The making of a Trumpet Sonata after Richard Strauss

Introduction

If there was ever a composer in the modern era from whom instrumentalists would hanker for a sonata or concerto, Richard Strauss would be amongst the top contenders. His wide-ranging orchestral and operatic creations bleed with gloriously idiomatic writing for every instrument, and yet only the piano, violin, clarinet (in tandem with the bassoon) oboe and horn can really claim to have bespoke solo works from Strauss's seamlessly productive workshop from the 1880s to the late 1940s, and collectively they form only a small proportion of the composer's output.

Our 'Sonata after Richard Strauss' differs significantly from a re-deployment of the composer's music to another medium, as observed in various transcriptional practices of the last six-hundred years. Here we have two musicians spending five years figuring out how to make a significant concert piece which Strauss might have at least recognised. The primary aim was to fill the gaping chasm of 'serious' late-Romantic recital music for trumpet players, to be performed *in toto* as a sonata or as 'drei konzertstück'.

The categories of engagement with Straussian material have been multi-dimensional, as readers will see. Because of the complex levels of creative collaboration between the two of us, we decided that individual operational distinctions were largely superfluous, save that one person thought up the idea and selected the majority of original pieces (a trumpet player) and the other (a composer) took material from a series of 30-40 practical sessions we undertook, and then wrote the material leading to a three-movement sonata. The pattern was fairly consistent: the pair would map out the structure together, and experiment practically (instruments in hand) with melodic characters and harmonic worlds, by drawing on a collective knowledge of Strauss's oeuvre. The composer would then harness the results and develop the material before the pair reconvened to edit, refine and move onto the next section.

Holding considerable reservations with this kind of endeavour, we were conscious throughout that for this work to result in a convincing piece of music and not a mere academic exercise, we would need to think beyond a patchwork quilt of pastiche. Irrespective of what a *pasticcio* might sound like, it would inevitably lead to questions in terms of legitimacy, authenticity and artistic integrity. Similarly, simple transcriptions of existing material could never provide a cohesive extended form, nor a satisfying musical journey. We concurred that the clue to a successful piece lay in devising a balanced method, comprising an array of complementary processes. It ranged from re-using near-unaltered Strauss to composing entirely original material, the latter especially which required a fully-trained composer, one who would also possess passionate knowledge of the subject and the technical skills to manage Strauss's idiosyncratic musical language.

The material found in the Sonata is drawn from five different categories of provenance and treatment: i) *near-untouched material* taken directly from the first movement of Strauss's Violin Sonata, Op. 18, ii) *light arrangement of material* from diverse original sources (lieder or orchestral pieces), iii) *very significant arrangement and re-deploying of other material for a radical new context or purpose*, iv) *newly composed sections*, and v) *development or transitions based on existing material within the Sonata itself* (be it Strauss's or newly composed).

The risk of ending up with a menu of unrelated musical gobbets without stylistic unity remained; the litmus test largely resides in whether or not listeners surprise themselves wondering what is truly by Strauss's hand and what is not. If there is ambiguity of any kind, then we are likely to have achieved something of our goal. To dispel any doubt, one can find in the structural diagram (see annex) all the sources of the material used (knowingly), but also below a description with musical examples of how this Strauss Sonata was conceived, the processes we employed and the decisions we made.

