Das hat Rrrrasss

for speaker and pianist

Ian Pace

Dedicated to Alwynne Pritchard

Composed in 2018, based in part upon some early sketches from 2005.

Text: Ian Pace
Performance Instructions

1. The speaker’s part is spoken throughout, never sung nor delivered as Sprechgesang.

2. The speaker’s part is intended to resemble a flamboyant but somewhat malevolent character. It should be delivered in an arch manner, stressing qualities of artifice and exaggeration rather than naturalistic delivery. The piece as a whole should resemble a variety of cabaret act.

3. Nonetheless this can be undertaken in many different ways, and the speaker is free to choose accent (or accents) employed, the outfit to wear in performance (which could be extravagant, garish or other possibilities, though the pianist’s outfit should look more ‘neutral’ in comparison), and other theatrical elements. One option is for the speaker to sit on a high stool (as might be used by a cabaret singer) throughout, but it could also be performed in a more physically active manner, involving changes of position around the stage.

4. The speaker should use a microphone to ensure their words are clearly projected during the most active moments in the piano part.

5. All indications of rhythm and pitch in the speaker’s part are approximations mostly to give some general idea of the diction, inflection, and co-ordination with the piano. For the most part, the rhythms are relatively independent of those in the piano, though a few points where these coincide (for example with some of the reiterated staccato bass chords in the middle section) should be observed carefully. The notated pitches purely indicate general contour of speech and points of emphasis in this respect.
6. Similarly, while the piano part involves many very detailed rhythms and polyrhythms, these should not be interpreted in an over-literal and metronomic fashion except where indicated as such. The basic tempo in the opening piano section in particular should be flexible and the performer can thus present some relatively smooth transitions between different successive tuplet groups. Complex polyrhythms are often intended to convey multiple simultaneous metres or tempi, and when this effect is palpable, the performer is welcome to execute them with a fair degree of freedom. The profiles of lines and gestures are more important than precise timing of individual notes, except for the low staccato chords in the middle section.

7. A performance can employ different types of staging or stage set, and especially lighting (some red-infused, quasi-expressionistic lighting is especially favoured). Performances in venues other than traditional concert halls are also welcomed.

First Performance: City, University of London, 27 November 2018. Alwynne Pritchard, speaker; Ian Pace, piano. Part of concert ‘Decennials’, celebrating Alwynne Pritchard and Ian Pace at 50, Kunsu Shim at 60, Gwyn Pritchard at 70 and Hans-Joachim Hespos at 80.
Programme Note

The idea for Das hat Rrrrasss first came to me in the early 2000s, after reading a passage reproduced in David Hirst’s history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, The Gun and the Olive Branch (first published in 1984), a remarkable open letter written by right-wing Israeli satirist Ephraim Kishon to King Hussein of Jordan, and published in the Jerusalem Post on 16 June 1967, thus just six days after the Six-Day War of 5-10 June. The letter was a satirical account of the events leading up to the war, essentially parodying the idea that the whole situation had been engineered by the State of Israel so as to appear as if they were fighting a defensive war against the belligerent states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, when in reality it was a calculated war of expansion, above to allow Israel to take control of the whole city of Jerusalem. Hirst and others believe that this satire actually gave in many ways an accurate rendition of events.

A work of music-theatre such as this is not the place for a serious and sober historical engagement with the causes of and responsibilities for the Six-Day War. Rather, the piece constitutes a response to the very audacity embodied in this open letter (which is echoed in other of Kishon’s writings), mocking a view in order actually to assert it, in the knowledge that the one to whom the letter is addressed has no real response to make, as they would only look foolish as a result. The mentality lies somewhere in a realm where the flaunting of privilege and high theatrical camp intersect, an area which has long fascinated me.

The text set is my own, not Kishon’s, but takes some inspiration from the latter. The work constitutes a short and rather malicious mini-cabaret act based upon this type of model. It also draws upon two numbers from Lehár’s Die lustige Witwe, the first of which the aria ‘Da geh’ ich zu Maxim’ from near the beginning of the opera, in which Count Danilo Danilovitsch, first secretary of the Paris embassy of a Balkan principality, Pontevedro (based on Montenegro) sings quite shamelessly of how he does little work and mostly just hangs around his favourite club, Maxim’s, to watch the dancing girls there. The other is aria (with chorus) of Hannah, the Pontevedrian widow of the title, ‘Ein flotter Ebestand soll’s sein’, from the Finale to Act 2. In this, she taunts Danilo (who has been set up by others to marry Hanna in order that her wealth will not leave his poverty-stricken country) by announcing her engagement to French aristocrat Camille de Rosillon. However, she sings about how they will be on the surface a respectable married couple, but will actually both have plenty of affairs on the side, in the ‘Parisian style’, leading to the chorus ‘Das hat Rrrrasss’ (not really translatable, but comparable to the English phrase ‘that’s got style’ or ‘that has class’ to describe something outrageous).

