

hero who challenges the establishment. While no single source contains all the adventures of Till Eulenspiegel, the character is recognizable in various adaptations, just as Strauss' musical depiction in the rondo theme is apparent throughout the musical compositions.

The musical form of Till Eulenspiegel is a large-scale rondo. By identifying the character of Till with the rondo theme, Strauss found a way to demonstrate the recalcitrant nature of the protagonist and also to unify the work. After a brief introduction, often interpreted as an expression of "once upon a time," Strauss states the theme at the very beginning in a bravura passage for horn. The theme recurs between episodes of the rondo, and it is in those episodes that Till Eulenspiegel has his adventures. In terms of musical structure, the rondo-episodes provide contrast and, as they depart further from the main idea, they also set the stage for the return of the familiar rondo theme. The subsequent episodes show Till at odds with the peasants, railing at preachers, wooing a woman and being rejected by her, and making fun of the intelligentsia. Within these sections, Strauss allowed his theme for Till to return in various guises, yet still remain recognizable. Ultimately, Till finds himself brought before judges, who review his career and sentence him to death. Even then Till cannot depart without a mocking gesture, and the piece ends with his theme fully transformed with all its permutations exhausted.

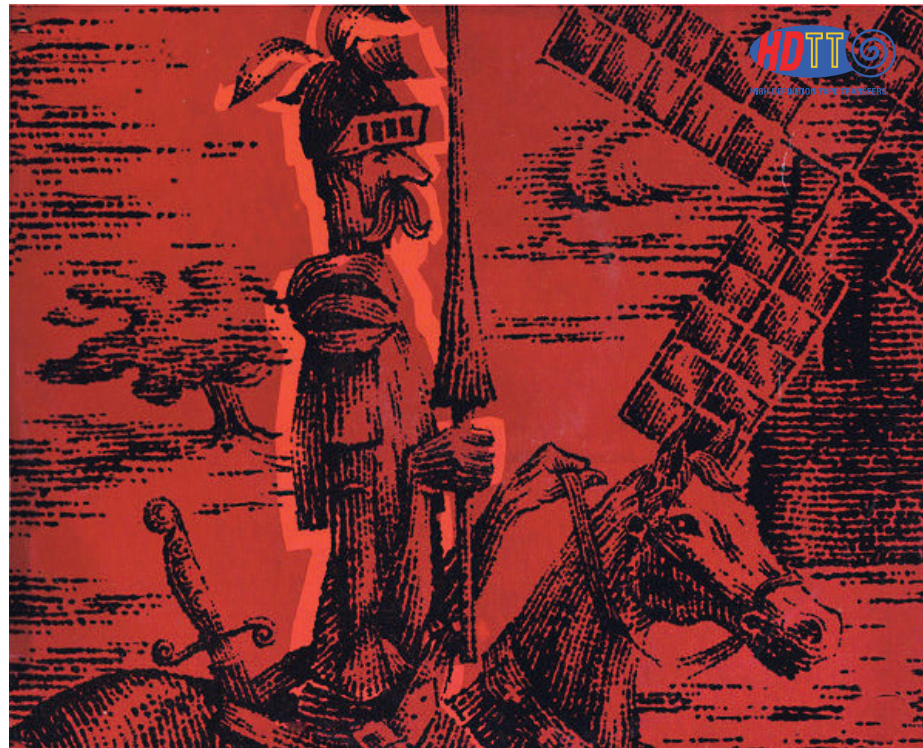
Till Eulenspiegel contains some of Strauss' most brilliant orchestration and makes use of various instruments, including the clarinet in D. Strauss approached the orchestration of this work with a kaleidoscopic hand, often abruptly shifting between instrumental groups. This gives the work its appealing color and also makes it a virtuoso piece for orchestra. In writing program music, Strauss chose a still-new approach to composition and aligned himself with the avant-garde. His brilliantly orchestrated score with its virtuosic instrumentation and colorful dissonances showed Strauss as a modernist. It remains a popular concert piece and one of Strauss' best-known compositions.

