



Highlights

Richard Strauss and the family

Parental home

The horn player Franz Joseph Strauss (1822 – 1905) was already 42 years old when his second wife (the first had been carried off by cholera) bore him a son, Richard. "He was a so-called character". So begins the "Memories of my Father" by Richard Strauss. The son's gratitude for the education and encouragement his father offered him is mixed with gentle criticism of the father's authoritarian manner. "A difficult childhood had made my father bitter. [...] At home he was violent, irascible and tyrannical. It needed my sweet mother's entire gentleness and goodness to maintain a harmonious relationship between my parents even though their marriage was always born by genuine love and respect." The later nervous disorder of Josepha (née Pschorr, 1838 – 1910), Richard's sensitive mother, was, at least, nourished by the patriarchal family situation: "To what extent, however, my mother's very sensitive nerves really suffered, I can no longer decide." Both parents bequeathed the boy positive qualities: thrift and level headedness from his father, sensibility and a "poetic bent" from his mother.

Richard's mother helped write down the text of the first compositional attempts while his father involved him in chamber music and performed the early works of the thirteen-year old with the orchestral society *Wilde Gung'l*. Thanks to his father – and from a certain point against his father – Richard Strauss very quickly developed into an outstanding, independent musician. And although Franz did not appreciate his son's interest in Wagner and Liszt, he remained an untiring source of advice. Countless letters to and from Richard's parents testify to the closeness of their relationship and the correspondence covers almost everything: the young man's travel impressions, health con-

cerns, his initially sweeping conducting style against which his father advised and the bold talent of the emerging composer that Strauss senior always sought to control in the spirit of the Viennese classics. Franz Joseph Strauss died seven months before the first performance of his son's opera *Salome* and never witnessed the "opera revolution" the work sparked.

Father Strauss also recommended friendly diplomacy toward Pauline de Ahna: 'Miss de Ahna seems a somewhat exalted lady but an educated man can sometimes turn a blind eye without conceding anything.' Richard's mother was also optimistic when Richard and Pauline exchanged their vows, 'because her light-hearted, clever nature will always cheer you up and she knows how to look after you so lovingly.'

Pauline

As an artist the thirty-year old Richard Strauss was viewed as an *enfant terrible* but in his private life he longed for a bourgeois existence. The wife he chose to realise this existence guaranteed a regulated but far from peaceful daily routine. Pauline de Ahna, born in Ingolstadt on 4 February 1863 (for reasons of professional advancement she passed herself off as eleven years younger), was the daughter of a general. She was not only a promising singer but also of fiery temperament.

As Strauss proposed to her in the middle of the turbulent rehearsals for *Guntram* in 1894, the young woman was aware of what she would have to give up for the emerging conductor and warned him: "You, yourself know best how many weaknesses I have, ... your parents and Hanna also know my moods; oh well, and now I am supposed to suddenly become the model housewife." She did become the perfect housewife but Pauline never gave up



her moods in the slightest. The couple were married on 10 September 1894 and they spent their honeymoon in Venice.

A son was born on 12 April 1897. The birth put Pauline in mortal danger. Richard Strauss, in Stuttgart on a concert tour, learned of the happy outcome by telegram. A "huge baby", he was named Franz (after his grandfather) Alexander (after the late friend Ritter), but throughout his life was called Bubi.

In 1906 Pauline ended her professional artistic career as a worldwide renowned lieder singer. It had united her with her husband and it is with a touch of bitter irony that Richard Strauss writes: 'It is a pity that she turned prematurely to the beautiful calling of an exemplary housewife and mother.' From now on the family, Bauxerl and Bubi, was to be an indispensable support in the busy working life of the conductor and composer.

The anecdotes about Pauline's forked tongue, her temperamental outbreaks and extravagances are legendary. Alma Mahler recalled (not entirely credibly) in her memoirs the "rage" of the other composer's wife and Strauss' comments about it, "My wife is often extremely harsh, but, you know, I need that." Yet, the works Strauss devoted to his family life deserve as much attention as the gossip of contemporaries. *Ein Heldenleben* contains a glowing tribute to his "companion", the *Symphonia domestica* portrays daily worries, a domestic argument and a sensual reconciliation in the Strauss household while the opera *Intermezzo* was inspired by an episode of unfounded jealousy on the part of Pauline. The numerous songs Strauss conceived for the voice of his wife should also be mentioned as must the role of the *Färberin* in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* which Hofmannsthal modelled on the moody wife of the composer.

Pauline was deeply devoted to her Richard and his art. She accompanied him to his final resting place in the Munich East Cemetery on 12 September 1949. The *Rosenkavalier* trio was sung and, "at the climax her arms reached out ecstatically, her hands locked and grasping wildly in the air, as if with her summoned power she wanted to hold something

back that was disappearing" (Alois Melichar). Pauline died only a few months later on 13 May 1950.

Son and grandson

As an only child, Franz Strauss (born in 1897) was especially attached to his parents. This was heightened by his sickness during his first years. The Strauss biographer Kurt Wilhelm, who knew Franz personally, described him as, 'a peaceful, calm, good-natured person, sensitive and vulnerable, with an intuitive feel for people, who would certainly have made more of his life had the dominating love of his parents not been stronger than his will.'

Bubi accompanied his father on his travels, helped with contracts and, with a heavy heart, abstained from studying medicine. Instead, he studied law and wrote his dissertation on the Association of German Composers, an organisation always close to his father's heart. At the age of eighteen he volunteered for military service in 1915, but was rejected – to his parent's great relief – on health grounds.

In 1923 Franz Strauss became engaged to Alice von Grab-Hermannswörth. The two families had met in 1907 at a performance of *Salome* in Prague, where the Jewish industrialist Emanuel von Grab owned textile factories. The wedding took place in Vienna in January 1924. Richard Strauss composed the *Hochzeitspräludium* for two harmony instruments, for which he used motives from *Domestica*, *Guntram* and *Rosenkavalier*.

During the Nazi era Richard Strauss protected his son's Jewish relatives as best as he could and enabled his grandchildren to attend school in Vienna. His grandchildren's education was one of his main concerns. Close to the end of the war he wrote copies of some of his scores for the boys as "Christmas presents of value".



While Christian, his younger grandson, became a doctor, Richard, an opera director, devoted himself to the preservation and management of his grandfather's work. His second wife was Hans Hotter's daughter, Gabriele. She not only brought a "genetic" love and knowledge of Richard Strauss' work, but, as a librarian, made a valuable contribution to the recording and publication of the archives as well.