

ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA



Title: *Also Sprach Zarathustra*

Time Frame: 25-35 minutes

Overview: Students will learn about Richard Strauss' tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* and draw or write their impressions of multiple sections based on the music.

Standard: Critical Analysis: Identify relationships among music, other arts, and disciplines outside the arts (M-CA-E4, M4, H4).



Richard Strauss
photographed in 1925
by August Sander

Richard Strauss (*ree-khard shtrows*) was born in 1864 in Munich, Germany. His father, a professional horn player, was his first music teacher. Strauss began composing at six years old and his first symphony composition was performed when he was only 17! One of his biggest influences was the German composer, Richard Wagner and, at one point, Strauss's father forbade him to listen to Wagner's (*ree-khard vag-ner*) music. Strauss originally enrolled in Munich University to study philosophy and art, not music. A year later, he traveled to Berlin where he quickly became an assistant conductor to Hans Bulow. When Strauss was 21, he became the conductor of the Meiningen Orchestra and later became the junior conductor at the Munich Opera. Strauss married a famous soprano singer and they had one son.

Strauss composed many **tone poems** (also known as a *symphonic poem*, an orchestral work in a single movement based on a poetic or narrative text) for orchestra, as well as operas and concerti. For his tone poems, he preferred to use a large orchestra with extra instruments and **extended techniques** (non-traditional methods of playing musical instruments to produce unusual sounds or timbres) in order to better show mood or characters' personalities.

***Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*):** You might recognize the opening motif from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*—it's one of the most recognizable pieces ever written! It is based on the philosophical novel by the same name written by the German poet Friedrich Nietzsche. The book is about Nietzsche's philosophical ideas, told through the narrative of Zarathustra (based on the Persian prophet Zoroaster) who comes down from a mountain to offer his wisdom to the world. The most famous aspect of this book is when Nietzsche states that "God is dead;" his ideas fundamentally oppose Judaeo-Christian morality and tradition. Strauss divided his tone poem into nine parts, named after chapters in Nietzsche's novel. Strauss's music stresses the eternal conflict between man and the universe, which is heard in the conflicting, dissonant chords. This is the mystery between the nature of the universe and its connection with the meaning of life. Strauss prefaced the published score with words from Nietzsche's opening paragraphs, the *Ode to the Sun*: "For too long we have dreamt music, now let us awake. We were nightwalkers. Let us now be daywalkers." When you listen to the opening of the Introduction, listen for the long tones in the trumpets: do they sound like rays of light waking up the music? Each time they repeat the long tone sequence, more instruments add in and the sound becomes brighter—like the sun rising in the sky each morning.



Discussion:

Other well-known classical works based on stories include:

- Maurice Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* (http://youtu.be/pjXm_g58-A) based on several different fairy tales
- Johan de Meij's *Lord of the Rings* Symphony (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRcKIAtHv5c>) based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* novels
- Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-jl-H6Cdu0>) based on Shakespeare's play,
- Strauss' *Don Quixote* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3b4JhNi0qAg&list=PL1230D9D49955C1CD>) based on Cervantes' novel of the same name, and
- Šerkšnytė's *The Fairy Tale of the Little Prince* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dENNVcdYiLg>) based on the novella by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Are students familiar with any of these stories? What do they think of the music that was written with the story in mind? What, if anything, could the composers have done differently?

Activity:

Give each student a sheet of paper. Have students fold it in half and then in half the other way so they have 4 squares when open. Label them 1, 2, 3, 4 clockwise around the paper. Listen to part or all of each section from Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra* and ask students to draw what they hear—before you tell them the titles. After you've listened to all four sections, ask students to describe their pictures. Are any of the drawings similar to Strauss' vision? What would students title these sections, based on their own drawings?

Older students: write a paragraph about what is going on in each section.

1. Einleitung, oder Sonnenaufgang (Introduction, or Sunrise): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeHu7omCC6w>
2. Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften (Of Joys and Passions): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs1aeZkps6A>
3. Das Tanzlied (The Dance Song): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y-FOHAq3Eo>
4. Nachtwandlerlied (Song of the Night Wanderer): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LskzaFjylWA> (this one starts much louder than the others!)

Wrap up:

Review how a composer uses his or her tools to tell a story: different instruments or melodies can portray different characters or the setting, increasing or decreasing the tempo or volume can show action, etc. Which of these tools did Strauss use in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*? What other elements do music and literature have in common?

