This critique will examine the work of Chris Walton entitled “Beneath the seventh veil: Richard Strauss’s Salome and Kaiser Wilhelm II”. This was a perfect article for me to find in researching for my paper topic. The content of the article is directly applicable to my topic and provides great insight on the life and work of Richard Strauss. Throughout this article, Walton uses letters, journal entries, and other first-hand historical resources to support his claims. This sort of support helps to legitimize his ideas and provides for me quality information for my research paper. These first-hand resources were not always created by Strauss himself but in some instances by closely associated family and friends. Walton did a great job of including these letters as support for his claims but not allowing them to take over his entire article. His overall point is that Strauss was one of the first composers to use all the facets that a modern, capitalist society could offer to reach his goals. This statement was supported with information found in the letters he included and also in historical events. That goes to say that Walton did a great job supporting his claims with evidence included in the text that was from the original source himself.

While this article presents a strong claim and supporting evidence, it is also written with a conversational yet academic tone. Walton uses a dry sense of humor to interrupt larger sections
of information-based text. I appreciated this sense of humor and I do not think it takes away from the academic prestige of the writing. Aside from the occasional humor, Walton’s tone is also a bit conversational. While his vocabulary is still academic, there are also statements included that are more informal. I think this facet of the article made it more enjoyable to read. Readers can not only benefit from the information presented but also be more engaged in the reading because of the casual tone.

I also enjoy how the author chooses to organize his ideas. The article does not begin with a standard introductory paragraph in which a main statement is made, instead Walton chooses to begin with a short discussion of Strauss’s Salome. This short discussion is mainly intended to intrigue the reader to continue reading the article while also placing the reader in the time period that is going to be discussed throughout the article. This was an effective way to set the reader up for better experiencing the rest of the writing. From there Walton chooses to chronologically organize his writing from the start of the Wilhelmina era. This is very logical, in my opinion, and helps to highlight to the reader the development of Strauss over time. Another aspect of organization that I saw as a positive was the way Walton organized his thoughts. While the overall article was chronological, Walton bounced from one idea to the next. He does not necessarily sequence the thoughts together or seemingly include them in a particular way. While this could have been confusing, the chronological nature of the writing helps to keep the reader on track, while the spontaneity helps to keep the reader interested. Along with the spontaneity of ideas, Walton also keeps each paragraph or thought relatively short. This also helps to keep the reader engaged throughout the entire article. Keeping each paragraph brief also speaks to the writing efficiency exhibited in Walton’s article. Walton often starts a new paragraph or idea by
including some back story or first-hand resource. He then draws his point from the information included and simply moves on to his next point/paragraph. Often academic articles are long-winded and short ideas are drawn out into lengthy explanations. For Walton, he efficiently presents an idea and quickly moves on.

Along those same lines, I think the formatting of the article was successful as well. The reader benefits from having the endnotes listed alongside the text, in the margin instead, of at the bottom of the page as in most academic writing. This is a small detail but does make the information more visually accessible to the reader. Walton also separates his article by a large capital letter at the start of each new section. This is a subtle way to organize the writing while not interrupting the flow of ideas.

In this article, Walton includes information about Strauss that the common person would not know. In other articles in which revealing information is included, it is often presented in a way that perpetuates a negative portrayal of the individual. Walton does a good job of including true information but not allowing it to taint his view or portrayal of a musical genius. While Strauss may have been mostly motivated by money Walton does not let that fact overcome the neutral portrayal of him. Along with this idea, Walton includes much information in this article that is extremely interesting and goes on to draw conclusions about Strauss’s professional life based on this information. That goes to say that Walton’s article is very analytical and looks deeper into aspects of Strauss’s life that other music historians may simply take for face-value.

While many aspects of this writing are very positive, there are a few negative aspects I wish to highlight. Walton included a few images as visual resources that I do not think served a
very useful purpose. Walton failed to mention the visual aids included and in no way tied them to ideas presented in his writing. For this reason, I think Walton could have omitted the images included and made his article that much stronger. Also Walton included many German names and phrases throughout this article. While I understand the need to include Germanic expressions due to Strauss’s origin, Walton failed to include the translation for all of these German words/names. In a few instances it was difficult to understand the central idea being presented because of the lack of interpretative material. Overall I really enjoyed reading this article and learning more about Richard Strauss. Walton did great job presenting and supporting his ideas and I will definitely use this article in writing my paper.

With all of that said, I agree with Walton’s overall point. Through the evidence he included, it can be concluded that Strauss used every facet of his society to advance his financial status and overall clout in society. I agree with this point because Strauss wrote in letters himself discussing the strong financial gain resulting from such scandals as a ban from the Nazis.

Book and Discussion:


I chose to study Richard Strauss because I am interested in opera and wanted to study a composer who I was not that familiar with, aside from what I have learned in about him in class.
I also think it would be interesting to discuss how his operas contributed to the culture at that
time. I found these sources on Card Cat and Music Index. In continuing to research I have not
found an overwhelming amount of articles that follow the requirements of the assignment. In
completing the paper last semester, my mistake was not including enough sources and I do not
want to repeat the mistake this time. I plan to supplement what can’t be found online with books
in print, since I have had better luck finding sources of this sort.

Word Count: 1,264