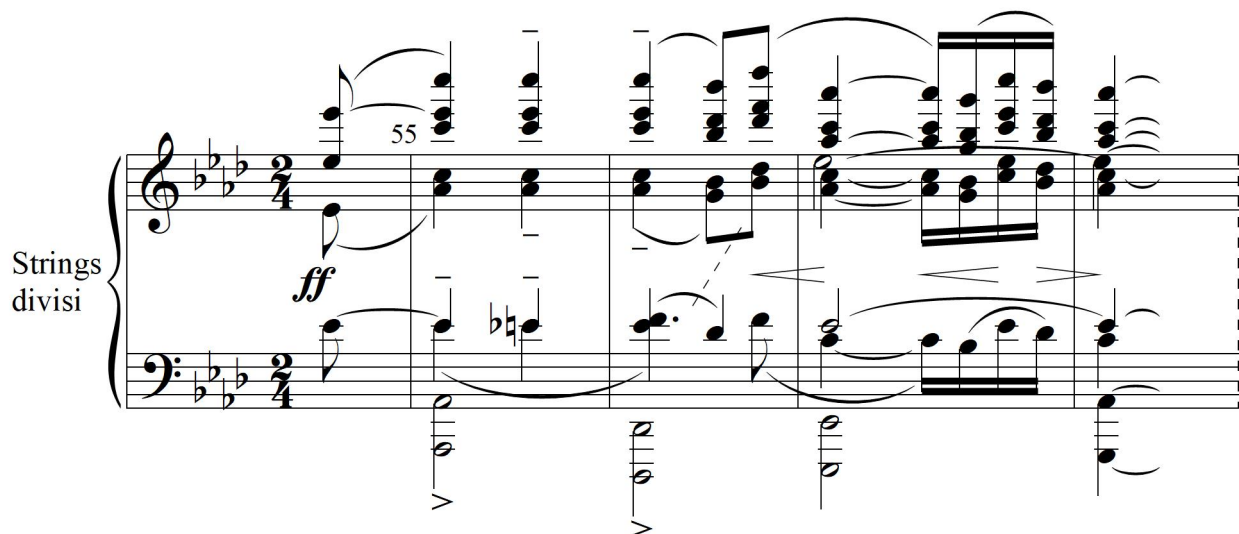## I. Near-untouched Material

The first movement of the Trumpet Sonata is *sui generis*, as it is the only movement which contains material by Strauss with barely any modification. The reason is that only the Violin Sonata provides an appropriate model (if not the only one) of a canonic sonata form in Strauss's chamber oeuvre fit for this particular purpose. Therefore, it had to be the main inspiration for the emergence of our first movement. While analysing the exposition of the Sonata, it became apparent very quickly that three of the five thematic ideas were perfectly suited to the trumpet, whereas the most 'iconic' first and third themes undoubtedly had to be invented or reconfigured (see section IV).

The second thematic idea (named B on the structural diagram — see annex 1) offers a beautiful melodic contrast with its undeniable singing quality, while the solemn and aspirational ascending arpeggios of the D section suits the gestural world of the trumpet to perfection. Similarly, the many dotted rhythms of the E section reveal themselves in a new idiomatic light thanks to the possibilities of the trumpet's incisive articulation. By keeping these three thematic ideas practically untouched in the exposition, recapitulation, and in those sections of the development which makes use of the original material, it would appear at first to be a somewhat unexciting transcription of the Violin Sonata. However, the complete re-invention of the two most important thematic ideas sends shock-waves through the form. The character of the exposition and recapitulation is vastly altered and also supported by newly composed sections of the development. A fresh coda was essential because of the nature of the new first theme. The scale of the movement as a whole has the effect of being 'tightened up', largely regulated by the nature of the duo and questions of stamina for the trumpet player.

Thus, re-using the material of these three thematic ideas with the least possible alteration has provided a robust sonata form which sits within an identifiable Straussian world. To counter-balance the original, the new material plays a crucial role in offering novelty in the movement to suit the transformed instrumental idiom. Only a carefully balanced blend of extant and fresh-minted music within an existing sonata form (of which there are so few usable Strauss models) could possibly allow us to achieve our goal.

II. Transcription and light arrangement

The second movement epitomises the use of idiomatic transcription and light arrangement in the context of a Strauss 'homage'. Its ABA' structure draws on two sources. The first section consists of a transcription of the rich string theme which appears after the sunrise at the opening of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The re-imagining still required careful review since the original version, beautifully written for strings with peerlessly lush textures, would not suffer a straight-forward translation. For example, the end of the last phrase of the main theme (bar 55) in the original relies heavily on divisi string writing. The climax is particularly effective with its expansive and thick textures encompassing the whole register of the string ensemble, as can be seen below:

Fig. 1a: String texture in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* bar 55-58

The task here was to find a way of adapting an idiomatic orchestration for the new version, one which delivered a similarly climactic effect but with different means. Incidentally, the simultaneous E flat and E natural bar 55, while exquisite in the context of the original orchestration, would not function as successfully in a piano accompaniment. Rising arpeggios proved the most effective solution to capture the spirit of the climax.

