

The Berlin Philharmonic was founded in Berlin in 1882 by 54 musicians under the name Frühere Bilsesche Kapelle (literally, "Former Bilsse's Band"); the group broke away from their previous conductor Benjamin Bilsse after he announced his intention of taking the band on a fourth-class train to Warsaw for a concert. The orchestra was renamed and reorganized under the financial management of Hermann Wolff in 1887. Their new conductor was Ludwig von Brenner; in 1887 Hans von Bülow, one of the most esteemed conductors in the world, took over the post. This helped to establish the orchestra's international reputation, and guests Hans Richter, Felix von Weingartner, Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Johannes Brahms and Edvard Grieg conducted the orchestra over the next few years. Programmes of this period show that the orchestra possessed only 46 strings, much less than the Wagnerian ideal of 64.

In 1895, Arthur Nikisch became chief conductor, and was succeeded in 1923 by Wilhelm Furtwängler. Despite several changes in leadership, the orchestra continued to perform throughout World War II. After Furtwängler fled to Switzerland in 1945, Leo Borchard became chief conductor. This arrangement lasted only a few months, as Borchard was accidentally shot and killed by the American forces occupying Berlin. Sergiu Celibidache then took over as chief conductor for seven years, from 1945 to 1952. Furtwängler returned in 1952 and conducted the orchestra until his death in 1954.

His successor was Herbert von Karajan, who led the orchestra from 1955 until his resignation in April 1989, only months before his death. Under him, the orchestra made a vast number of recordings and toured widely, growing and gaining fame. When Karajan stepped down, the post was offered to Carlos Kleiber, but he declined.

Claudio Abbado became principal conductor after Karajan, expanding the orchestra's repertoire beyond the core classical and romantic works into more modern 20th-century works. He stepped down from this post in 2002 to conduct the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. During the post-unification period, the orchestra encountered financial problems resulting from budgetary stress in the city of Berlin. In 2006, the Orchestra Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic established the Claudio Abbado Composition Prize in Abbado's honour.

Sir Simon Rattle conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 2006

In June 1999, the musicians elected Sir Simon Rattle as their next chief conductor. Rattle made it a condition of his signing with the Berlin Philharmonic that it be turned into a self-governing public foundation, with the power to make its own artistic and financial decisions. This required a change to state law, which was approved in 2001, allowing him to join the organization in 2002. Rattle's contract with the orchestra was initially through 2012. In April 2008, the BPO musicians voted in favour of retaining Rattle as their chief conductor. From 2006 to 2010 the general manager of the orchestra was Pamela Rosenberg (de). In April 2008, the orchestra announced that Rosenberg would not continue as general manager after her contract expires in 2010. As of September 2010 the new general manager will be German media manager Martin Hoffmann (de).

In 2006, the orchestra announced it would investigate its role during the Nazi regime.[9] In 2007, Misha Aster published *The Reich's Orchestra*, his study of the relationship of the Berlin Philharmonic to the rulers of the Third Reich. Also in 2007, the documentary film *The Reichsorchester* by Enrique Sánchez Lansch was released.

UNICEF appointed the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and Rattle as Goodwill Ambassadors in November 2007. On 10 January 2013 Simon Rattle announced that his tenure as artistic director and chief conductor would end in 2018.



Richard Strauss

Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Op. 40



Herbert von Karajan

Berlin Philharmonic



HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Op. 40 is a tone poem by Richard Strauss. The work was completed in 1898. It was his sixth work in the genre, and exceeded any of its predecessors in its orchestral demands. Generally agreed to be autobiographical in tone, despite contradictory statements on the matter by the composer, the work contains more than thirty quotations from Strauss's earlier works.

Strauss began work on the piece while staying in a Bavarian mountain resort in July 1898. He proposed to write a heroic work in the mould of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony: "It is entitled 'A Hero's Life,' and while it has no funeral march, it does have lots of horns, horns being quite the thing to express heroism. Thanks to the healthy country air, my sketch has progressed well and I hope to finish by New Year's Day."

