

# LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY



## DIE FLEDERMAUS

Johann Strauss II 1874

**IN-DEPTH GUIDE**

WRITTEN BY STU LEWIS OF THE  
KANSAS CITY LYRIC OPERA GUILD

## INTRODUCTION

*Die Fledermaus* (“The Bat”) occupies a unique position in the standard operatic repertoire. Not only is it the prime example of the “Golden Age” of Viennese operetta, it is the only representative of that era to consistently hold the stage. It could be called the operetta for people who hate operetta, both those who consider the form too highbrow and those “serious” opera fans who consider it too frivolous. Virtually everyone loves *Fledermaus*.

What is the source of its appeal? We could start by discussing Strauss’s gorgeous melodies, the type you can hum or whistle as you leave the theater. But there is an abundance of great melodies in works that have long since virtually disappeared from the stage.

Then there’s the story. Before Gilbert and Sullivan came along, librettists never shared top billing with the composers with whom they collaborated, but all of the great composers have recognized that the key to composing a great opera, operetta, or Broadway musical is to start with a superior text. The libretto of *Die Fledermaus* could stand on its own as a great comedy (though who would want to do without Strauss’s glorious melodies?) It is a great classic comedy, built on classic comic devices such as disguise, intrigue, and mistaken identity, as the characters continue to invent more and more elaborate lies to cover up the deceptions they have practiced.

A third and perhaps more significant factor is that it is one of the few works in the standard repertoire in which contemporary audiences can see ourselves. The late nineteenth century saw the development of the *verismo* school, which purported to tell the stories of real people rather than the kings, queens, and noblemen of traditional operas before that time. However, most people who attend operas have little in common with the dockhands, farmers, and itinerant actors who populate the most popular *verismo* operas. The characters in *Die Fledermaus*, on the other hand, are people who, though perhaps better off financially than most, essentially live, dress, and act like the members of the audience who are observing them. Most of them work for a living, in white-collar professions. Even in its own time, this work was somewhat unusual in its use of a local setting and contemporary dress.

Lastly, the opera may have special resonance in our own time of economic downturn. While Strauss began composing it before the stock market crash of 1873, by the time of its premiere the market crash had thrown the economy into a deep depression. On one hand *Die Fledermaus* is a nostalgia piece, recalling a more affluent, opulent time. At its center is a masked ball, a form of entertainment that had declined in popularity since the crash. On the other hand, it reflects its own time, the nihilistic gaiety of a society in serious decline, relying on alcohol as a source not of celebration but of consolation. The operetta concludes with a tribute not to love but to the power of champagne.

When the Lyric last staged *Die Fledermaus* in 1999, the setting was moved to Paris in the 1920's, and in the frenzied actions of the characters one might well be reminded of Edna St. Vincent Millay's 1920 poem which seemed to provide a prophetic description of the decade to follow:

*My candle burns at both ends, it will not last the night,  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends, it gives a lovely light.*

The life depicted in *Die Fledermaus* could not go on forever. But the lovely light of Strauss's music still shines.

## CHARACTERS

**Gabriel von Eisenstein** (Tenor or Baritone) – A wealthy man of leisure

**Rosalinde** (Soprano) – Gabriel's wife

**Frank** (Baritone) – A prison governor

**Prince Orlofsky** (Mezzo-Soprano) – A Russian prince (trouser role)

**Alfred** (Tenor) – A singing teacher

**Dr. Falke** (Baritone) – A notary

**Dr. Blind** (Tenor) – A lawyer

**Adele** (Soprano) – Rosalinde's maid

**Ida** (Soprano) – Adele's sister

**Frosch** (Speaking role) – A jailer

Chorus of guests and servants of Prince Orlofsky

## THE STORY

Any description of the plot of *Die Fledermaus* should begin with a disclaimer. Directors generally are given much more latitude with operetta than they are with either opera or Broadway-style musicals. One might go as far as to say that there is no “traditional” way to stage this work. Strauss set the work in his own time, and as of this writing we are anticipating a nineteenth-century setting for this production, but it is likely that the director will take some liberty with the original.

Two areas where anything goes are the party scene in Act II and the prison scene in Act III. During the party scene it is customary for some of the guests to entertain their fellow partiers with songs and arias from other musical works. At the Metropolitan Opera premiere in 1905, twenty-nine notable singers – among them Enrico Caruso – sang songs and arias from other operas. Joan Sutherland’s farewell appearance at London’s Royal Opera House was as a party guest in *Die Fledermaus*, where she sang “Home Sweet Home.”

