauss was to do, after 1908, to Garmisch).

Although *Ein Heldenleben* is in one continuous movement — a vast sonata-form structure containing elements of two *scherzos* and an *adagio* — it is divided into six sections: 1. The Hero; 2. The Hero's Adversaries; 3. The Hero's Companion; 4. The Hero's Deeds in Battle; 5. The Hero's Works of Peace; 6. The Hero's Retirement from the World and the Fulfilment of his Life. The work is scored for a very large orchestra including eight horns and five trumpets, a generous array of percussion, and strings to number at least 64. Its principal key is E flat major.

The first section outlines the Hero's character in a long aspiring theme for horns and strings which spans three octaves. Other themes sprout from it as it builds towards a grandiose re-statement, after which part of it is used as a peremptory challenge, uttered six times. An expectant pause is followed by the *scherzo*-like start of Part 2 in which the Adversaries are depicted in woodwind, muted trombones and tubas, in turn spitting, snarling and pompous. The Hero's theme goes dolefully into the minor and the critics renew their



attacks until a fanfare from the brass diminishes them. In their place comes the Hero's Companion (solo violin). 'It's my wife that I wanted to portay,' Strauss wrote, 'she's very complex, very much a woman, never twice alike.' And the complex solo perfectly illustrates Pauline Strauss's volatile nature. The section ends with a voluptuously scored love scene.

But the critics are still nagging in the background; off-stage, trumpets sound a call to action and the Hero goes into battle (section 4). This aggressive orchestral showpiece is constructed from fragments of the themes representing the Hero, the Companion, the Adversaries and love. The Hero's theme becomes a victory-hymn and at its height Strauss quotes from *Don Juan* followed on strings and winds by the love-theme from the same work and the 'Spirit of Man' theme from *Also sprach Zarathustra*. There is an expectant pause, broken by one of the critics who puts in a word or two (on tubas). The Hero lashes out, but calms down in preparation for section 5.

In this section, Strauss weaves into a rich tapestry nearly 30 quotations from nine of his works, including the opera *Guntram*. Among fragments of two of his songs and the six tone-poems which preceded *Ein Heldenleben* are interpolated the various motifs of the Hero and his Companion. At length the Hero again utters his challenge. In the last section, a bucolic cor anglais melody sets the pastoral scene for the Hero's retirement. The critics briefly return, as if in nightmare, but the Companion's theme soothes away care, and the love-themes intertwine on solo horn and solo violin as a contented E flat major conclusion is reached.

The magnificent series of tone-poems, was launched in public (although it was the second to be composed) by **Don Juan** in 1889. 'The sound was wonderful, glowing and exuberant', the 25 year old Strauss exulted after conducting the first performance in Weimar. It was no idle boast. With this concise masterpiece, he puts himself at the head of the post-Wagner generation of German composers. The impetuous opening is somehow symbolic of his emergence as a major force as well as being a musical description of Don Juan's ardour. In the love scene, with its long and beguiling oboe melody, the operatic Strauss may first be glimpsed. Another great moment is the heroic new Juan theme on four horns which initiates the recapitulation before the duel and Juan's death.

- **A Chandos Digital Recording**

- Recording Producer: Brian Couzens
- Sound Engineers: Ralph Couzens
- Assistant Engineers: Ben Connellan (*Tod und Verklärung*), Philip Couzens (*Eine Alpensinfonie*, *Ein Heldenleben* and *Don Juan*), Tim Handley (*Don Juan*), Janet Middlebrook (*Tod und Verklärung*)
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