

**Philharmonia
Records**

**Santtu conducts Strauss:
Ein Heldenleben**



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Strauss: Ein Heldenleben

Philharmonia Orchestra
Santtu-Matias Rouvali – conductor
Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949)

Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Op. 40 (1898)

1. Der Held (The Hero)	04:28
2. Des Helden Widersacher (The Hero's Adversaries)	03:48
3. Des Helden Gefährtin (The Hero's Companion)	14:27
4. Des Helden Walstatt (The Hero at Battle)	07:58
5. Des Helden Friedenswerke (The Hero's Works of Peace)	08:09
6. Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung (The Hero's Retirement from this World and Completion)	11:19
Total timings	50:12

Passing the Baton: Richard Strauss and the Philharmonia

Philharmonia 

By Gavin Plumley

The Philharmonia has enjoyed a unique relationship with the music of Richard Strauss, almost since the orchestra was founded in 1945. Yet just as that history was beginning, Strauss's life was coming to an end. A child of the 1860s and a hero of the *fin de siècle*, as well as a somewhat ambivalent figure during the interwar years and the Third Reich, Strauss was 83 years old when he conducted the Philharmonia at the Royal Albert Hall on 19 October 1947.

It should have been an unequivocally happy event. But, sadly, shadows loomed. The former (if reluctant) president of the Third Reich's Music Chamber could not help but bring the spectre of Hitlerism with him to London. Strauss may have been declaimed innocent of any ties to the Nazi State, but others remained unsure. After all, he had initially been

labelled 'Class I – Guilty' due to his official role. And while the Bavarian Secretary of State successfully overrode the automatic designation, some maintained the composer was a genuine adherent of Nazism, with the great writer Thomas Mann even calling him a 'Hitlerian composer'.

In the wake of these events, the dust of war barely settling, Strauss was a somewhat ghostly presence at the London festival arranged for him by Thomas Beecham, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC, Victor Hochhauser and the New Philharmonia Orchestra. No doubt flattered by such attention at a time when flattery was rare, Strauss had supposedly only come to London due to a desperate need for money. The recent sale of some of his sketchbooks and manuscripts had

secured piecemeal income, though the composer's health was also in a steady state of decline. Thankfully, the October 1947 trip – what was to be his last foreign tour – offered both hard currency through the collection of previously withheld royalties and essential medical attention.

Fraught, far from uncomplicated, Strauss's first (and only) concert with the Philharmonia did, however, engender warmth between the aged composer and the young orchestra. The evening opened with *Don Juan*, becoming the most regularly performed of Strauss's works in the Philharmonia's repertoire, followed by the *Burleske* for piano and orchestra (with Alfred Blumen at the keyboard). After the interval, Strauss returned to the platform for his 1903–4 *Symphonia domestica*, with its depictions of family

life, before the concert closed with the first of the waltz sequences from his 1911 opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. To a packed auditorium, the audience no doubt amazed by the composer's resilience, Strauss brought significant prestige to the Philharmonia's infancy. But two years later, on 8 September 1949, he was dead.

Between these events had come another milestone in Strauss's late life and the early years of the orchestra's history: the creation of the *Four Last Songs*. Composed in 1948, these twilight Lieder were performed posthumously for the first time, also at the Albert Hall, on 22 May 1950, when the Philharmonia was conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler with Kirsten Flagstad as the soprano soloist. Strauss had always intended Flagstad to give the first performance of the



songs, featuring words by Hermann Hesse and Joseph von Eichendorff, though his was to be a palpable absence when that wish finally came true.

Where Strauss left off, the Philharmonia continued, passing the baton to a new generation of musicians. Keen to explore his vast output – operatic, symphonic and otherwise – the orchestra maintained its interest in a composer whose career had often evolved alongside seismic shifts in human history. Yet as much as *Salome*, an opera the Philharmonia both recorded with Charles Mackerras and performed live in Taormina with Giuseppe Sinopoli, speaks of the hothouse of the turn of the last century, or orchestral poems such as *Don Quixote* and *Don Juan* evoke other worlds and characters entirely, the

music has remained contemporary. The virtuoso challenge of the scores, their mythological import and the sheer brilliance of Strauss's sublimation of his source material has ensured that he continues to test and beguile both musicians and audiences.

