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BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

RICHARD
STRAUSS
FRIEDENSTAG

ALBERT DOHMEN
DEBORAH VOIGT
ALFRED REITER
JON VILLARS

STAATSOPERNCHOR DRESDEN
STAATSKAPELLE DRESDEN
GIUSEPPE SINOPOLI



Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Friedenstag

Opera in one act · Libretto: Joseph Gregor

The Commandant.....	ALBERT DOHMEN
Maria, his Wife	DEBORAH VOIGT
A Sergeant-Major.....	ALFRED REITER
A Corporal	JOCHEN KUPFER
A Private Soldier	TOM MARTINSEN
A Musketeer	ANDRÉ ECKERT
A Bugler	JÜRGEN COMMICHAU
An Officer.....	JOCHEN SCHMECKENBECHER
A Front-line Officer	MATTHIAS HENNEBERG
A Piedmontese	JOHAN BOTHA
The Holsteiner.....	ATTILA JUN
The Mayor.....	JON VILLARS
The Pastor	SAMI LUTTINEN
A Woman of the People	SABINE BROHM
Members of the Delegation.....	NORBERT KLESSE, EKKEHARD PANSA, RAFAEL HARNISCH

Staatsopernchor Dresden *chorus master* Matthias Brauer

Staatskapelle Dresden

Giuseppe Sinopoli

Total time: 76'00

Recording: September 1999, Lukaskirche, Dresden

Cover image – Vaclav Brosik: The Defenestration of 1618

Photo: National Gallery of Melbourne/The Bridgeman Art Library

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1	Hast was gesch'n? (<i>Sergeant-Major/Private Soldier</i>)	3'14
2	La rosa, la rosa che un bel fiore (<i>Piedmontese/Corporal/Private Soldier/Musketeer/Bugler/Soldiers/Chorus</i>)	5'23
3	Hunger! Hunger!...Nur Wiederhall (<i>Chorus/Corporal/Sergeant-Major/Bugler/Musketeer/Officer/Soldiers</i>)	3'17
4	Hunger! Brot! (<i>Chorus/Commandant/Mayor/Delegation/Pastor/Soldiers/Front-line Officer</i>)	5'15
5	Mein Commandant!...Rede! (<i>Front-line Officer/Commandant/Delegation/Woman</i>)	2'48
6	Es sei! Doch hört (<i>Commandant/Chorus/Delegation/Soldiers</i>)	4'35
7	Zu Magdeburg in der Reitschlacht (<i>Commandant/Sergeant-Major/Corporal/Private Soldier/Musketeer/Bugler/Chorus</i>)	4'57
8	Geht, geht alle! (<i>Commandant</i>)	2'02
9	Wie? Niemand hier? (<i>Maria</i>)	8'36
10	Nein, leere Hoffnung alles (<i>Maria/Commandant</i>)	2'38
11	In einer Stunde verschwindet (<i>Commandant/Maria</i>)	3'36
12	Der Kaiser stand im Saal (<i>Commandant/Maria</i>)	5'33
13	Erwünschtes Zeichen! Auf eure Posten! (<i>Commandant/Sergeant-Major/Soldiers</i>)	1'16
14	Nein, nicht Todesnebel (<i>Maria/Sergeant-Major/Corporal/Private Soldier</i>)	2'47
15	Der Feind! Der Feind! Wo steht sein Angriff (<i>Commandant/Sergeant-Major/Private Soldier/Maria/Officer</i>)	1'22
16	Das Zeichen, das Ihr uns verheißet (<i>Mayor/Pastor/Delegation/Chorus/Soldiers/Commandant</i>)	4'09
17	Wo ist der Mann (<i>Holsteiner/Commandant/Maria</i>)	3'52
18	Geliebter, nicht das Schwert (<i>Maria/Chorus/Mayor/Pastor</i>)	5'21
19	Warum kämpfen wir Jahre um Jahre (<i>Commandant/Holsteiner/Maria/Chorus</i>)	2'50
20	Wagt es zu denken (<i>Maria/All/Chorus</i>)	2'29

Friedenstag: a noble, humanitarian idea

Friedenstag is at once the last real product of Strauss's collaboration with Stefan Zweig and his first opera written to a libretto by Joseph Gregor, Zweig's designated successor. One of the composer's least performed works, it remains controversial both for its genesis and for its message. Although that message – or at least what can be termed *Friedenstag*'s ideological stance – was largely of Zweig's devising, the composer never seriously contested it, however much he may have fretted over the opera's lack of theatrical qualities. His greatest challenge lay in expressing the message clearly in the Third Reich, where propaganda could take a work intended to express the highest humanitarian and liberal ideals and proclaim it 'the first Nazi opera'. Its failure to sustain such a preposterous claim is confirmed by *Friedenstag*'s tenuous hold on the German repertory after 1938. Whether Strauss truly created an effective vehicle for Zweig's lofty ideas, however, is also debatable, and the question has only partly to do with his music.