Richard Strauss

Don Quixote

Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks

THE BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA CONDUCTED BY RUDOLF KEMPE WITH PAUL TORTELIER AND GIUSTO CAPPONE



Strauss wrote these "Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character" in 1897. Franz Wüllner conducted the first performance on March 8, 1898, with the Gürzenich Orchestra of Cologne. In addition to solo cello and viola, the work is scored for triple winds and contrabassoon; six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, two tubas; timpani, two percussionists, wind machine, harp, and full strings. Strauss was an omnivorous reader attracted firsthand to what Walter Starkie called "the first modern novel...a spiritual autobiography."

Strauss rearranged the novel's sequence of misadventures for purposes of structure, but otherwise put his powers of depiction at the mad Man of La Mancha's service. A myriad of marvelous touches are detailed in the first volume of Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary by the late conductor Norman del Mar, who concluded that, "on the side of humor and incredible fertility of invention...Strauss at no time surpassed what [he] accomplished throughout Don Quixote." Amen. Let me try to condense his analysis for home-listening consultation.

A long introduction heralds ten variations and an epilogue, based on a cornucopia of themes. Three of these pertain to the Don, who is immersed in literature about chivalry until fantasy unhinges his reason. A series of dissonant chords sends him "on his adventures with the cold, quiet logic of insanity," disguised as a solo cello which iterates the Don's themes. We hear two more for his fat squire, Sancho Panza, the first one played in unison by bass clarinet and tenor tuba, the babbling second one played by the viola, which thereafter impersonates him. The deluded Don's "Ideal Lady," Dulcinea, also has a theme, introduced by the principal oboe.

In Variation One, "the Knight and his squire start their journey" by mistaking windmills for giants. When the Don attacks, he is painfully unhorsed. Variation Two, "the victorious battle against the host of the emperor Alifanfaron," turns out to be against sheep. Their orchestral bleating still astonishes a century later. Variation Three, "colloquies of the Knight and his Squire," is the first of two eloquent rhapsodies addressing honor, glory, and the "Ideal Lady." Sancho keeps interrupting. Variation Four brings "the adventure with the penitents," mistaken by the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance for robbers; it ends when they trounce him. Variation

Five, "the Knight's vigil," nobly tender music, meditates on a vision of the Ideal Woman, conjured up by a horn. Variation Six, "the meeting with Dulcinea" becomes briefly droll, one of Strauss' very best jokes (in 2+3/4 time), when Sancho's search finds only a country tart and two companions. Variation Seven is "the ride through the air," blindfolded astride a wooden horse, features a wind machine. Timpani and basses play an earthbound tremolo underneath. Variation Eight depicts "the unfortunate journey in an enchanted boat"; it floats downstream without oars until a water mill capsizes it and the intrepid duo. (Listen for the cello to shake off droplets, pizzicato.) Variation Nine brings "The combat with two magicians" -- monks, actually -- routed from their prayers. Variation 10, "The duel with the Knight of the White Moon," in reality depicts a disguised townsman who has challenged Quixote. If the Don loses -- and he does, ignominiously -- he must renounce all further quests and return home quietly. The finale, "The Death of Don Quixote," shows the Don restored to sanity but physically depleted, meditating on his follies until "the great Creator draws/his spirit, as the sun the morning dew." When the cello slides terminally from B to B below, the orchestra offers a brief, compassionate eulogy.

One of Strauss' most popular symphonic poems is Till Eulenspiegel, a single-movement work for orchestra. It was composed between 1894 and 1895, shortly after the premiere and critical debacle of his first opera Guntram. In choosing the popular tale of Till Eulenspiegel as the basis for the tone poem, Strauss found an effective vehicle for responding to his critics, who treated his first opera unfavorably.

The character of Till Eulenspiegel is a chronic prankster, whose unrelenting sense of the sardonic continually challenges his peers and lands him in trouble. Till would never learn from his mistakes and constantly thumbed his nose at convention and any criticism. The tone poem is based on a German folktale that has appeared in various versions since its first appearance in the fourteenth century. Some have found a historical basis for the character, but he is best understood as a kind of folk

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Don Quixote, Op. 35

1 Fantastic Variations On A Knightly Theme

2 Till Eulenspiegels Lustige Streiche, Op. 28

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