Over the last 80 years, the Philharmonia has also been blessed with brilliant Strauss interpreters, starting with the composer himself. The legacy continued with Furtwängler, together with other advocates hailing from Central and Eastern Europe. They included Otto Ackermann, who conducted Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's early recording of the *Four Last Songs*, as well as Herbert von Karajan, a continual presence during the 1950s, and Christoph von Dohnányi.

The latter's association with the orchestra lasted for many years and included concerts of works by Strauss – as during Sinopoli's equally happy tenure – and fully staged productions of *Arabella*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Die schweigsame Frau*. And now, thanks to the Philharmonia's links to Garsington, that tradition has continued in recent productions of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Der Rosenkavalier*. But Strauss has also remained a key component of the Philharmonia's work in the concert hall, not least with its latest principal conductor, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, as revealed in this new recording. It showcases one of Strauss's most celebrated if divisive works – the two qualities never wholly exclusive in the composer's output. Written in 1897–8, *Ein Heldenleben* represents

the pinnacle of Strauss's engagement with the tone poem, a genre often taken as a statement of modernising intent at the end of the 19th century. Instead of the traditional symphony, looking back to Haydn, Beethoven and Brahms – one of Strauss's early idols – *Ein Heldenleben* embraced both the symphonic and the dramatic.

It had not always been so. The composer began his career writing symphonies, with the Second particularly gaining a foothold in the repertoire. But conventional structures soon lost their appeal, becoming, as Strauss described, 'giant's clothes made to fit a Hercules, in which a thin tailor is trying to comport himself elegantly'. Instead, he decided to find a 'new form for every new subject', making strides with *Aus Italien* in 1886, before triumphing with *Macbeth* (1888),

Don Juan and *Tod und Verklärung* (both 1888–9), followed by *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1894–5), *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896) and *Don Quixote* (1897). With their vivid themes and ingenious orchestrations, these were the works that paved the way for Strauss's later, even greater triumphs in the opera house.

Ein Heldenleben is a particularly wowing case in point. Unlike the literary themes of its predecessors, however, the subject – the 'hero' – remains ambiguous. Some contemporary critics at the work's initial performances, including the world premiere in Frankfurt on 3 March 1899, were quick to charge Strauss with arrogance, suggesting the hero was none other than the composer himself. But given that Strauss was just as fond of self-deprecation as he was

of fluffing his own ego, such claims sit a little wide of the mark. Perhaps, he remembered his friend and colleague Mahler's poignant views on gallantry: 'it is not easy to be or to become a hero.' And like the anti-heroic *Don Quixote* (another work championed by the Philharmonia in its early days), *Ein Heldenleben* certainly speaks of that equivocation.

Instead of a windmill-tilting knight, however, the work's point of focus and derision may well be Wagner and his leitmotif technique. Strauss had long been an advocate, though had recently turned his back on Bayreuth and the cult of its (now deceased) house composer. But regardless of the 'intended' programme and any consequent guesswork, the reality proves much richer, depicting an intense struggle between an

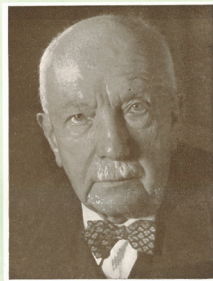
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VICTOR HOCHHAUSER

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RICHARD STRAUSS

conducting the

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Leader : THOMAS CARTER

in a

STRAUSS FESTIVAL CONCERT

Soloist :

ALFRED BLUMEN

SOUVENIR

PROGRAMME AND NOTES

Specially prepared in honour of Dr. Strauss

individual and the wider world, as well as profound romantic love, all contained within a brilliant synthesis of narrative and form.

