About This Resource

Thank you for choosing this collection of reproducible biographies and worksheets for use in your general music education classes. For each of the featured composers listed above, you will find a more advanced biography followed by an accompanying worksheet and a simpler reading example with its own accompanying worksheet. Our hope is to provide you with resources about composers for a wide range of students and curricular needs.

Be sure to check out the suggested websites* listed on each of the reproducible reading pages to extend the learning and hear musical examples.

* The publisher does not have any control over nor assumes any responsibility for third-party websites or their content.
Spotlight on Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Called the greatest of the late-Romantic composers, Richard Strauss was born on June 11, 1864 in Munich, Germany. Like Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and many of the other composers that he admired, Richard came from a musical family. His father, Franz, was a famous French horn player who made sure that his son started studying classical music when he was very young. Richard began taking piano lessons from his father’s friends when he was four years old, was composing when he was six, added violin lessons when he was eight, and had his first symphony performed by a professional orchestra when he was only seventeen.

Most of Richard’s early compositions used traditional forms and genres. These included piano pieces, vocal solos, chamber music (pieces for small groups of instruments), concertos, and symphonies. While performers and critics enjoyed these early works, Richard did not become famous until he started writing tone poems in the mid-1880s. A tone poem is a Romantic period genre that uses instrumental sounds to describe a scene or to tell a story. Some tone poems only suggest a mood or place, while others introduce characters and illustrate what happens to them. Richard wrote both kinds of tone poems, and he became known for composing colorful and sometimes humorous musical scenes. Many of his best-known tone poems, like Don Juan and Don Quixote, tell stories from famous books, while he included himself as a character in other musical stories. In A Hero’s Life, Richard is the hero who fights against critics who don’t like his music, and he is also the playful main character in Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks.

Richard’s love for creating descriptive musical scenes, along with the success of his tone poems, led him to start composing operas during the 1890s and into the twentieth century. He especially enjoyed writing for his wife, who was a famous soprano, so the main characters of many of his operas were women. A few of these titles were Elektra, Der Rosenkavelier, and Daphne. Richard’s fame ensured large audiences for his premieres, and his choices of controversial subjects led to debates about the value of his music.

Like his operas, Richard’s musical career was a subject of much discussion. In addition to his fame as a composer, he was a well-known and respected conductor. He took his first conducting job with the Meiningen Orchestra when he was twenty-one and quickly earned a reputation as a skilled performer. Throughout his career, he held positions with the Munich Opera, the Vienna Opera, and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as appearing as a guest conductor for orchestras around the world.

Richard lived and worked in Germany for most of his life, and—unlike many of his fellow musicians—he did not leave the country when the Nazis took control. He spent some time working as the head of the State Music Bureau, even though he did not agree with the Nazi beliefs, and he was eventually fired for working with a Jewish librettist (someone who writes the lyrics for operas). After the Nazis were defeated in World War II, Richard wrote Metamorphosen, a lament about the sadness that people experienced under Nazi rule.

Throughout his more than seventy years of composing, Richard wrote music that ranged in style from conservative and classical to romantic and modern. While he never wrote music for movies, some of his tone poems have been used in soundtracks. For example, you can hear his Also Sprach Zarathurstra as the main theme for the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey. His detailed and descriptive musical scenes have also influenced musicians working with symphonies, operas, movies, and even rock and roll.

Want to learn more? Take a WebVisit!
You can learn more about Richard Strauss by visiting: http://www.naxos.com/person/Richard_Strauss/26296.htm
Strauss’s Secret Code

Do you want to learn more about Richard Strauss and his music? Strauss’s Secret Code holds the key! We’ve replaced some important words with numbers, and it’s your job to unlock the code. Use the chart and letter hints below to discover the hidden information. Each number stands for one letter. Hint: Fill in the chart to keep track of your discoveries.

1. Rather than abstract music, Richard is famous for writing programmatic music, or music that tells a _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______

2. Richard’s musically conservative father wanted him to follow in the footsteps of which famous composer?

3. A visit to which country inspired Richard to write his first tone poem?

4. Richard used which play by William Shakespeare as the story for another famous tone poem?

5. Because many of his operas used controversial subjects, Richard often had to fight _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______

6. Richard Strauss was influenced by famous composers like Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______

7. Many of the stories that Richard used in his operas came from Greek _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______

8. One famous film composer who was influenced by Richard’s music is _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______

Bonus exercise: Using what you’ve learned, write Richard Strauss’s name in the same code used for this puzzle.

______________________________________________________________________________
Get to Know Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Richard Strauss lived in Germany during the late part of the Romantic period.

He began taking piano lessons from his father’s musical friends when he was only four years old.

When Richard was seventeen, his first symphony was performed by a professional orchestra.

Early in his career, he wrote mostly solos, chamber music (pieces for small groups of instruments), concertos, and symphonies.

Richard did not become famous until he started writing tone poems, which use instrumental sounds to describe a scene or to tell a story.

Many of his best-known tone poems, like Don Juan and Don Quixote, tell stories from famous books.

Richard’s love of descriptive music led him to start composing operas during the 1890s.

His wife was a famous soprano, so the main characters of many of his operas were women.

Richard was also a well-known and popular conductor.

Even though he did not agree with the Nazis, he was in charge of the State Music Bureau until he was fired for working with a Jewish librettist (someone who writes the lyrics for operas).

Strauss never wrote music for movies, but some of his tone poems have been used in soundtracks.

Want to learn more? Take a WebVisit!
You can learn more about Richard Strauss and hear some of his music by visiting: http://www.dsokids.com/listen/composerdetail.aspx?composerid=33