Fig. 1b: Climax in the A section of the 2nd movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 44-47

When the return of the main theme is heard a hundred or so bars later, the climactic effect is further augmented through the use of rising sextuplets and an even thicker conclusive chord.

Fig. 1b: Final climax in the second movement bar 143-146

This last example demonstrates our commitment to think adventurously when using material from any given source. Beyond the change of instrumentation, the new formal context necessarily provokes its own alterations. Here, the return of the main theme demanded a variation (as a literal repetition risked to be heard as an unimaginative copy-and-paste) and would fall short of a successful ABA' structure.

The B section reveals a very similar process. While most of the material contained minimal changes from its source – the Lied *Liebeshymnus* op. 32 no. 3 – its new position in the middle section of a larger structure demanded some dynamic modifications. In contrast to

the more serene, albeit grandiose chorale of the A section, the middle section required an impetus of a different nature (essentially a questing and 'agitato' effect, similar to B section of the Romance of Saint-Saëns's Cello Sonata No 2), not least to give the return of the main theme a satisfying role. Hence, the appearance of sextuplets from bar 78 in the accompaniment presents a more unsettled rhythmic texture than before, driving forward the remainder of the B section. This process of arranging served its own specific ends but was not sufficient proportionally: to be effective, further augmentation was required both in terms of length and musical tension (this is further discussed in section V).

Other occurrences of such light arranging can also be found dotted around the score, for instance between bar 185-196 at the end of the development of the first movement, where the rhythm of the repeated F sharp felt satisfyingly idiomatic. It also successfully avoided presenting foreign material from the first theme – which we put aside altogether – of the Violin Sonata. More often than not, the material received more radical transformation than it might seem on the surface.

III. Arrangement and transformation of material for a radical new context or purpose

While the third movement makes the most use of a radical re-thinking of pre-existing music selected from Strauss's oeuvre, the third thematic idea of the first movement (section C on the diagram) is a striking example of how the material has been significantly transformed to fulfil the demands of the form. In the Violin Sonata, the corresponding third thematic idea would unarguably be considered inadequate in the context of a trumpet piece, even with significant transformation. But that point in proceedings provides a striking contrast with its inherently lyrical nature and intense, flowing accompaniment. Only a section with similar characteristics would ensure that the form can retains a functioning balance. *Die Verschwiegenen*, op. 10 no. 6 was chosen for its beautifully expressive melodic material, although it's a song which needed substantial re-working to operate successfully in its new context – especially in the accompaniment.

Fig. 2a: excerpt from R. Strauss's lied *Die Verschwiegenen* op. 10 no. 6 bar 13-21

Fig. 2b: Flowing accompaniment figures in the C section of the first movement
of the Trumpet Sonata bar 56 -59

These two excerpts show where the source and its re-composition sit at their closest within this section. The harmony is preserved, as is the shape of the melodic line, but the accompanimental figures are re-cast to cater for the requirement of a rapidly flowing texture. One can observe, in this example, how this kind of re-imagining process – even when selecting excerpts notably similar to the original material – can result in substantially different musical gestures and conceits to the original. The remaining sections depart further from the source material (bar 50-55 and 60-64) but the same principle applies.

Similarly, the third movement features sections which rely on radical transformation. Its form is, broadly speaking, that of a classical rondo with coda. One could argue that its basic model, the third movement of Strauss's Horn Concerto no. 2, possesses the recognisable qualities of a rondo-sonata, with the middle section containing several short episodic developmental passages. We emulated the form as closely as possible but slightly diminished the formal importance of these furtive developments. The strong sense of recapitulation, however, is still conveyed as strikingly as possible.

Of the four thematic ideas, three rely on a radical re-assembling of material sourced from two pieces: the *Symphony for Wind Instruments 'Fröhliche Werkstatt'* and the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1916 version). The fourth movement of the *Symphony for Wind Instruments* features a fleeting lyrical theme from the through-composed musings of an old man in recreational mode. It appears evocative to our ears, this bucolic Alpine scene, and creates the contrasting b sub-section of the movement (see diagram). Again, the new formal context demanded contextual re-fitting with the rondo 'moto perpetuo' in the piano.

