



Johann STRAUSS II

Die Fledermaus overture

Johann Baptist Strauss II (25 October 1825 – 3 June 1899), also known as Johann Strauss Jr., the Younger, the Son, was an Austrian composer of light music, particularly dance music and operettas. He composed over 500 waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and other types of dance music, as well as several operettas and a ballet. In his lifetime, he was known as "The Waltz King", and was largely responsible for the popularity of the waltz in Vienna during the 19th century. Some of Johann Strauss's most famous works include "The Blue Danube", "Kaiser-Walzer" (Emperor Waltz), "Tales from the Vienna Woods", "Frühlingsstimmen", and the "Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka". Among his operettas, *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron* are the best known. Strauss was the son of Johann Strauss I and his first wife Maria Anna Streim. Two younger brothers, Josef and Eduard Strauss, also became composers of light music, although they were never as well known as their brother. Strauss was born into a Catholic family in St Ulrich near Vienna (now a part of Neubau), Austria, on 25 October 1825, to the composer Johann Strauss I and his first wife, Maria Anna Streim. His paternal great-grandfather was a Hungarian Jew – a fact which the Nazis, who lionised Strauss's music as "so German", later tried to conceal. His father did not want him to become a musician but rather a banker. Nevertheless, Strauss Junior studied the violin secretly as a child with the first violinist of his father's orchestra, Franz Amon. When his father discovered his son secretly practising on a violin one day, he gave him a severe whipping, saying that he was going to beat the music out of the boy. It seems that rather than trying to avoid a Strauss rivalry, the elder Strauss only wanted his son to escape the rigours of a musician's life. It was only when the father abandoned his family for a mistress, Emilie Trampusch, that the son was able to concentrate fully on a career as a composer with the support of his mother.

Strauss Jr.'s *Die Fledermaus*, *The Flittermouse* or *The Bat*, sometimes called *The Revenge of the Bat* is an operetta composed by Johann Strauss II to a German libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée, which premiered in 1874. The original literary source for *Die Fledermaus* was *Das Gefängnis* (*The Prison*), a farce by German playwright Julius Roderich Benedix that premiered in Berlin in 1851. On 10 September 1872, a three-act French vaudeville play by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, *Le Réveillon*, loosely based on the Benedix farce, opened at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal. Meilhac and Halévy had provided several successful libretti for Offenbach and *Le Réveillon* later formed the basis for the 1926 silent film *So This Is Paris*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Meilhac and Halévy's play was soon translated into German by Karl Haffner (1804–1876), at the instigation of Max Steiner, as a non-musical play for production in Vienna. The French custom of a New Year's Eve réveillon, or supper party, was not considered to provide a suitable setting for the Viennese theatre, so it was decided to substitute a ball for the réveillon. Haffner's translation was then passed to the playwright and composer Richard Genée, who had provided some of the lyrics for Strauss's *Der Karneval in Rom* the year before, and he completed the libretto.

The operetta premiered on 5 April 1874 at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna and has been part of the regular repertoire ever since. It was performed in New York under Rudolf Bial at the Stadt Theatre on 21 November 1874. The German première took place at Munich's Gärtnerplatztheater in 1875. *Die Fledermaus* was sung in English at London's Alhambra Theatre on 18 December 1876, with its score modified by Hamilton Clarke. When the operetta came to Paris in 1877 at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, as *La Tzigane*, with Ismaël and Zulma Bouffar in the cast, it was not a success; only in 1904, with Meilhac and Halévy's original roles names and the words adapted by Paul Ferrier to the music (with Max Dearly and Ève Lavallière in the cast) did it find success in Paris and enter the repertoire there. The first London performance in German did not take place until 1895. According to the archivist of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, "Twenty years after its production as a lyric opera in Vienna, [composer and conductor Gustav] Mahler raised the artistic status of Strauss's work by producing it at the Hamburg Opera House [...] all the leading opera houses in Europe, notably Vienna and Munich, have brightened their regular repertoire by including it for occasional performance." The role of Eisenstein was originally written for a tenor but is now frequently sung by a baritone. The role of Orlofsky is a trouser role, usually performed by a mezzo-soprano, sometimes by a countertenor and occasionally – an octave lower – by a tenor. The party of act 2 allows productions to insert a variety of additional entertainment acts, such as music, comedy, or dance. The lengthy drunken soliloquy by Frosch (a comedy speaking role) in act 3 also permits variety in performance.