

Richard Strauss

# CAPRICCIO

April 23, 2011

Conductor **Andrew Davis**  
Production **John Cox**  
Set Designer **Mauro Pagano**  
Costume Designer and  
Interior Décor  
**Robert Perdziola**  
Lighting Designer **Duane Schuler**  
Choreographer **Val Caniparoli**  
Stage Director **Peter McClintock**

The Countess **Renée Fleming**  
Clairon **Sarah Connolly**  
Flamand **Joseph Kaiser**  
Oliver **Russell Braun**  
The Count **Morten Frank Larsen**  
La Roche **Peter Rose**

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A chateau near Paris, the 1920s. Artists, friends, and admirers have gathered to celebrate the birthday of the young, widowed countess Madeleine. The composer Flamand and the poet Olivier realize that they are both in love with her, wondering what will impress her more—Flamand's music or Olivier's poetry? The theater director La Roche declares that neither poetry nor music is the greatest of the arts. His own, the art of theatrical production, encompasses and overshadows them both. La Roche is to direct Olivier's new play, with the famous actress Clairon and the countess's brother, a talented amateur actor, in the leading roles. As the three men leave to prepare for the rehearsal, the count and countess enter, teasing each other about their artistic opinions.

Clairon arrives and she and the count read a scene from Olivier's play that ends with the count reciting a passionate sonnet. Olivier declares that the sonnet was written for the countess and recites it again, which inspires Flamand to rush off to set it to music. Alone with the countess, Olivier seizes the opportunity to declare his love. Flamand returns to sing the sonnet he has just composed. The countess reflects on the synthesis of words and music, while Olivier, though moved, feels that his work has been ruined. When La Roche takes Olivier away to rehearsal, Flamand in turn declares his love to the countess. He asks her to decide: music or poetry, him or Olivier? She promises that he shall have the answer the next morning at eleven o'clock.

The rehearsal over, Flamand and Olivier resume their argument of words versus music and the others join in. La Roche eloquently expresses his theatrical creed: instead of the feeble attempts of modern writers, he wants drama to show human beings as creatures of flesh and blood. He challenges Flamand and Olivier to create new works that will speak for their time. A new plan emerges: Flamand and Olivier are to write an opera together. The count suggests that the events of this very day should be its subject, with the people present as its characters—

it is the opera we have been watching. The ending is yet to be decided by the countess.

The guests leave for Paris, accompanied by the count. Servants comment on the events of the afternoon from their point of view—isn't everybody just playing theater? Monsieur Taupe, the prompter, who had fallen asleep during the rehearsal, unexpectedly appears and explains to the major-domo that, in fact, it is he who is the most important person in the theater because without him the show couldn't go on.

It is evening. The countess enters and learns from the major-domo that Olivier will call the next morning at eleven to hear from her the ending of the opera. She tells herself that since the reading of the sonnet, the composer and the poet seem inseparable—now they even expect to meet her the following morning at the same time. She begins singing the sonnet to herself, trying to make up her mind: which of the two men does she love? Looking at herself in the mirror, she realizes she can't make a choice. When the major-domo announces that dinner is served, she smiles at her reflection and slowly walks out of the room.

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