Fig. 3a: Excerpts of lyrical theme at the end of the 4th movement of R. Strauss's *Symphony for Winds* (between figures 39 and 40)

Fig. 3b: End of the b section of the 3rd movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 56-64

This excerpt is a telling example of how several modifications can be creatively applied to the original material. The excerpts of the *Symphony for Winds* show how the end of the melodic theme, played by the first oboe, is accompanied by a somewhat vertical harmony – with the exception of the first bassoon's descending scale on the 6/4 chord. The original harmony is largely retained in the Trumpet Sonata, apart for the last cadence which needed to land on a B flat major perfect cadence. The texture, though, is significantly changed. While this b sub-section shouts out for still-greater lyricism to contrast with the agile and energetic first theme, it would have been deprived of its momentum if only vertical chords were used as accompaniment. The stream of quavers both characterise the new 6/8 metre and offer an effective counterpoint to the simpler melodic line. One can also notice that the cadence is lengthened so the phrase is concluded as elegantly as possible within its structural proportions.

The middle section of the rondo is based entirely on material gathered from Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* – excerpts from Zerbinetta's monologue 'scena' becoming the source for both c and d sub-sections. Once again, significant transformation was required to fit the material within the movement's structural narrative. In the case of the c sub-section, its sketch reveals (see fig. 4) how it retains traces of its developing stages, whilst also illustrating the processes at work in its ultimate transformation.

The thematic material originates from an allegro in 4/4, with a starting accompaniment of quavers. The first step was to convert the metre into a 12/8, which consequently required a new opening accompanying figure. The first two bars of the sketch spell out the beginning of the melody, and display rhythmic figures below the piano staves. This was the direct result of a collaborative workshop during which we improvised various possibilities and agreed on a light vertical accompaniment with little quaver interjections.

Faint diagonal lines are observable on the next section of the sketch (marked C). It consists of a re-writing of Strauss's original material with only small changes, as agreed: a simple metric conversion with a modified opening accompaniment. It was, however, quickly discarded (in fact barred, hence the diagonal lines!) since it retained too much of its original recitative quality, and the accompaniment lacked distinctiveness in the new context. The last 14 bars consist of the last version of the section (bar 122-135 in the score) and show that some durations have been altered, as well as the accompaniment, which now fit the formal purpose of the section far more naturally. Often, the process was identical at each stage: an identification of promising material followed by various of experimental transformations in our collaborative workshops.
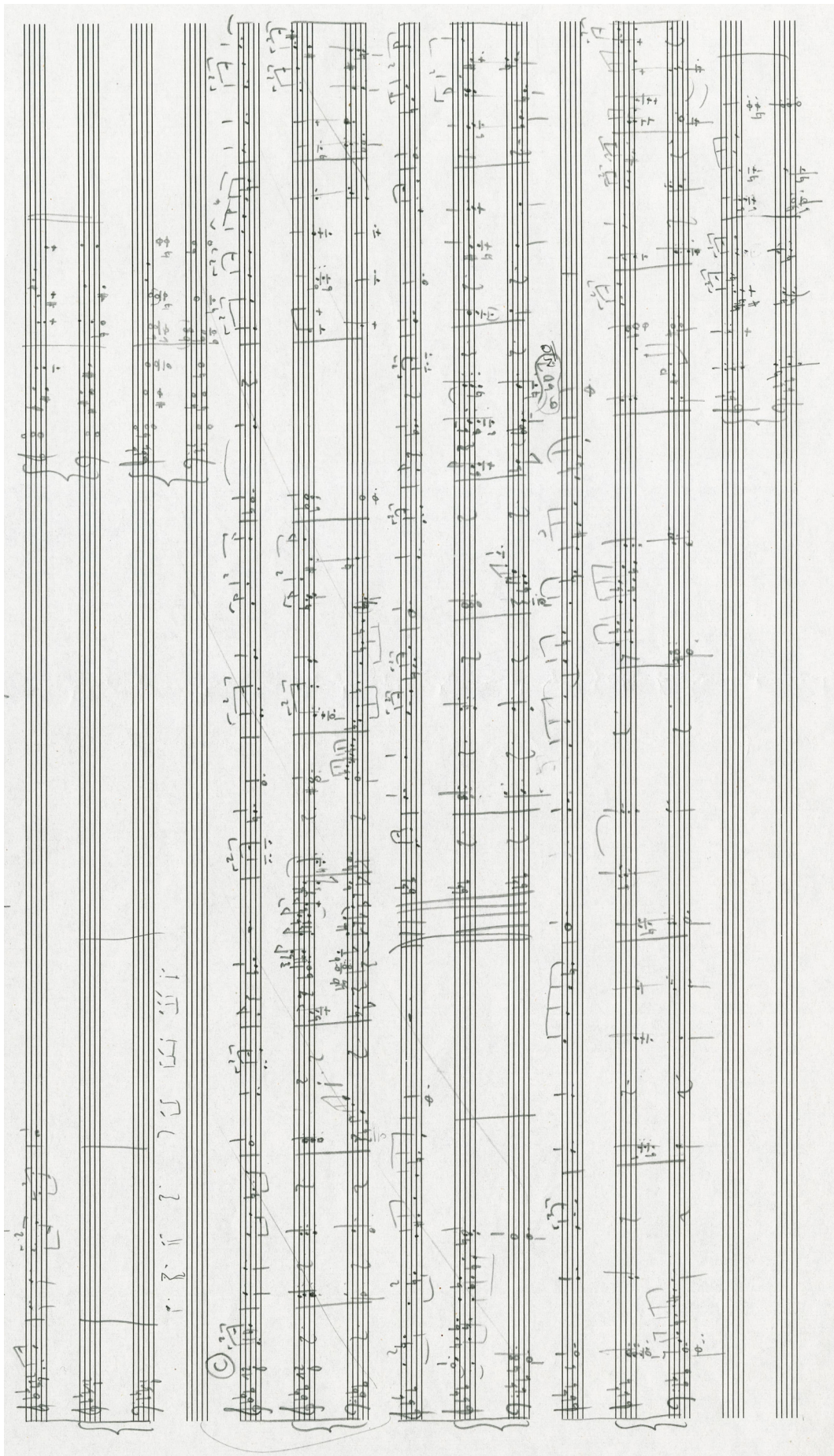
Fig. 4: Stages of development of the c sub-section in the sketch of the 3rd movement of the Trumpet Sonata

