

# RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864 in Munich; died September 8, 1949 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen

## *Aus Italien* ("From Italy"), Opus 16 (1886)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Munich, March 2, 1887

Bavarian Court Orchestra

Richard Strauss, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 47 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, harp and strings

In the autumn of 1885, Hans von Bülow, music director of the Meiningen Orchestra, appointed the 21-year-old Richard Strauss as his conducting assistant. Within months, Strauss was asked to become von Bülow's successor, but he declined the offer in favor of a post as third conductor at the Court Opera in Munich, his hometown. Strauss left his post at Meiningen in April 1886 and did not have to report for his new duties in Munich until August, so, encouraged by Brahms, who shared with the young musician his fond memories of his visits to Italy, he undertook a trip across the Alps during April and May. The journey, financed by his father and by his uncle Georg Pschorr, a wealthy Munich brewer (Pschorr Beer is still a Bavarian favorite and a mainstay of the famous Oktoberfest), took Richard to Verona, Bologna, Rome, Naples, Florence and many smaller cities. Despite losing his leather suitcase in Naples, his laundry in Rome and his Baedeker in a theater, being overcharged by the local merchants, and having to skip a stop in Venice because of an outbreak there of cholera, he thoroughly enjoyed the junket. When he returned to Munich in late May, Strauss was bubbling with ideas for a new work, and he immediately set about creating the set of four tone pictures that became the "Symphonic Fantasy" titled *Aus Italien* ("From Italy").

Strauss provided the following comments about *Aus Italien*:

"1. *Auf der Campagna* ('In the Country'). This prelude reproduces the mood experienced by the composer at the sight of the broad extent of the Roman Campagna bathed in sunlight as seen from the Villa d'Este at Tivoli.

"2. *In Roms Ruinen* ('Amid the Ruins of Rome'). Fantastic images of vanished glory, feelings of melancholy and grief amid the brilliant sunshine of the present. The formal structure of the movement is that of a great symphonic [sonata-form] first movement.

"3. *Am Strande von Sorrent* ('On the Shore at Sorrento'). This movement represents in tone painting the tender music of nature, which the inner ear hears in the rustling of the wind in the leaves, in bird song and in all the delicate voices of nature, and in the distant murmur of the sea, whence a solitary song reaches the beach. Contrasting with that distant song are the sensations experienced by the human listener. The interplay in the separation and partial union of these contrasts constitutes the spiritual content of this mood-picture.

"4. *Neapolitanisches Volksleben* ('Neapolitan Folk Life'). The principal theme is a well-known Neapolitan folk song. [Strauss was incorrect. This melody is actually the familiar *Funiculi-Funicula* by the Italian composer Luigi Denza, but it was so ubiquitous in Naples that he assumed it to be a traditional tune.] In addition, a tarantella the composer heard in Sorrento is used in the coda. After a few noisy introductory bars, the statement of the principal theme by the violas and cellos launches this crazy orchestral fantasy, which attempts to depict the colorful bustle of Naples in a hilarious jumble of themes; the tarantella, at first heard only in the distance, gradually asserts itself towards the end of the movement, and provides the conclusion for this humoresque. A few reminiscences of the first movement may express nostalgia for the peace of the Campagna."

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda