

## 2023 New Year's Concert. Programme Notes.

The Vienna Philharmonic's 2023 New Year's Concert is conducted for a third time by Franz Welser-Möst, whose previous appearances were in 2011 and 2013. The 2023 concert also marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the close association between the orchestra and the conductor in both the concert hall and the opera house. With the exception of the closing waltz and the encores, the 2023 concert is also notable for being the first in the history of these events to feature exclusively works not previously heard at a New Year's Concert.

The concert starts with *Wer tanzt mit?* (Who'll Join the Dance?), a Schnell-Polka by Eduard Strauß that was performed for the first time on 7 November 1886 at a concert given by the Strauß Orchestra in the Großer Musikvereinsaal in Vienna under the composer's own direction. The Musikverein building had opened in 1870 and popular concerts were held on Sunday afternoons during the autumn and winter months, when the Strauß Orchestra would attract a different type of audience from those that attended symphony concerts, even though the classics were also performed alongside works by the Strauß dynasty.

Josef Strauß's waltz *Heldengedichte* (Heroic Poems) was written in 1860 for the unveiling of a monument to Archduke Karl of Austria on Vienna's Heldenplatz. The ceremony was led by Emperor Franz Joseph. Karl had been commander-in-chief of the Austrian army in 1809, when his forces had driven back Napoleon's troops at the Battle of Aspern-Essling in May. Despite their defeat, the French continued to occupy Vienna until November 1809 but, when they finally left, they blew up parts of the Hofburg's fortifications. The Heldenplatz was later laid out on this site. The concert that the Strauß Orchestra had planned to give in the Imperial and Royal Volksgarten next to the Heldenplatz in May 1860 had to be postponed for several days as the result of bad weather, which meant that the waltz's first performance was likewise delayed.

The *Zigeunerbaron-Quadrille* (Gypsy Baron Quadrille) was written for the annual ball of Concordia, an association of journalists and writers, and was heard for the first time during the 1886 Carnival. A six-part work, it consists of tunes from Johann Strauß's hugely successful operetta *The Gypsy Baron*, which had been premièred at the Theater an der Wien only a few months earlier. A preview performance was given at the court ball held in the Hall of Ceremonies at the city's Hofburg before it received its official first performance at the Concordia Ball in the Sofiensaal on 2 March. The conductor was Eduard Strauß. The quadrille begins with Count Homonay's Recruiting Song but includes other, less familiar, sections of the score before ending with the famous Entrance March from Act Three.

Carl Michael Ziehrer's waltz *In lauschiger Nacht* (On a Cosy Night) is likewise taken from an operetta, in this case *Die Landstreicher* (The Vagabonds), which received its first performance in the Summer Arena of the Venice in Vienna amusement park in the Prater in July 1899. With its wealth of memorable tunes, Ziehrer's comedy – set in Upper Bavaria and involving mistaken identities – was immensely popular in its day. One such tune is the song "Sei gepriesen, du lauschige Nacht, hast zwei Herzen so glücklich gemacht" (All Hail to You, Secluded Night, for Making Two Hearts So Happy), which is sung by Roland, a probationary judge. The waltz was first heard at a concert that took place at The Wild Man in the Prater in October 1899, a hostelry whose guests had once included Beethoven. Listeners may recognize ideas from Johann Strauß's waltz *Spiralen* (Spirals) of 1858. As a military bandsman Ziehrer will have been familiar with Strauß's music.

For the Concordia Ball in 1880 Johann Strauß wrote the Schnell-Polka *Frisch heran!* (Come On In!). According to one local newspaper, "the whole of the diplomatic corps as well as every parliamentarian and everyone who is anyone in the world of literature and the arts" had promised to attend the performance in the Sofiensaal, which was conducted by the composer's younger brother, Eduard, Johann himself being kept increasingly busy writing operettas.

Franz von Suppè's operettas cast their spell not least as a result of their sophisticatedly elaborate overtures that often combine Viennese local colour with more exotic motifs. In the case of the Overture to *Isabella*, which was first heard at Vienna's Carltheater in 1869, the music suggests Spain. The work itself was in fact unsuccessful, although the Viennese daily *Express* spoke of "a little treasure chest of charming melodies", while the *Neues Fremden-Blatt* was struck by reminiscences of the Overture to Otto Nicolai's opera *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (The Merry Wives of Windsor): Nicolai, it will be recalled, had been one of the founders of the Vienna Philharmonic in 1842.

*Perlen der Liebe* (Pearls of Love) was Josef Strauß's wedding present to his fiancée Caroline Pruckmayer in 1857. When the couple were introduced, Josef, who had trained as an engineer, was working as a draughtsman, while Caroline was a seamstress. Neither of them was thinking of starting a family of musicians, but Josef's mother had in the meantime been urging her second-oldest son to support his overworked older brother Johann and help run the Strauß Orchestra. The *Wiener Theaterzeitung* described *Pearls of Love* as a waltz "in an entirely original garb and in a novel form", a reference presumably to the symphonic introduction to Josef's first concert waltz. Such introductions were later to become one of the hallmarks of his compositional style.