Zerbinetta's monologue also provided the material used in the d sub-section of the third movement. This time, the metric change proved more challenging, and the accompaniment also needed a new approach, as can be seen in the excerpts below.

Fig. 5a: Excerpt of sourced material for the c sub-section in Zerbinetta's monologue in *Ariadne auf Naxos*

Fig. 5b: Opening of the C sub-section in the 3rd movement of the Trumpet Sonata bars 136-152

The conversion from a 3/4 into a 12/8 produced new rhythmic inflexions in the melodic line, and the scantier accompaniment – albeit containing irreverent interjections –shed a new light on the material. The hemiolas also contributed greatly to the comical asides of the passage. Again, the position of this section at the heart of the movement demanded a *burlesca* quality, giving necessary contrast to the busy outer sections.

IV. Original Material *"Ex Nihilo"*

As described above, the composing of an entirely original first theme was an absolute necessity. The opening of an extended sonata intrinsically carries a seal of its overall identity, an iconic and immediate quality by which it can be remembered. This was the first task undertook in the project as we realised that only after a successful first theme would we be empowered to continue to meet the requirements of a Straussian trumpet sonata.

In a local sense, this theme is indeed pastiche. It is a word that can carry pejorative undertones but they may be rooted in misconceptions. A successful piece of original stylistic writing is never a succession of quotes or references; nor is it the result of a

superficial knowledge of the repertoire – even a deeper analytical one. It requires that the spirit of the style be captured and then applied creatively in its adoption of an appropriate language. Put another way, it assumes the discipline that one composes within the realm of a well-defined and understood style. Paramount to a successful attempt at such endeavours is the good old-fashioned notion of *craft*.

Consequently, this newly composed theme may reminisce Strauss (the swagger of the song, 'In der Campagna', Op. 42 no. 2 springs to mind) but it is devoid of directly conscious quotes, as this particular exercise would risk being diminished by too many such references made knowingly. It is well-nigh impossible to compose anything remotely original within a certain style if previously written pieces are kept too present in the forefront of one's awareness. It is worth mentioning, though, that in the case of this first theme, one particular chord progression is directly and knowingly taken from the first movement of Strauss's Horn Concerto No. 2.