Strauss worked on *Ein Heldenleben* and another tone poem, *Don Quixote* during 1898. He regarded the two as complementary, saying they were conceived as "direct pendants" to one another. There was speculation before the premiere about the identity of the hero. Strauss was equivocal: he commented "I'm no hero: I'm not made for battle", and in a programme note he wrote that subject of the piece was "not a single poetical or historical figure, but rather a more general and free ideal of great and manly heroism." On the other hand, in the words of the critic Richard Freed:

The music, though, points stubbornly to its own author as its subject, and Strauss did concede, after all, in a remark to the writer Romain Rolland, that he found himself "no less interesting than Napoleon," and his gesture of conducting the premiere himself instead of leaving that honor to the respected dedicatee may well be viewed as further confirmation of the work's self-congratulatory character.

The work, which lasts about fifty minutes is through-composed, performed without breaks, except for a dramatic grand pause at the end of the first movement. The movements are titled as follows (later editions of the score may not show these titles, owing to the composer's request that they be removed):

Ein Heldenleben employs the technique of leitmotifs that Richard Wagner used, but almost always as elements of its enlarged sonata-rondo symphonic structure.

1. "The Hero": The first theme represents the hero. In unison, horns and celli play E-flat major triads ascending through an almost four-octave span. A contrasting lyrical theme first appears in high strings and winds in B major. A second motive appears, outlining a stepwise descending fourth. Trumpets sound a dominant seventh chord followed by a grand pause, the only prolonged silence throughout the entire piece.

2. "The Hero's Adversaries": The movement opens with chromatic woodwinds and low brass: multiple motives in contrasting registers are heard. The adversaries represented by the woodwinds are Strauss's critics, such as the 19th-century Viennese music critic Doktor Dehring, who is memorably written into the score with an ominous four note leitmotif played by the two tubas in parallel fifths. As the critic Michael Kennedy puts it, the Hero's theme goes dolefully into the minor and the critics renew their attacks until a fanfare from the brass diminishes them".

3. "The Hero's Companion": Strauss was evasive about whether he was or was not the hero depicted in the piece, but he explicitly confirmed that the hero's companion was a portrait of his wife, Pauline de Ahna. He wrote to Rolland, "She is very complex, a trifle perverse, a trifle coquettish, never the same, changing from minute to minute." The section features a tender melody played by a solo violin. In an extended accompanied cadenza filled with extremely detailed performance instructions by Strauss, after the fashion of an operatic recitative, the violin presents new motivic material, alternating with brief interjections in low strings, winds, and brass. During this section, the violin briefly foreshadows a theme that will appear fully later. The cadenza concludes and the new thematic material is combined in a cantabile episode commencing in G-flat. Fragments of the motives from the previous movement briefly appear. A fanfare motive in offstage trumpets, repeated onstage, is then heard. The section ends with "a voluptuously scored love-scene."

The academic and critic James Hepokoski observes that the whole work is in a massive version of sonata form. The three initial sections comprise an elaborate exposition, with elements of a multiple-movement symphony evident in their contrasting character and tempo. The remainder of the work comprises development, recapitulation, and coda, with occasional new thematic material.

4. "The Hero's Battlefield": In this first extended development section of the work, percussion and a solo trumpet are heard in the first appearance of 3/4 time: a variation of a previous motive. A sequence of clamorous trumpet fanfares occurs as the music approaches a harmonic climax in G flat, and the related E flat minor. Percussion is pervasive throughout the movement. 4/4 time returns in a modified recapitulation of the first theme as it appeared at the beginning of the piece, this time with a repeated quaver accompaniment. A new cantabile theme makes its appearance in the trumpet, and an extended elaboration of this serves to preface the next section.

