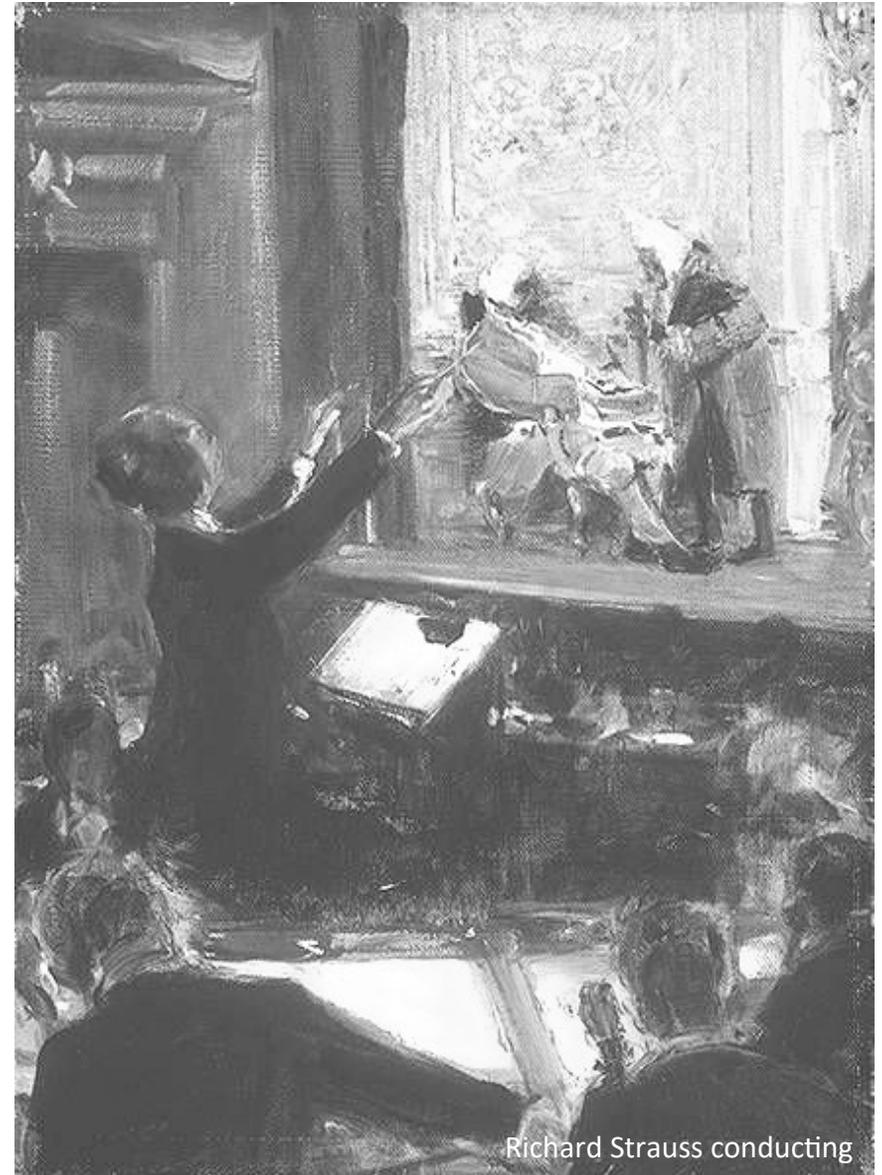


Great Scenes in Opera

Sophie, though, is upset with this remark, and wonders if she too were no more than a prop in the farce put on by the aristocrats for their amusement. But the Marschallin reassures her, and sends her back to Octavian, fully aware that this will mean the end of her own claim on him. The stage is set for the celebrated Trio and the Duet that follows it, both of which express feelings through music that would be far too cumbersome to put into words.

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act III, ending. (All video excerpts come from a 1985 production at the Royal Opera House, London. Georg Solti, *conductor*; John Schlesinger, *director*; Kiri te Kanawa, *Marschallin*; Anne Howells, *Octavian*; Barbara Bonney, *Sophie*; Aage Haugland, *Ochs*; Jonathan Summers, *Faninal*; Phyllis Cannan, *Marianne*; Cynthia Buchan, *Annina*)



Richard Strauss conducting

For more detail and lots of color, see the class website:

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10. *Der Rosenkavalier*

April 16, 2026

10. Der Rosenkavalier

DREAMING IN WALTZ TIME. After the violence of the one-act Expressionist masterpieces *Salome* (1905) and *Elektra* (1909), **Richard Strauss** (1864–1949) and his librettist **Hugo von Hofmannstahl** (1824–1929) relaxed into the charm of 18th-century Vienna with their expansive three-act comedy, *Der Rosenkavalier* (The Rose Bearer, 1911). Although quite anachronistic, Strauss upped the ante on *Gemütlichkeit* by drenching the score with the lilt of Viennese waltzes of a century later.

The two most famous scenes are the Presentation of the Rose near the start of Act Two, and the Trio for three female voices near the end of Act Three. We will hear them both, together with the music that immediately precedes and follows them, plus three shorter clips to provide context. *rb.*

A. Presentation

The Marschallin, a princess married to an elderly Field Marshall, seeks romance in the arms of younger men. The latest of these is Octavian, Count Rofrano, a teenage role written to be sung by a woman. The curtain rises on the two of them in bed, but we will pick it up where they are enjoying their morning chocolate.

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act I, chocolate scene

Their idyll is interrupted by the arrival of the Marschallin's distant cousin, Baron Ochs von Lerchenau, a coarse individual who is about to finalize an engagement to Sophie von Faninal, daughter of a recently-ennobled businessman. It is clear that he is interested only in the Faninal dowry, for when Octavian, who has hidden in a closet, emerges in disguise as the Marschallin's supposed maid, Mariandel, he

takes an unhealthy interest in the pretty young servant. The main purpose for his visit, however, is to get the Marschallin to suggest a young nobleman to serve as his Rosenkavalier, presenting the silver rose symbolic of his intent to marry. After enduring a rather boisterous morning *levée*, the Marschallin is left alone to muse on the passage of time and to accept that she herself is getting older (she is probably in her mid-forties). With this in mind, and half aware that she risks losing him, she nominates Octavian as the Bearer of the Rose.

Act Two opens in the excitement of the Faninal household. Octavian enters in full panoply, and for a while the music seems suspended in a silvery shimmer. The young people then sit down to chat until Ochs arrives, but he is his boorish self when he does.

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act II, opening

B. Outcome

Octavian endures the behavior of Ochs for only so long before asking Sophie if she really wants to marry him. When she says no, he challenges Ochs to a duel, in which he gives him a flesh wound—a minor injury that the Baron milks for all he can. Before the act ends, he sends an Italian go-between with a letter ostensibly from “Mariandel” agreeing to a date that night. This puts Ochs back into good spirits, and he ends the act by humming his favorite waltz.

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act II, ending

Act III takes place in a disreputable inn on the outskirts of the city. Octavian has organized people to pose as tradesmen demanding payment of their bills, bastard children begging for support, and so on, lying in wait until he gives the signal. Then he changes into the maid's costume before Ochs arrives.

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act III, Ochs and “Mariandel”

Just before Ochs's attentions get too hot and heavy, Octavian gives the signal for the various extras to burst into the room. Among them is the Chief of Police, who refuses to be satisfied until the Marschallin arrives with Sophie and Faninal (all sent for by Octavian), and assures him that all this is “a Viennese farce, and nothing more.”