Fig. 7a: Inspiring chord progression in the 1st movement of R. Strauss's 2nd horn concerto bar 27-29

Fig. 7b: Identified reference to Strauss's chord progression in the opening
of the 1st movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 9-11

In this case, the chord progression is clearly identifiable as its harmonic rhythm has been retained in the context of the same metre – as has the descending bass line. The passage is still original, given the entirely different melodic line. A particular chord progression, if employed creatively, rarely (if not ever!) feels too close to its possible source, except in the rare case that it is consciously employed.

Understanding Strauss's particular harmonic language contributes greatly to the choices one can adopt within his unique vocabulary. The following excerpt exemplifies a striking characteristic of how his use of the harmony was emulated.

Fig. 8: Harmonic 'swerve' in the opening of the 1st movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 5-7

The sudden swerve to F sharp minor from the key of E flat major creates an unsettling effect, typical of the sinuous harmonic journeys one finds regularly in Strauss's harmonic grammar. Strauss's harmony is indeed tonal, with strong cadential points and clearly recognisable poles, but it is immensely enriched by these colourful excursions into distant keys. Emulating such striking harmonic effects early in the first theme of the Trumpet Sonata was all-too-tempting.

Listing the full range of harmonic progressions and carefully engineered voicings would be tedious and serve no useful purpose – a treatise on Strauss's harmonic language is not what is intended here – but a single example taken from another newly composed section is worth comment. The first thematic idea of the third movement also demanded entirely original material. Its harmonic language is, at first, quite straight-forward. It installs E flat major without fuss, allowing for its lively melodic lines to flow unhampered. The sudden appearance of an E major 6/4 chord not only surprises, but also offers a typically mischievous Straussian harmonic dimension to the section.

Fig. 9: Enharmonic thinking leading to a cadential 6/4 in the opening
       of the 3rd movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 13-19

6/4 chords feature greatly in Strauss's music and they are often approached through augmented sixth chords. In this particular example, the E major 6/4 chord in bar 14 naturally resolves into a B dominant seventh chord, which in turn is understood

enharmonically as a German augmented sixth (B, D sharp, F sharp, A becomes C flat, E flat, G flat, A). The progression back to a cadential 6/4 chord in E flat major is then a seamless one. These types of progression are nothing extraordinary, but their judicious placement contributes significantly to the stylistic personality and 'authenticity' of a Straussian sonata. Numerous additional parameters come into play, such as the ever-enjoyable appearance of harmonic pedals which occur in transitionally and at moments of extreme intensity.

V. Transitions and Developments

In many occasions, passages of various lengths needed to be written to connect two sections, be they by Strauss, transformed or original. This type of composing was probably one of the most challenging, as it evolved around several constraints, of which the following excerpt is a telling example.

Fig. 10: Newly composed link at the end of the introduction
        of the 2nd movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 11-15

The introduction of the second movement of the Trumpet Sonata was taken from the closing gesture of the *Also Sprach Zarathustra*'s section we transcribed and discussed earlier (bar 66-74 of Strauss's orchestral score). While it suddenly bursts into a new livelier section in Strauss's tone poem, using this material as an introduction (as opposed to a link) necessarily meant that new material was needed to connect it to the main melodic theme. Only a seamless transition would do, as any discrepancy of style or gesture would undermine the passage and feel strongly out of place. As in the case of the missing part of a painting, the exact same colour and contours were needed to match the overall canvas – a tricky one indeed!

The development of the first movement also proved a daunting challenge. Although a significant section comes directly from the Violin Sonata – one where the developing material is taken from thematic ideas also presented in the exposition of the Trumpet Sonata – the first forty or so bars of the development required newly composed material. The broad harmonic canvas of the beginning of the corresponding section in the Violin Sonata afforded a solid starting point in which to emulate Strauss's developing technique. The sketch below shows some steps of the process at work.