5. "The Hero's Works of Peace": The autobiographical aspect of the work is indicated most clearly in this section, in which Strauss extensively quotes his previous works. He quotes his early opera *Guntram* (eight times), his symphonic poems *Don Quixote* (five times), *Don Juan* (four), *Death and Transfiguration* (four), *Macbeth* (three), *Also sprach Zarathustra* (three) and *Till Eulenspiegel* (once). The lieder "Traum durch die Dämmerung", Op 29/1 and "Befreit", Op 39/1, are quoted once each. The melodies lead into the final section.

6. "The Hero's Retirement from this World and Consummation": Yet another new motive appears, commencing in a rapid descending E-flat triad, which introduces a new development of the original theme: an elegy featuring harp, bassoon, English horn, and strings. The reappearance of the previous "Hanslick" motive brings in an *agitato* episode. This is followed by a pastoral interlude with what Kennedy calls "a bucolic cor anglais theme". The descending triad now appears slowly, cantabile, as the head of a new, peaceful theme in E flat: this is the theme foreshadowed during the violin cadenza. In a final variation of the initial motive, the brass intones the last fanfare, and a serene E flat major conclusion is reached. The work is scored for a large orchestra consisting of piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn/cor anglais (doubling 4th oboe), E-flat clarinet, 2 soprano clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns in F, E and E-flat, 3 trumpets in B-flat (3 used offstage briefly) and 2 trumpets in E-flat, 3 trombones, tenor tuba in B-flat (euphonium), tuba, timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, tenor drum, tam-tam, 2 harps, and strings, including an extensive solo violin part.

Strauss dedicated the piece to the 27-year-old Willem Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. However, it was premiered by the Frankfurter Opern- und Museumsorchester on March 3, 1899 in Frankfurt, with the composer conducting. The first American performance was a year later, performed by the Chicago Symphony, conducted by Theodore Thomas. The work did not reach England until 1902, when the composer conducted Henry Wood's Queen's Hall Orchestra. Béla Bartók wrote a piano reduction of the piece in 1902, performing it on 23 January 1903 in Vienna. The conductor Joolz Gale was more recently given permission to arrange the work for chamber orchestra, which was commissioned and premiered by ensemble mini on 16 October 2014 in Berlin.

The German critics responded to Strauss's caricatures of them. One of them called the piece "as revolting a picture of this revolting man as one might ever encounter". Otto Floersheim wrote a damning review in the *Musical Courier* (April 19, 1899): "... alleged symphony ... revolutionary in every sense of the word. The climax of everything that is ugly, cacophonous, blatant and erratic, the most perverse music I ever heard in all my life, is reached in the chapter 'The Hero's Battlefield.' The man who wrote this outrageously hideous noise, no longer deserving of the word music, is either a lunatic, or he is rapidly approaching idiocy". The critic in *The New York Times* after the New York premiere in 1900 was more circumspect. He admitted that posterity might well mock his response to the piece, but that although "there are passages of true, glorious, overwhelming beauty ... one is often thrown into astonishment and confusion". Henry Wood, with whose orchestra Strauss gave the British premiere, thought the piece "wonderfully beautiful".

In modern times, the work still divides critical opinion. According to Bryan Gilliam in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, this is "mainly because its surface elements have been overemphasized." In Gilliam's view:

Various critics see the work as a flagrant instance of Strauss's artistic egotism, but a deeper interpretation reveals the issue of autobiography to be far more complex. *Ein Heldenleben* treats two important subjects familiar from earlier works: the Nietzschean struggle between the individual and his outer and inner worlds, and the profundity of domestic love.

Richard Strauss

Ein Heldenleben

Herbert von Karajan

Berlin Philharmonic

1. Der Held 4:14
2. Des Helden Widersacher 3:27
3. Des Helden Gefährtin 13:00
4. Des Helden Walstatt 7:14
5. Des Helden Friedenswerke 6:04
6. Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung 11:38

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