STRAUSS DURING THE WAR YEARS

By Willi Schuh

WHEN the second world war began, arrangements for the celebration of Strauss's seventy-fifth birthday had been completed despite the shadows cast by the approaching catastrophy. They culminated in performances of six Strauss operas which, given before an audience still international in character at the Munich State Opera in August 1939, testified to the endeavours of Clemens Kraus and his collaborators to produce Strauss's stage works in exemplary performances with the composer's closest collaboration as to his final intentions in respect of style. During the first years of the war it was possible to extend this plan, and in October 1942 the ninth of Strauss's operas, 'Capriccio,' was first performed in Munich. The outbreak of war took Strauss by surprise in Baden (Switzerland); and in the course of discussing the opera the composer revealed his deep concern at the disaster which the Hitler *régime* had brought about, and his contention that the war would end in catastrophy for Germany.

The affair of 'Die schweigsame Frau' and the Stefan Zweig correspondence (see *Tempo* No. 7, June 1944) had already in 1936 caused Strauss's resignation from the office of President of the *Reichmusikkammer*, and revealed the chasm which lay between him and the Nazis. He had accepted that office in the general belief that the *régime* would either become more normal or would be superseded by another; and he had hoped to do some good and prevent wrong. He soon realized however that it was the Party and not the President of the *Reichmusikkammer* who took the decisions on Germany's musical life. He had, in fact, already resolved to resign before the well-known Furtwängler affair, and it was only his entirely non-political nature and his aversion to demonstrative gestures that made him wait until events precipitated the issue.

Peace and war had alternated in Strauss's long life. He had served the Duke of Meiningen, the Grand Duke of Weimar, the Bavarian King, and the German Kaiser. He had seen the Republic in Germany and Austria, and had never concerned himself with the form of the State. Now the new *régime* had come, the effects of which he could not realize, and with which he had as little in common as with those previous to it. Strauss has always gone his own way, as the artist he wanted solely to be, without caring for worldly favours. As a member of an older generation he was unable to perceive that things were happening which were not only at variance with the world he had grown up in, but were alien to the whole concept of European civilization. In this he was by no means alone. Strauss felt that he belonged to Germany as the heir of a great musical culture, and that he was its last great representative.

Strauss stayed in Germany, and did so for the sake of his family, who would otherwise have been in serious danger. His daughter-in-law and grand-children needed the protection afforded by his name because of their "non-Aryan" descent. This struggle for the toleration of his family during the past twelve years has darkened Strauss's life. Tension between the composer and certain official circles grew during the war, and resulted in repeated clashes (as in 'Stagma,'* where Strauss defended the claims of serious music against the light music championed by the Propaganda Minister). For a time it was forbidden to mention Strauss's name in the Press, and official persons were not allowed to contact him. Permission to visit Switzerland to take part in the Zurich Festival performances of 'Elektra' and 'Capriccio'—the latter with a Viennese *ensemble*—was withheld, and Strauss's defiant remark, that he had nothing to do with the war and that so far as he was concerned there was no reason for waging it, was reported and spread, and is indicative of his personal independence. Strauss's task was to testify for another Germany with his music. That he did so is shown by the works of the years 1934-45, which give no indication of compromise. He wrote nothing which had any direct connection with the circumstances through which he passed.

When the Nazis came to power, Strauss was in close collaboration with Stefan Zweig, and even in 1936 he was urging the latter to further literary effort. He believed that the "thousand-year Reich" would soon vanish, and that they would eventually

* The official German organisation for the collection of performing-right fees.—(Ed.)

appear with their joint work. Some observers interpreted the military atmosphere of the opera 'Friedenstag,' so unusual in Strauss, as a gesture to the military spirit of Hitlerism. This is contradicted by the oratorio-like praise of peace at the conclusion, and by the fact that the first sketch of the libretto came from Zweig himself. It was the latter who later recommended Joseph Gregor to finish it, as he could not agree to secret co-operation with the composer. The only work written by Strauss on official commission was the Hymn for the Olympic Games, and this was declared the official hymn "for all time" by the International Committee. The 'Japanese Festival Music,' too, has no political significance. Written in 1940 to commemorate the 2,600th anniversary of the founding of the Japanese dynasty, it was one of several works commissioned by the Japanese Government from leading composers in various countries, including some which later went to war against Japan.

So far as Strauss's major works are concerned, they continue the great line of his life's work. There are three operas—'Daphne' (1938), 'Die Liebe der Danae' (based on a scenario of Hofmannsthal), and 'Capriccio.' That is, two mythological operas with libretti by Joseph Gregor, and one conversation-piece, in the setting of a Paris *rococo* salon, which treats the problem of text and music in opera in the manner of a private conversation. These are works which both musically and scenically address themselves to the *élite*, and have nothing in common with the present time.

'Der Liebe der Danae,' an *heitere Mythologie in drei Akten* combining the Jupiter-Danae episode with the tale of Midas, was the main work with which Strauss was occupied at the outbreak of the war. The score was finished on June 28, 1940. Strauss wanted to withhold the work until after the war, but at Clemens Krauss's request consented to a festival performance at Salzburg in 1944. As a result of the closing down of the German theatres, only a private dress-rehearsal of this difficult work was eventually arranged (August 16). The open conflict between Strauss and the *régime* prevented public performance.

