

*Eine Alpensinfonie*, completed in 1915, is Richard Strauss' (1864-1949) final tone poem for orchestra. Tone poems - behemoth works for even more massive orchestras - are works in which composers express exterior ideas via musical means. This one in particular is about a lone climber's journey up a mountain, and his encounter with a thunderstorm on the descent. Last spring, after I heard the work for the first time by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, I was immediately intrigued by its lush orchestration and engaging narrative.

For MUSI 551: The Music of Strauss, my choice of this topic was initially a hesitant one. One can roughly organize Strauss' works by the three major compositional periods in his life: his early works (chamber music and lieder for voice, generally speaking), his tone poems (1886-1903, with the exception of *Alpensinfonie*), and his operas and later works (1903-1946). Standing apart from the rest of his tone poems, *Alpensinfonie* was written amidst the beginning of World War I. To me, the troubling part was that it seemed as if scholars have seen the work as an equally isolated piece to study, and it had fallen by the wayside in the musicological and academic world.

Strauss had established himself as a successful - if not infamous - operatic composer, following the performances of his controversial operas, *Salome* and *Elektra*. After such arresting character portraits in his operas, why did Strauss decide to return to the idyllic mountains as inspiration for this work? Furthermore, why did he go on to live another thirty years without writing another tone poem for orchestra? I realized it was crucial for me to stitch together a philosophical portrait of Strauss circa 1912 in order to understand.

I first had to consult the score for *Alpensinfonie*, which was readily available at the library. My professor pointed me in the direction of a few essays that survey the work in the analytical sense via harmonic and motivic disassembly, but I knew I would be able to push my

research further by understanding what was going on in Strauss' world beyond the notes written in the score. I was immensely helped by being able to access Strauss' correspondences with colleague and celebrated librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal. These were made available to me via Fondren's collection. Reading the correspondences, I gained a perspective on how *Alpensinfonie* related to Strauss' feelings of nationalism and Nietzschean idealism.

Speaking of Nietzsche, Strauss had many (and sometimes conflicting) philosophical leanings. To understand the relationship between Strauss and Friedrich Nietzsche, I had to study the research of Charles Youmans, who has explored the subject at length. Through the subscription access online databases (JSTOR, Grove Music Online, and RILM) made available through Fondren Library, I was able to find these and other related articles, which helped me summarize and map out Strauss' philosophical evolution. Often needing to work with my computer and several books open simultaneously, I was immensely grateful to have the luxury of being able to easily access these databases both in Fondren's study areas while I was on campus, and at my off-campus apartment at any time.