

STRAUSS *Der Rosenkavalier* • Leopold Ludwig cond; Régine Crespin (*Marschallin*); Anneliese Rothenberger (*Sophie*); Elisabeth Söderström (*Octavian*); Oskar Czerwenka (*Baron Ochs*); Glyndebourne Festival Ch; Royal PO • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES 1202-3 mono (3 CDs: 200:00) Live: 6-7-1959

& **TCHAIKOVSKY *Eugene Onegin: Tatiana's Letter Scene***. Elisabeth Söderström (*Tatyana*); John Pritchard, cond; Royal PO. Live: Glyndebourne, 8-23-1968

By Ken Meltzer

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Immortal Performances (IP) presents a “world premiere release” of a June 7, 1959 broadcast from the Glyndebourne Festival of Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*. This superbly-cast performance, reproduced in fine broadcast sound, is a pleasure throughout. According to William Russell in his liner notes for the IP release, the 1959 Glyndebourne production marked the first time the superb French soprano Régine Crespin sang the role of Strauss’s Marschallin in German. Prior to that time, Crespin performed the role in her native language. Crespin, who studied the role with Lotte Lehmann, was one of the great Marschallins of her era. Crespin made a justly-acclaimed late-60s complete studio recording of *Der Rosenkavalier* for Decca, conducted by Georg Solti. There is also a superb *Rosenkavalier* highlights disc, again for Decca, that Crespin recorded in 1964, with Silvio Varviso conducting. In the 1959 Glyndebourne broadcast, Crespin is in fresher, more radiant voice than in the two studio recordings, especially the 1968 complete version. And the Glyndebourne interpretation preserves all of the insight, warmth, and femininity that Crespin brings to the Decca releases. A superb singing actress, Crespin brilliantly portrays the Marschallin’s profound and shifting emotions, all the while delivering Hofmannsthal’s text and Strauss’s music with a direct and unaffected elegance that is breathtaking. All we miss in this recording is Crespin’s magical stage presence. But the aural component more than convinces and does justice to this great soprano role.

The other female leads are superb as well. The Swedish soprano Elisabeth Söderström, a great singing actress in her own right, is a first-rate Octavian in every respect. While Söderström’s voice was not a large one, it was very beautiful, and she used it with the utmost intelligence and artistry. As a result, she is totally convincing both in voice and bearing as the Marschallin’s impetuous young lover. Söderström is also marvelous in Octavian’s moments of disguise. Like Crespin, Söderström was a keenly expressive artist who never allowed a contrived or overmanaged approach to interfere with the music she interpreted. Both Crespin’s Marschallin and Söderström’s Octavian are most human and sympathetic characters. Their presence in this broadcast makes the drama all the more affecting and poignant. Anneliese Rothenberger’s Sophie is youthful and gloriously sung. The great Final Trio for the three sopranos has all the spine-tingling beauty one could hope for.

The Austrian bass Oskar Czerwenka performs his signature role, Baron Ochs. Czerwenka did not possess the most sonorous voice. There are many bassos who relish Ochs’s descents into the lower register, including the delicious conclusion of Act II, with more voice than Czerwenka is able to supply. But if the lowest notes are not Czerwenka’s strength, the remainder of the voice is secure, evenly produced, and

employed with the utmost relish. Overall, Czerwenka is a superb Ochs, able to embody the character's hubris and lascivious, boorish nature while actually singing the role, and avoiding the kinds of buffoonery and extra-musical interpolations that are so tempting. It's also clear that the Glyndebourne audience loves Czerwenka's performance. The various subsidiary roles are beautifully sung and acted, as one would expect of a Glyndebourne production. Tenor William McAlpine performs the Italian Singer's Ochs-interrupted aria with aplomb.

Conductor Leopold Ludwig presides over a performance that crackles with energy, but never sounds rushed. And in the moments when repose is in order, as in the Marschallin's Act I monologue, or The Presentation of the Rose, Ludwig allows the magic to weave its spell, without disrupting the opera's flow and momentum. Performances of *Der Rosenkavalier* always run the risk of getting bogged down from the stretch after the Presentation of the Rose up to the Final Trio. That is not the case in this Glyndebourne *Rosenkavalier*. The drama proceeds apace. And the playing of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra provides great pleasure, with the ensemble's fabled winds and brass providing Straussian magic. BBC broadcast announcer comments are included. As a bonus, IP presents an excerpt from the August 23, 1968 Glyndebourne Russian-language broadcast of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Elisabeth Söderström, again in excellent voice, sings Tatiana's Letter Scene with mesmerizing involvement. What a glorious artist.

IP's documentary material includes William Russell's extensive commentary on *Der Rosenkavalier* and the 1959 Glyndebourne broadcast, a full plot synopsis, Richard Caniell's "Recording Notes" and artist photos and bios. A marvelous *Der Rosenkavalier*, preserved in very fine sound. Recommended with enthusiasm.

Five stars: An all-star 1959 Glyndebourne *Der Rosenkavalier*