The first subject ('Der Held') in the sonata-form structure begins in the lower strings, before rising to a salvo of eight horns. Couched in E flat major, the tonality of Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony, these sweeping gestures seem to invoke a long history of musical heroism. A transitional passage ('Des Helden Widersacher') announces the hero's adversaries, who are depicted as grotesques and caricatures. Writing to his horn-playing father after the work's premiere, Strauss described them as figures who 'spit poison and gall, principally because on reading the analytical note they believed that they could see themselves identified with the really

hatefully portrayed "grumblers and antagonists" and that I am meant for the hero, which is only partially true.'

The protagonist is rescued from the critics' clutches by his companion, described by a solo violin ('Des Helden Gefährtin'). There is an unmistakable feeling of romance here, though also something skittish and nagging. Surely, this is Strauss the realist. While he dearly loved his wife, Pauline, whom he had married in 1894, he was often a little too true-to-life when it came to depicting her in music: as Barak's wife in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* or as Christine in *Intermezzo* ('a perverse woman'); as well as more flattering portraits in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and the *Four Last Songs*. What follows in *Ein Heldenleben*, after an extended recitative between the violin and the orchestra, is a love scene of searing intensity.

Adversaries return in the development's 'noisy outburst' ('Des Helden Walstatt'), as if prefiguring the violence of *Elektra*. But there can be no doubt, thanks to the broad (if gloriously uncouth) cadence at the end of this central section, that the hero will be triumphant, as his theme returns. Victory is nonetheless brief, the fight clearly not over, as the second subject takes us into an entirely different atmosphere ('Des Helden Friedenswerke'). Strauss now quotes from his already substantial catalogue, including earlier tone poems, his first opera *Guntram* and two songs ('Befreit' and 'Traum durch die Dämmerung'), all representing the hero's 'works of peace'. Citing their themes, Strauss was nonetheless also marking the end of a chapter. For instead of enjoying the numinous retirement described in the work's coda ('Des

Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung'), he soon turned his attentions to the opera house full-time, with *Salome* and *Elektra* just around the corner. Indeed, the audacity described in *Ein Heldenleben* was nothing compared to what lay ahead.

Santtu-Matias Rouvali

Principal Conductor

Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra in September 2021. He is just the sixth person to hold that title since the Philharmonia was founded in 1945.

Santtu has conducted a wide range of music with the Philharmonia, from blockbusters by Strauss and Rachmaninov to works by living composers including Magnus Lindberg and Anna Clyne. He has performed with the Philharmonia in all their residency venues – at the Southbank Centre in London, and in Bedford, Leicester, Canterbury and Basingstoke – at the BBC Proms, and Edinburgh International Festival. And annual visits to the Mikkeli Festival in Finland have fast become a highlight of the Philharmonia players' calendars.

In autumn 2024 Santtu led the Philharmonia's series *Nordic Soundscapes*, conducting music by Sibelius, Grieg, Nielsen, María Sigfúsdóttir, Miho Hazama and Mats Larsson Gothe.

In the Philharmonia's 2023 series *Let Freedom Ring: Celebrating the Sounds of America*, he conducted music by George Gershwin, Duke Ellington and Wynton Marsalis, and had the audience dancing in the aisles when he played drum kit in the first ever performance of the Philharmonia Big Band. Originally a percussionist, he played with the Philharmonia's percussion section in Steve Reich's *Music for Pieces of Wood* in a streamed performance during the Covid pandemic.



Santtu conducts Strauss, the first release on the Philharmonia Records label, features his recordings of four Strauss tone poems, two of them recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall in his first concert as Principal Conductor. His second Philharmonia Records release is a live recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, 'Resurrection'. The third, 'Santtu conducts Stravinsky' was released in spring 2024, followed by the latest two releases featuring Shostakovich's Symphonies 6, 9 and 10. He has also released Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 with the Philharmonia on Signum Records.

Santtu is Chief Conductor of Gothenburg Symphony, with whom he is recording an award-winning Sibelius cycle. He is Honorary Conductor of Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra,

and also performs regularly with top orchestras around Europe and the US.