Friedenstag was conceived during the crisis in Strauss's relationship with the Third Reich engendered by his collaboration with Zweig, who was Jewish, in the comic opera *Die schweigsame Frau*. This episode led Zweig to sever all ties with Germany, even to the point of abandoning further proposed collaborations with Strauss. He did, however, remain sufficiently friendly towards the composer to keep some of their intended projects alive, albeit now with his close friend, the writer and theatre historian Joseph Gregor, as librettist. Although the operas that Strauss created with Gregor comprise a distinct chapter in his career, Zweig's shadow falls over *Friedenstag* to such an extent that Kenneth Birkin has called it 'the only one of these operas which took its form and dramatic substance exclusively from him'.

The work originated in a seemingly chance remark by the composer in a letter of 2 February 1934, as he attempted to renew the collaboration with Zweig in the interval between the completion and premiere of *Die schweigsame Frau*. Strauss's suggestion of 'a fine single-act festival piece' on Henry III and the 'Peace of Constance' of 1043 arose from his reading of Leopold Ziegler's *Das heilige Reich der Deutschen*. The peace, or 'Day of Indulgence', at which the Salian Emperor Henry III promised to forgive his enemies and urged them to behave similarly was one of several such episodes in the history of medieval kingship and diplomacy and offered the opportunity for a display of usually temporary rapprochement.

The idea of reconciliation between deadly opponents appealed to the humanitarian and pacifist side of Zweig, but at the back of his mind were other inspirations, notably Velasquez's *Surrender of Breda* and Calderón's play on the same subject, *El sitio de Bredá*. A famous episode in the Eighty Years War between Spanish and Dutch, the surrender of Breda to the former in 1625, had been marked by unaccustomed clemency on the part of the victors. In his first draft of *Friedenstag* in late 1934, Zweig moved the situation and the sentiments forward to 1648 and the end of the Thirty Years War, sharpening the idea of reconciliation by its new associations with the bloodiest conflict in German history before the 20th century. The subject became the renunciation of hate between rival commanders and armies, between rival religions (symbolizing ideologies), between besiegers and besieged. As a result, the work was sometimes described in its earliest stages as [24. Oktober] 1648, '... the last day of the Thirty Years War in the citadel...', and *Der erste Friedenstag*, before the familiar title was adopted in October 1935. Nonetheless a civil war is a two-edged symbol, almost as much so as Henry III's gesture of *Gleichschaltung*. *Friedenstag* could also be viewed as a symbol for the 'Burgfriede' that descended on Germany after the partisan strife of the Weimar Republic, a metaphor for the new Reich that was just about sustainable once Zweig was replaced as librettist by Gregor. Yet Zweig continued to haunt the project to its conclusion.

As early as his first draft, Zweig began backing out of the collaboration, which also embraced several other projects, including the germ of the idea that later grew into *Capriccio* and an opera based on Calderón's *Semiramis*. The first thing that Gregor showed the composer was a sketch for *Semiramis*, which was criticized so trenchantly by Strauss and (to a lesser extent) Zweig that the collaboration nearly collapsed. That Gregor was for long regarded as a mere intermediary is evident from Strauss's insistence that Zweig should vet subsequent material. While the disaster of *Die schweigsame Frau* was moving to its climax in Dresden, Strauss and Zweig met in Austria to shape the new collaboration with Gregor, who visited Garmisch in order to have several projects considered. Strauss eventually agreed to three, two of which were *Friedenstag* and the pastoral tragedy *Daphne*. Here was the origin of an association between these two works that was particularly important to Gregor and led to their later joint premiere in Dresden on 15 October 1938. That the collaboration was to begin with the one-act *Friedenstag* seemed particularly appropriate to Zweig on practical grounds, suggesting that he shared some of Strauss's misgivings about Gregor's tendency in his verses towards the antiquated and high-flown.

