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■Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

■Symphonic Fragment from “Josephs Legende,” ballet (20')

Richard Strauss's *Josephs Legende* (*The Legend of Joseph*), Op. 63 is a ballet in a single act, composed between 1912 and 1914 for the *Ballets Russes*, a well-known ballet company in Paris. Its director Sergei Diaghilev was a charismatic figure who commissioned famous composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, and Sergei Prokofiev to write pieces for the company. The company's principal dancer and choreographer was Vaslav Nijinsky, one of the best known male dancers of the time. Strauss's ballet is about Joseph in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament, in particular about Potiphar's wife Zuleika tries to seduce Joseph. The libretto was written mostly by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (the poet also provided Strauss with a number of *libretti*, including *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Die ägyptische Helena*, and *Arabella*).

Strauss struggled with the ballet. He found the Biblical story uninspiring. Nevertheless, the project was for the renowned ballet company and great dancer/choreographer, an opportunity that could propel Strauss's career to a higher level. The ballet premiered in Paris on May 14, 1914 where it was performed for seven times, then seven more in London. The outbreak of the First World War, however, eliminated all the chances for the ballet to be staged elsewhere. In 1947, Strauss returned to the piece to make a concert version and published it as Symphonic Fragment from *Josephs Legende*. This newly arranged piece retains the essence of the original and is filled with beautiful melodies typical of the composer.

[Akira Ishii]