

Late Romantics: Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

- Best known for tone (symphonic) poems and songs (although he wrote many operas, some other genres)
- Symphonic poems were programmatic like those of Liszt; *Don Juan* (1888), *Death and Transfiguration* (1889), *Till Eulenspiegel* (1895), *Ein Heldenleben* (1898)
 - All have underlying heroic theme, picking up on Beethoven's idea of "artist as hero"
 - First big success was *Don Juan*; Strauss said "new ideas must search for new forms," although his tone poems are not really new forms but free versions of traditional forms, e.g. Don Juan is sonata allegro; Till Eulenspiegel is a rondo, Ein Heldenleben is a variations work.
 - This music is an ultimate expression of romanticism:
 - huge sound, orchestra, lush, sweeping harmony
 - programmatic elements
 - chromaticism
 - virtuosity
 - Strauss **stressed tonal system**, e.g. juxtaposition of keys a tritone or half step apart
 - Strauss married a great singer; she was inspiration for Lieder and some opera roles
- In the first decade of 20th century, Strauss wrote 2 *avant garde* operas, *Salome* (1903-5) and *Elektra* (1906-8)
 - *Salome* (1903-5) based on Oscar Wilde's play (1891-2). Wilde is largely responsible for our concept of her today as the embodiment of evil; reflects decadence of turn-of-century Vienna as well as Wilde's misogyny. The Bible doesn't have that much detail about her.
 - Strauss's setting is very dissonant, tonal relationships are largely absent, except when John the Baptist is singing: this is tonal, with predictable progressions

- The opera uses some Leitmotives, not as systematic as some of Wagner's music dramas, but still unifying the work throughout. **Elektra** is even more organized with Leitmotives; also just as bloody and perverse, just as dissonant and experimental
- After this, Strauss drew back from atonality, in fact participated in a new trend, neo-classicism