

Mahler and Strauss

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MAHLER AND STRAUSS Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss were two of the most famous composers of the last 19th century. Both were influenced by Beethoven, and both were extremely proficient and had a lasting impact on classical music into the 20th century. It is very interesting and instructive to examine their aesthetics and the various techniques they used to help establish their remarkable reputations and make such wonderful music.

To begin with, both Mahler and Strauss were composers in the late Romantic period. Their music featured clear harmonies and melodies and had themes that were often rooted in nature and in love—indeed, some of their best works were inspired by failed love affairs (something everyone can identify with). Both also involved and were inspired by various folk songs of their homelands.

Another important element seen in the works of both men is tonality. Mahler experimented with tone a lot. A lot of this can be said to have influenced later atonalist composers like Schoenberg, who really respected Mahler and drew a great deal of inspiration from the older man. Mahler pushed what was then seen as the limits of conventional tonality. Strauss too would experiment with tone in his tone poems. He started off quite conservative, but after discovering Wagner, began to experiment a lot more.

One difference between the two men was that more than Mahler, Strauss had a talent for wearing his various inspirations on his sleeve. In some of his operatic scores it is possible to pick out many of the various composers who have influenced him. In a review of *Feuersnot*, a critic writes:

Time and history buckle and bend, as the music becomes giddy with anachronism and allusion in ways that prefigure *Der Rosenkavalier* and

Ariadne auf Naxos. Tremendous waltzes sweep the characters onwards. Not only Wagner, but also the entirety of the Austro-German musical tradition is caught up in its flow as Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schumann are examined in their turn. It's a magical score. 1

By bringing a whole tradition into the melody, Strauss proved his significant talent. Mahler was equally talented, but in a slightly different way. Both composers' music stands the test of time.