Fig. 11: Sketch of the opening of the development
in the Trumpet Sonata's 1st movement

The chords written at the top of the sketch represent a harmonic analysis of the opening of Strauss's development. The next stage consisted of intertwining material taken from the first and second thematic ideas of the exposition (the rising triplets followed by a longer descending appoggiatura, and the melodic line of contiguous quavers) and carefully moulding it into the very same harmonic progression. The opening of the development thus still feels organic within the sonata, developing the 'epic' thematic material while maintaining unquestionably Straussian harmonies and proportions.

A conscious reference to another of Strauss's piece is worth mentioning in the development. It is neither a quote, nor intended as an allusion bit it directly inspired crucial figures heard in three key moments of the movement: the next section of the development, the pedal preparing for the recapitulation, and the coda. The battle scene of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* offers striking brass motifs, in particular in the biting trumpet parts. The feverishly articulated staccato triplets are redolent of the jagged melodic contours of the newly created material, used for the first time in the development. These motifs are also combined with various other thematic cells from the exposition.

Fig. 12: First occurrence of material inspired by Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* battle scene
in the Trumpet Sonata bar 105-108

This 'referencing' to allowed not only for new contrasting staccato quality to shine through the sonata, but its chromatic nature could act as the catalyst in the accrual of tense harmonic passages, especially those over pedal points (for instance, bar 118-121). Both codas fall into the category of music which has been freely developed. The first movement concludes on determined ascending triplets figures based on the initial motif of the Sonata. A daring chord progression is the least one would expect of a Strauss in providing a final strong harmonic flourish to an extensive movement.

Fig. 13: Chord progression by 3rds in the coda of the 1ˢᵗ movement of the Trumpet Sonata bar 318-320

The fundamentals of the three rooted chords C minor, A flat minor and E major proceed by intervals of descending major thirds. Their voicing also favours an overall shape of contrary motions. If not entirely coincidentally, the recognisable chord progression C minor-A flat minor, is famously heard in the opening of *Frühling* from Strauss's *Vier Letzte Lieder*. Their juxtaposition offers an accumulation of harmonic tension leading to the explosive top B flat, reached via an ascending diminished tenth in the trumpet part: a hyperbolic moment fit for the denouement of an eventful first movement.

The end of the Trumpet Sonata required an additional spray of badinage, something

which resonates with the slight absurdity of the whole project. The coda reminisces with the main themes of the first and second movements with a touch of impertinence. Could the joyful eccentricity of the minds behind the Trumpet Sonata come through any more unequivocally?

Thomas Oehler and Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Note: A performing score will be published by Boosey & Hawkes in Spring 2020. The first recording, played by Jonathan Freeman-Attwood (trumpet) and Chiyan Wong (piano) will be available on Linn and Apple Music at the same time.

ANNEX
Structural Diagram

Movement I

EXPOSITION						DEVELOPMENT			
Bar	30	50	65	75	85	92	130	139	148
A	B	C	D	E	Trans.				
	Violin Sonata	*Die Verschwiegenen*	Violin Sonata	Violin Sonata	Violin Sonata		*Die Verschwiegenen*		Violin Sonata

DEVELOPMENT CTND.			RECAPITULATION						CODA
	185	197	212	241	256	267	275		306
			A'	C'	D'	E'	Cadential/Dev.		
Violin Sonata	Violin Sonata			*Die Verschwiegenen*	Violin Sonata	Violin Sonata	Violin Sonata		

Movement II

INTRO	A	TRANS.	B	TRANS.	A'
	16	60	76	108	115
Also Sprach Zarathustra	*Also Sprach Zarathustra*				*Also Sprach Zarathustra*
			Liebeshymnus		

Near untouched material

Transcription and light arrangement

Arrangement and significant transformation

Original Material

Developments and/or transitions

Movement III

A				B			
	32	76		122	136	156	
a	b	a′		c	d	c′	Dev.
	Frohe Werkstatt			*Ariadne auf Naxos i)*	*Ariadne auf Naxos ii)*	*Ariadne auf Naxos i)*	

A′				CODA
186	218	274		324
a	b′	a′′		
	Frohe Werkstatt			

☐ Near untouched material

☐ Transcription and light arrangement

■ Arrangement and significant transformation

■ Original Material

■ Developments and/or transitions