When he's not conducting, Santtu loves to spend time meditating, foraging and hunting in the forest around his home in Finland, and cooking the food he brings home.

The Philharmonia



The Philharmonia was founded in 1945 by EMI producer Walter Legge, and has worked with a who's who of 20th- and 21st-century musicians. Finnish conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as Principal Conductor in September 2021. The sixth person to hold the title, he is known for his expressive, balletic conducting style and irrepressible energy.

Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Arturo Toscanini, Riccardo Muti and Esa-Pekka Salonen are just a few of the great artists to be associated with the Philharmonia, and the Orchestra has premiered works by Richard Strauss, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Errollyn Wallen, Kaija Saariaho and many others.

Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, in the heart of London, has been the Philharmonia's home since 1995. The Orchestra also has residencies at venues and festivals across England, each embracing a Learning & Engagement programme that empowers people to engage with, and participate in, orchestral music.

The Philharmonia's international reputation is built in part on its extraordinary 80-year recording legacy, which in the last ten years has been built on by pioneering work with digital technology. The Orchestra's installations and VR experiences have introduced hundreds of thousands of people to the symphony orchestra. The Philharmonia has won four Royal Philharmonic Society awards for its digital projects and audience engagement work.

The Philharmonia is the go-to orchestra for many film and videogame composers in the UK and Hollywood, and its music-making has been experienced by millions of cinema-goers and gamers. It has recorded over 150 soundtracks, with film credits stretching back to 1947. Since 2023, the Orchestra has released live recordings on its own label, Philharmonia Records, in collaboration with Signum Records.

The Philharmonia has over two million listeners each month on Spotify, and a vibrant YouTube channel with over 140,000 subscribers. The channel features free performances; instrument guides; interviews with artists; and in-depth documentaries. The Philharmonia is an official partner of Classic FM and broadcasts extensively on BBC Radio 3.

The Philharmonia is a registered charity, proud to be supported by Arts Council England, many generous individuals, corporate supporters and Trusts and Foundations.

A team of 80 outstanding musicians from 16 countries, the Philharmonia looks forward to bringing music into your life, through great concerts, recordings and ground-breaking projects, for many years to come.



Ein Heldenleben

By Gavin Plumley

Nothing said 'modern' at the end of the 19th century more than a tone poem. Instead of the traditional symphony – a genre freighted with the ghosts of Haydn, Beethoven and Brahms, Strauss's early hero – it offered a work embracing both the symphonic and another major force in Strauss's life: the theatre. Melding function and fiction, it was a genre that truly came to dominate his output in the 1880s and 1890s.

The Bavarian-born composer had already written two symphonies, with the Second gaining a significant foothold in the repertoire. But such conventional structures quickly lost their appeal, becoming, as Strauss described, 'giant's clothes made to fit a Hercules, in which a thin tailor is trying to comport himself elegantly'. Instead, he was increasingly

convinced of the need to find a 'new form for every new subject'. Making strides towards the more flexible genre of the tone poem in *Aus Italien* in 1886, Strauss made his mark with *Macbeth* (1888), *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung* (both 1888–9), followed by *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1894–5), *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896) and *Don Quixote* (1897). Featuring vivid themes and ingenious orchestrations, these were the masterpieces that paved the way for Strauss's later, even greater triumphs in the opera house.

Ein Heldenleben, written in 1897–8, is a case in point, though, unlike the literary topics of its predecessors, the subject (or 'hero') is left ambiguous. Some early critics, quick to charge Strauss with arrogance, suggested it was the composer himself – though

Philharmonia 



he was as fond of self-deprecation as of inflating his own ego. Indeed, presenting a tale of heroism only to unmask it might well be the subject of *Ein Heldenleben*, with Wagner and his leitmotif technique a simultaneous point of focus and derision – Strauss had recently turned his back on Bayreuth and the cult of its (deceased) house composer. The reality, however, proves much richer, depicting a struggle between the individual and his world, as well as the profundity of domestic love, all contained within a brilliant synthesis of narrative and form.

