

A Preview of Munich's *Rosenkavalier*--in Munich

By [George Loomis](#), *Musical America*

March 20, 2018

MUNICH— Nearly every New York opera goer knows by now that the Bavarian State Opera will present a concert performances of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* at Carnegie Hall at the end of the month (March 29). Aside from promising to be a high point of the season in its own right, it will constitute something of a courtesy call on New York by conductor Kirill Petrenko before he departs as the company's general music director to lead the Berlin Philharmonic. Similarly, the performance will allow New Yorkers a glimpse of the good work of Artistic Director Nikolaus Bachler who will also be leaving the company.

By a felicitous coincidence, on March 12, the day after the premiere of its new production of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, the company performed *Der Rosenkavalier*, thus making it irresistibly convenient for those wishing to attend both. After experiencing the latter—gorgeously sung by the principals scheduled for New York and superbly conducted by Petrenko—it can confidently be reported that New Yorkers have a treat in store.



Hanna-Elisabeth Müller as Sophie; Angela Brower as Octavian

The performance in Munich's National Theater offered something the one in New York will not: the chance to see Otto Schenk's 1972 production. Just how much of a loss that will be might depend on how much one misses the Metropolitan Opera's now-retired Nathaniel Merrill/Robert O'Hearn production from 1969, for the two are cut from the same cloth. As at the Met, the audience applauded when the Act 2 curtain went up, even though the sets (designed by Jürgen Rose) looked dowdier than did the Met's in their final outings. They are also well over the top in depicting rococo extravagance, although the Act 3 inn is very rundown indeed.

Still, there was something comforting about seeing the opera produced like this. The Munich company is obviously well practiced in faithfully executing the complexities of the plot, and the staging allowed for arresting character studies by the principals. Adrienne Pieczonka's Marschallin was largely free of artifice, having instead an appealing directness and simple elegance. I thought of Baron Ochs's

comment about the Marschallin: no silly ideas, no undue formality, no “spanische Tuerei” (whatever they are). Yet there was much nuance in her delivery of the text, and in purely vocal terms she was captivating.

But then so were the Octavian and Sophie. Angela Brower, an American who rose to leading roles as a young member of the company, was as accomplished an Octavian visually as she was vocally, bringing ardent tone to the role and a boyishness that neatly meshed with Pieczonka’s Marschallin: you noticed their age difference but also that the latter was by no means around the bend. In another winning performance, Hanna-Elisabeth Müller, as Sophie, produced the dulcet tones the girl’s music cannot do without, and she reacted to the Baron spiritedly rather than meekly in receiving his insults.

Whenever a young, lean, dashing singer is cast as Baron Ochs, he is invariably praised as a refreshing change from the norm. Peter Rose is not such a singer. If Jackie Gleason had ever played Ochs, this is what he would have looked like. But Rose’s splendidly inflated portrayal, supported by a rich cushion of sound and incredibly dexterous verbally, is a classic.

Markus Eiche was a solid Faninal, and Miranda Keys’s Marianne and Peter Lobert’s Police Kommissar also stood out. Lawrence Brownlee sang The Singer with beautiful, liquid tone. He held those on stage (and in the audience) rapt, apart from the demonstrably impatient Ochs and the Marschallin’s hairdresser, who continued his unwitting transformation of her into looking like an old woman.

Petrenko’s performance was all of a piece. No particular aspect, whether uncovering notes not often heard or attending to interpretive details, stood out over another. Rather, it all fit together meticulously yet naturally. And, with superb playing from the orchestra, the music had a consistent vitality that brought life to even the opera’s talkiest passages. At the risk of ratcheting up expectations already high, you won’t want to miss the Carnegie Hall performance.