In 1941 Strauss orchestrated his Brentano songs (Op. 68), which were first performed with orchestra on February 9 in Düsseldorf with Erna Schlüter; and a new Goethe song, 'Das Bächlein,' was first sung by Viorica Ursuleac (who sang many of Strauss's operatic roles in Munich) on June 19, 1942. On April 5 Clemens Kraus performed in Munich, together with the 'Josephslegende' — after a prolonged struggle because of the Biblical subject!— a ballet based on a new sequence of Couperin pieces in Strauss's orchestration, 'Verklungene Fest.' With some additional pieces it was given at concerts under the title of Divertimento (first in Vienna on January 31, 1943) and was later published. In 1942 Strauss wrote in Vienna—to where he had moved in 1941—some as yet unpublished songs, and for the centenary of the Philharmonic he planned a little symphonic poem, 'Donau,' which however was not finished.

After the completion of 'Der Liebe der Danae,' intensive work on 'Capriccio' began, and the full score was finished on August 3 1941. The splendid first performance on October 28 1942 was the last great event before the destruction of the German opera-houses. It is understandable that the destruction of the two opera-houses in Munich, with which he had had many ties since his early days, and where during recent years something like a Straussian Bayreuth had been built up, was a particularly heavy blow for the eighty-year-old Master.

With 'Capriccio,' which is the consummation of the light and transparent conversational style begun in the 'Ariadne' prologue and continued in 'Intermezzo' and 'Arabella,' Strauss regarded his life's work as finished. Here a theoretical proposition is illustrated in human action with incomparable mastery. Conversation and easy-flowing melody are combined with recitatives, arias, duets, trios, and great ensembles (up to octets) and even with a free fugue. In this one-act opera, Strauss's final style has found it most perfect expression. The work is full of almost Mozartian music which has lost all heaviness, and is illuminated by the smile of a philosopher who knows that he has reached his goal.

Since 'Capriccio' Strauss has written only smaller intrumental works of a classicism which points back to his beginnings sixty-five years ago. These works are Strauss's bequest to posterity and will be published only after his death. Nevertheless, the composer has permitted occasional performances. They consist of a second horn concerto, first performed in Salzburg on August 11 1943 and in Winterthur on

May 23 1944; a Sonatina in F for sixteen wind instruments, 'From the Workshop of an Invalid,' (Dresden, June 18 1944) and a second one in E♭, 'Merry Workshop,' (1944-45), which will be played in Winterthur in spring 1946; and a study for twenty-three solo strings, 'Metamorphosis,' finished in April 1945 for Paul Sacher and the Collegium Musicum Zurich, and which will have its first performance on January 25 next in that city. Finally, Strauss has just completed in Baden (Switzerland), where he has been staying since mid-October, an oboe concerto. In 1943 Strauss wrote an epilogue to 'Daphne' for nine-part unaccompanied chorus, based on themes from the opera, with words by Joseph Gregor; and an occasional piece, 'Festival Music for the City of Vienna,' for trumpet fanfare, which the composer himself conducted on March 9. A new concert version of the 'Rosenkavalier' waltzes with an introduction for large orchestra was made at the beginning of this year.

Richard Strauss once noted Goethe's words that there is no-one more miserable than the comfortable man without work; and in a letter from Garmisch at the beginning of the fateful year of 1944 he wrote: "I am working quietly after Goethe's great example." Even now, in his eighty-second year, the master goes on working. He lives in the world of music; and the affairs of the world of to-day concern him just as little as those of the epoch which came to its end on May 8 1945. They do not enter into the spiritual domain to which as a creative artist he belongs.

RE-OPENING OF COVENT GARDEN

IN September 1944, Mr. Leslie A. Boosey contributed an article to this journal on the subject of the Covent Garden Royal Opera House, announcing the acquisition of the lease of the building by Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., and indicating that a scheme was to be explored whereby the theatre might resume its original function as the home of British operatic activities on the grand scale. Although warning was given at the time that early developments should not be expected, more than one rather impatient letter has reached us, and comment has been heard here and there, indicating, shall we say, a polite disbelief in the possibility of any such scheme coming to fruition.

The fifteen months that have elapsed since the original announcement was made have not however been wasted, and a group of experts known as the Covent Garden Committee has been busily employed in exploring all aspects of a situation which involves great opportunities and great risks in more or less equal measure. Very considerable impetus was given when it became known that the Arts Council of Great Britain (or CEMA, as it then was) was willing to be associated with the project, and Lord Keynes, Chairman of the Arts Council, consented to become Chairman of the Committee.

The upshot of the Committee's activities has now been announced. Covent Garden will re-open next February (during the week commencing 18th) with a season of ballet by the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company under the direction of Miss Ninette de Valois. This Company is to pass to the control of the Covent Garden Committee for an intitial period of four years, and will become the resident ballet company. A second ballet company, which will work in active co-operation with the first, will be formed at Sadler's Wells. Operatic productions are a more complex matter, but it can be stated that there will be a first season of opera in March, to be followed by short seasons in the spring and summer. An announcement as to the visiting opera companies that are to appear will be made in the immediate future. Meanwhile the Committee is progressing with its plans to form a resident opera company which, however, cannot mature before next autumn. In connection with the whole scheme it should be remembered that the Committee's fundamental aim is to build up an essentially British institution, giving opportunities to native composers, singers, dancers, designers, and conductors.

The repertory of the Sadler's Wells Ballet's opening season in February will include several new works, and new productions of established pieces. There will be a new ballet by Robert Helpmann with music by Arthur Bliss and décor by Roger Furse; another by Ninette de Valois with music by Alan Rawsthorne; another by Frederick Ashton based on Franck's 'Variations Symphoniques,' with décor by Sophie Feodorovitch; and pos-