The sweeping first subject ('Der Held') begins in the lower strings, before rising to a salvo of eight horns. Opening in E flat major, the tonality of Beethoven's 'Eroica', it invokes a long history of musical

heroism. A transitional passage ('Des Helden Widersacher') announces the subject's adversaries, seen as grotesques and caricatures. Writing to his horn-playing father after the work's premiere in Frankfurt in March 1899, Strauss described them as figures who 'spit poison and gall, principally because on reading the analytical note they believed that they could see themselves identified with the really hatefully portrayed "grumblers and antagonists" and that I am meant for the hero, which is only partially true.'

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Our players

First Violins

Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay
Eugene Lee
Tristan Gurney
Eunsley Park
Victoria Irish
Adrián Varela
Lulu Fuller
Soong Choo
Eleanor Wilkinson
Minhee Lee
Karin Tilch
Joonas Pekonen
Peter Fisher
Coco Inman
Julia Liang
Usman Peguero

Second Violins

Annabelle Meare
Emily Davis
Fiona Cornall
Jan Regulski
Nuno Carapina
Susan Hedger
Julian Milone
David López Ibáñez
Gideon Robinson
José Nuno Cabrita Matias
Anthony Wing Pong Poon
Andrew Thomson
Helena Buckie
Marina Gillam

Violas

Scott Dickinson
Julia Joyce
Sylvain Séailles
Linda Kidwell
Stephanie Edmundson
Cheremie Hamilton-Miller
Carol Hultmark
Gijs Kramers
James Heron
George White
Raquel Lopez Bolivar
Kate De Campos

Cellos

Steffan Morris
 Karen Stephenson
 Richard Birchall
 Eric Villeminey
 Yaroslava Trofymchuk
 Ella Rundle
 Anne Baker
 Silvestrs Kalniņš
 Anna Beryl
 Tamaki Sugimoto

Double Basses

Tim Gibbs
 Hugh Sparrow
 Michael Fuller
 Samuel Rice
 Owen Nicolaou
 Gareth Sheppard
 Simon Oliver
 Rupert Ring
 Benjamin du Toit
 Ryan Smith

Flutes

Frederico Paixão
 June Scott
 Anna Kondrashina

Piccolo

Robert Looman

Oboes

Timothy Rundle
 Imogen Davies
 Lauren Weavers
 Henry Clay

Cor Anglais

Henry Clay

Clarinets

Mark van de Wiel
 Laurent Ben Slimane
 Jordan Black

E-flat Clarinet

Katie Lockhart

Bass Clarinet

Laurent Ben Slimane

Bassoons

Robin O'Neill
 Guylaine Eckersley
 Shelly Organ

Contrabassoon

Luke Whitehead

Horns

Diego Incertis Sánchez
 Kira Doherty
 Daniel Curzon
 Carsten Williams
 John Davy
 Meilyr Hughes
 Samuel Jacobs
 Kathryn Saunders
 Duncan Fuller

Trumpets

Gwyn Owen
Gustav Melander
David Geoghegan
Gerry Ruddock
James Nash

Natural Trumpets

Neil Brough
Robin Totterdell
Matthew Wells

Off-stage Trumpets

Neil Brough
Robin Totterdell
Jack Wilson

Trombones

Dudley Bright
Becky Smith
Dan Jenkins

Bass Trombone

James Buckle

Euphonium

Philip White

Tuba

Peter Smith

Timpani

Antoine Siguré

Natural Timpani

Antoine Siguré

Percussion

Paul Stoneman
Louise Lewis Goodwin
Elsa Bradley
Laura Bradford

Harp

Heidi Krutzen
Anneke Hodnett

Acknowledgements

Gavin Plumley is a cultural historian whose work focusses on the art and music of Central Europe. A frequent guest on BBC radio, he has written for opera houses, concert halls and music festivals worldwide, including many projects about the life and work of Richard Strauss.

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