Heavily modified, perhaps unrecognisable, renditions of these two arias are used in the second and fifth sections of this piece. These are superimposed with freer post-tonal material and also some further allusions, to the ‘Tanz der sieben Schleier’ from Richard Strauss’s Salome, to Wagner’s Tannhäuser (the opera to which Theodor Herzl listened and gained inspiration when writing his 1896 book Der Judenstaat), and to another act of musical outrage, the section in the ‘Intermezzo Interrotto’ in Béla Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra in which the composer savagely parodies a theme from the first movement of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony.
The piece as a whole aims to say something about the power of artifice, of appearing to lie in order to tell the truth (there is at the end of the first section a musical ‘sneeze’, as used by Zoltán Kodály at the beginning of Háry János, which according to Hungarian folklore indicated the speaker was telling the truth), and Old World privilege expressed in the most naked and brazen fashion, including that expressed by those who think that very fact gives them the right to usurp the land and property of others.

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Das hat Rrrrass

For Alwynne Pritchard

Still but free \( \frac{j}{4} = c. 56 \)

Voice

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{molto ped.}
\end{array}
\]

Piano

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ppp}
\end{array}
\]

(these and other rhythms should always be flexible, never metronomic)
Allegretto \( \dot{=} \) c. 84

always in strict time, almost automatic, staccato/semi-staccato throughout

*sempre*

\( \text{sffz} \) \( \text{p} \) sempre
lower part slightly accented, not foregrounded, but half-perceptible within the surrounding material.
You stepped right into our little trap but you weren't alone tauntingly, provocatively.

to our little trap—but you weren't alone poco sf
with a clearly artificial sense of awe

These venerable statesmen, all over the
world, we out-witted them all. Our enemies

and our friends.

spread if necessary

focused, with a 'smile'
feigning innocence

Did you really think we hadn't planned this all

slightly suppressed giggle,
half-adolescent, half-hysterical,
vaguely imitating piano LH

well, in advance?

You little hus- sy,

RH more deliberate, somewhat acerbic, both parts becoming reckless
you are quite ridiculous

\textbf{f poco a poco cresc.}

\textbf{f poco a poco cresc}

\textbf{16:1f}

cunning

But let's look at how you were outwitted
joyous, very malicious

What a fool you were!
Completely still \( \dot{=} \) c. 54

Calm, measured, rational hold posture through silence, suspended in mid-phrase

Several years ago we decided
We would take the city

But we knew we'd

never get away with it unless you attacked us first

rhetorical

so... we had to find a way to coax you into doing it

still in the same manner

exaggerated and over-slow, as if talking down to a child
First we had to get rid of the Old Man.

They'd be scared of him.

(note change of chord)
So we sent our people to plant bombs in some cities.
And we got our people on to the in vesti-ga-ting com-mit-tee. They could spin it our way. We leaked some briefs and plan-tered dis in for-ma-tion.

Much faster, $\frac{d}{t} = 72$

with a sense of purpose, driven very deliberate, somewhat lyrical ppp sempre (independent of other parts)

more rhetorical

It all worked beau-tifully.
The Old man finally went. We persuaded everyone that his successor was a compromiser and a waverer. Both he and his
dep - u - ty played a - long.

With - in a few years we'd per-su-a-ded our enem- y that they'd be safe to at-tack us. But there were in - ter-na-tion
forces in the way

but their general didn't let us down.

a little matter-of-fact

The enemy took over the straits,
and the international forces just withdrew,

afraid of all hostilities.

This was all according to our plans
We asked anxiously

We waited for a long time, but nothing happened.

mp sempre
You wouldn't budge.

slightly detached, dancing

\textit{mf} (right hand)

with an almost erotic relish

We were out-rag-eous as we temp-ted you.
We pleaded with the international forces to protect us.

Our leader gave a hesitant faltering speech, we looked
So you

from here to the end, increasingly relaxed and matter-of-fact (but always projected over the piano)

weak.

joined with our enemy, pledged to help each other.

We breathed a sigh of relief.

somewhat frantic
The next day, we brought in our man,

and you know the rest.

clangorous
Sorry you didn't learn those tricks at your expensive school.
But we had to do it. We wanted that city so badly.

tapering off, slightly hurried, as if with a tinge of guilt.