Five years later the division of labour between the two brothers was so well established that Johann was able to spend the summer season in Pavlovsk, the tsar's summer residence outside St Petersburg in Russia, while Josef conducted the Strauß Orchestra's concerts in Vienna. He gave the first performance of his *Angelica-Polka* in the New World amusement park in Vienna's western suburb of Hietzing in 1862, little suspecting that he would soon have to make the journey to Pavlovsk himself. We do not know who the original *Angelica* in this multifaceted character portrait may have been, but in 2023 Franz Welsch-Möst is dedicating the polka to his wife, Angelika Möst.

Eduard Strauß assumed sole responsibility for the 1871 season of balls: his brother Josef had died the previous year and Johann was currently preparing the production of his first operetta, *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber* (Indigo and the Forty Thieves) at the Theater an der Wien. Musical highlights from this last-named work were presented by the Strauß Orchestra in the city's ballrooms at this time. One of the items on these programmes was Eduard's *Schnell-Polka Auf und davon* (Up and Away), which the composer conducted at a Carnival revue in the Musikverein.

For his final season of balls in 1870 the already ailing Josef Strauß wrote the polka française *Heiterer Muth* (Blithe Spirits), which was first heard in the Floral Hall of the Vienna Horticultural Society on the Ringstraße, where the Wieden District Council held its "Poor Ball". The fact that this event was counted among Vienna's "most elegant balls" did not strike contemporaries as in any way contradictory. Instead, the organizers hoped that the involvement of Josef and Eduard Strauß would "boost attendance" and result in a high level of donations that would "help to reduce the suffering of our poor fellow creatures".

In 1866 the Strauß Orchestra's benefit ball gave the world première of the *Schnell-Polka For ever*, the very title of which signalled the Strauß brothers' internationalist aspirations. Once the ball season was over, Johann Junior and Josef set off for Paris to prepare for their appearances at the 1867 Paris World's Fair. They also had plans to go to London, where Johann Senior had appeared with his orchestra in 1838 as part of a tour that had started in France in 1837. It made sense, therefore, to write works with English and French titles, even if ultimately it was only Johann Junior who travelled to Paris and London, while Josef and their orchestra remained behind in Vienna.

In the verse fables that he published around 1750 the German writer Friedrich von Hagedorn describes the siskin as a carefree creature that learns from its mistakes: instead of ensuring that its nest is secure, it sings its dawn chorus without a care in the world, whereupon its home is swept away in a hurricane. It finds refuge with its neighbour, a lark, concluding that it is unwise to count one's chickens before they are hatched. Cast in the form of a waltz, Josef Strauß's *Zeisserln* (Siskins) is no less carefree in tone but avoids striking Hagedorn's moralizing, finger-wagging note. It was heard for the first time in 1861 at Franz Unger's Casino

in the Viennese suburb of Hernals at the celebrations held to commemorate the consecration of the local church, an event best celebrated on the dance floor. At the same event eight years earlier, Josef had made his début as a composer when he had taken over from his brother.

Luigi Manzotti's ballet *Excelsior* was first performed at La Scala, Milan, in 1881 with music by Romualdo Marenco. The work is now largely forgotten, although a production staged at the Vienna Court Opera was seen more than three hundred times between 1885 and 1913. Audiences were particularly enthralled by the combination of dance and new technology. For the seventh scene, "Les Télégraphistes", Joseph Hellmesberger wrote a *Glocken-Polka* (Bells Polka) and a *Galop*. By the mid-1880s the telegraph had established a worldwide system of data communication using an international and intercontinental network of cables.

Josef Strauß's activities in 1862 extended well beyond the composition of his *Angelica-Polka*: in the middle of the summer season he was abruptly called away from Vienna to Pavlovsk by Johann who, claiming that he was ill, wanted to return to Vienna to marry the singer Jetty Treffz, whose lifestyle was far from uncontroversial. On his arrival in Russia, Josef quickly wrote his *Allegro fantastique*. Although scored for large orchestra, the surviving copy of the full score bears the subheading "Bravura Piece for Strings", the strings having to cope with some chromatically complex writing in the work's agitated outer sections, where they explore a number of relatively remote tonalities.

In keeping with their social standing, all three Strauß brothers were members of *Hesperus*, an association of Viennese artists that took its name from the Titan after whom the evening star was called. All three contributed regularly to the association's annual ball. One such work was the waltz *Aquarellen* (Watercolours) that Josef Strauß wrote in 1869 and which constitutes a tribute to painters among the society's members. Josef's "watercolours" are colourful and characterized by their fine brushstrokes, but water was also an integral part of the venue where the work was first performed: the swimming pool that was open during the summer at the city's Diana Baths was turned into a dance floor in winter. In 1869 the dancing went on all night as a result, not least, of the revellers' demand to hear Josef's work again. The reporter of the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* admitted that when he himself had left, exhausted, at four in the morning, the lively proceedings were still in full swing.

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