

Overture to *Donna Diana*
Emil Nikolaus von Řezníček

Emil von Řezníček was an exact contemporary of the great Richard Strauss, with whom he had an ambivalent friendship. Like Strauss, Řezníček thrived in the Austro-Germanic tradition, though he didn't dynamically change it like Strauss, nor challenge it like another Czech born contemporary, Gustav Mahler. There is an unusual amount of sarcasm and unabashed wit in Řezníček's writing, which is demonstrated in his piece, *Schlemihl* – a parody on Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*. Řezníček does not really survive the comparisons with Strauss and Mahler, except for one moment of 'hot' luck in 1894 with the composition of this overture to his operetta 'Donna Diana'.

The overture is a glorious amalgam of tunes and whimsical ebullience which is technically quite difficult to play. There is equally good use of brass fanfare which reminds us that Řezníček was Kapellmeister for the 88th Infantry Division in Prague from 1886-1894. This links him indelibly in 'ear', 'tradition' and 'expression' to Mahler who was greatly influenced by the sights and sounds of the military town of his childhood.

Řezníček wrote prolifically, including suites, serenades, quartets, a violin concerto, several staged works, two operas and five symphonies. It is a shame that 'one hit wonders' create a sensation of ignorance about everything else they write. Řezníček is worth the same indulgence as we now accord Mascagni, Leoncavallo and others who, through no fault of their own, had a single flash of lightning that blinded audiences to their other marvelous writing.

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