What Gregor could not be charged with was laziness. Having met Strauss on 7 July, within a fortnight he had a new draft ready that included at least one happy invention, the episode of the Piedmontese messenger that gave the composer the chance of writing Italianate pastiche as an antidote to the harsh sound-world already planned for the opera. Strauss continued to criticize Gregor's poetic style relentlessly, and the libretto went through several versions before the poet turned in despair to Zweig in November 1935 to create the scene of reconciliation between the commanders of the rival armies, the heart of the original vision. By this time, however, Strauss had a firm grasp on the shape of the opera, which he had never really seen as anything other than that 'fine single-act festival piece' of his first letter. Zweig's verses of reconciliation were discarded in favour of a version that focussed firmly on the final chorus of rejoicing, reinforcing the curious facelessness of a drama in which only one character is named. When the score was finished in draft in January 1936, the noble and humanitarian idea had been carried through to an ending that seems oddly lacking in true energy and passion. Partly this lay in the cloak of anonymity that lay over the besieged town, commanders and soldiers, a decision that emphasized the universality of Zweig's message and which he refused to water down by introducing a love episode in order to appease Strauss's instinct for the operatic stage. Partly it was due to the libretto, about which Zweig expressed mild doubts to Gregor, but *Friedenstag's* failure to achieve true success has at least something to do with Strauss's music.

The subject took Strauss out of his increasingly domestic musical milieu into areas that had proved taxing for him in the past. Over the first part of the opera hung a pall of martial gloom that emanated from the dour intransigence of the Catholic commander. The world of chivalry had not been a notable success for him, however, unless diluted with comedy and irony as in *Don Quixote*. From the grim tritones of the opening, the composer is working in a novel martial and austere vein that is lightened only slightly by the Italianate pastiche of the Piedmontese messenger. By no means unsuccessful on its own terms, the brass-bound music of the commander presents Strauss's characteristic chromatic language tied to a more rigid rhythmical scheme which is appropriate to the subject but deprives Strauss's musical style of some of its more familiar features.

The final chorus of reconciliation took Strauss into territory that he had visited before in episodes of his tone poems and in parts of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. In that opera, the prolonged glorification at the conclusion worked by the skin of its teeth, as Strauss's mastery of tension and

climax compensated for flagging melodic inspiration. The problem similarly affects the insistently affirmative C major close of *Friedenstag*, in which Strauss comes perilously close to the empty heroics of his festival music and occasional pieces. That left the salvaging of the opera firmly in the hands of Maria, the Catholic commander's wife, whom Strauss insisted on naming (unlike the Woman in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, who was humanized by contact with Barak). In accordance with Zweig's ideas, her dialogue with the commander eschewed conventional eroticism and became a clash of martial honour and duty with the self-sacrificing spirit of Beethoven's Leonore. While declaring her love for her husband, Maria provides a biting critique of war. Somewhat surprisingly, in view of the lyrical style Strauss normally reserved for his later heroines, he managed to blend Maria's tendency to cantilena with the block chords and fanfares of the commander, anticipating the manner in which he built Apollo's heroic music into the lyrical pastoral of *Daphne*. In keeping with the dramatic nature of Strauss's genius, this worked best in evoking ideological conflict, less well in the moment of reconciliation, where the role of the bells does not sustain the importance Zweig attached to them as the first harbinger of peace; significantly it was here that Gregor complained to Zweig that the process of creation had 'ground to a halt'.

When the opera was finished, Gregor praised the ending's similarity to the close of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (a comparison that amused the composer) and to *Also sprach Zarathustra*: 'simple, monumental, truly pure dome-like C major, not even broken up by the B, as in *Zarathustra*'. In spite of the novelty of many passages in *Friedenstag*, and of the fine music for the central dramatic clash, it is legitimate to wish for some of that B, which may also have occurred to composer and librettist when they planned to make *Friedenstag* a finale to *Daphne*. In the end this double premiere was anticipated by an earlier performance of *Friedenstag* on 24 July 1938 in Munich featuring the dedicatees Clemens Krauss and Viorica Ursuleac as conductor and Maria, and with Beethoven's *Prometheus* ballet music in the first half. Thus the opera came to be associated with no less than three works by Beethoven: *Fidelio*, the Ninth Symphony and *Prometheus*. By the cruellest of ironies, Zweig's great project of reconciliation was plundered then ignored by the Nazi regime while Strauss played at being Beethoven. The message of *Friedenstag* was already clouded by political and musical myths as Gregor steered its composer back to Greek mythology and idealized pastoral.

John Williamson

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