In Act III we are introduced to the jailer Frosch, a speaking role which has frequently been taken on by comic actors who otherwise are not seen on the opera stage. Among famous Froschs at the Met were Sid Caesar and Dom DeLuise. Such comedians are frequently given dialogue which was not included in the original text, sometimes including contemporary topical references.

## OVERTURE

The overture of *Die Fledermaus* is one of the most popular in the history of the musical stage and is frequently performed as a concert piece. It consists of a number of melodies which will be sung during the course of the operetta.

### **ACT I: *The Eisensteins’ home***

The curtain opens on an empty room. From offstage, the singer Alfred is serenading the lady of the house, Rosalinde. We will later learn that he is one of her old flames. The maid, Adele, enters, with a letter in her hand. As she explains in her aria, it is an invitation from her sister to attend a party at the villa of the Russian Prince Orlofsky. She would love to attend, she tells us, if only she could get the night off. Alfred resumes his serenade, and Adele gradually realizes that it is directed to her mistress.

Rosalinde enters, complaining that Alfred's public serenade is compromising her reputation. Adele makes up a story about a sick aunt in order to get the night off, but Rosalinde refuses, citing the stress she is under because her husband's jail term (for assault) is scheduled to begin that evening. The two sing a brief duet in which each reiterates her position.

Alfred enters and asks Rosalinde if they can spend the evening together. She reminds him of the impropriety of his request in view of the fact that she is married, but he insists and eventually gets her to agree to let him return after her husband has been escorted to prison. In an aside, she admits that when he sings she is unable to resist his advances. Alfred is a singer by trade and tends to ad-lib phrases from well-known operas throughout the evening.

Alfred departs, just in time for Eisenstein's entrance, along with his attorney, Dr. Blind. He is incensed that the attorney has so botched his appeal that the sentence was actually increased from five days to eight. Rosalinde joins her voice to theirs in a scintillating trio, during which Strauss and his librettists derive considerable humor from the attorney's enumeration of the various types of argument he has used in his losing cause. The skillful juxtaposition of the various vocal lines may remind one of the great ensembles of Mozart and Rossini. This is especially remarkable in view of the fact that Strauss had built his career by composing orchestral music and was a latecomer to writing for the voice in general and the stage in particular.

Dr. Falke, a long-time acquaintance of Eisenstein, enters. Left alone with Eisenstein, he announces that he has come to invite him to a party at Prince Orlofsky's villa (a premonition of complications to follow). He convinces Eisenstein that he can begin serving his sentence the next morning, and he further entices his friend by reminding him that there will be several young female ballet dancers whom he can impress by showing off his repeater watch (an expensive mechanical device developed before the invention of the illuminated dial, which would chime the hour with the push of a button, allowing one to tell time in the dark.) To avoid a scandal he offers to introduce Eisenstein under the alias Marquis Renard. The two men sing a duet expressing their anticipation of the fun they will have at

the party. Rosalinde enters, and Eisenstein tells her that Falke has so uplifted his spirits that he will begin serving his sentence at once, and he goes off to change clothing. In his absence, Falke tells Rosalinde of her husband's real plan for the evening and suggests that she should attend the ball in disguise, so she is not surprised when Eisenstein re-enters dressed for a party. Not wanting the maid to know of her plans for the evening, she summons Adele and grants her request for a night off. Eisenstein, Rosalinde, and Adele sing a trio which begins slowly in a minor key with Rosalinde lamenting Eisenstein's departure, but the melody soon speeds up to a polka rhythm, suggesting that they are all anticipating their planned evening activities.

Everyone but Rosalinde exits, and Alfred returns. At Rosalinde's suggestion, he borrows one of Eisenstein's dressing gowns. He tries to get Rosalinde in the mood for romance with a song in praise of alcoholic beverages, to which she joins in. Their rendezvous is interrupted by the appearance of the prison warden Frank, who has come to escort his prisoner to jail. He announces that he is in a bit of a hurry, since he has been invited to a party that evening. (He does not say where, but we can guess). Seeing how Alfred is dressed, Frank mistakes him for the man of the house, and in order to protect her honor, Rosalinde persuades Alfred to go to jail rather than reveal the compromising position he has put her in. The trio sung by the three is a brilliant Act I finale.

## **ACT II: *Prince Orlofsky's villa, later that evening***

The Prince's party is already in progress when the curtain rises. A chorus of party-goers sets the festive mood. Adele's sister Ida is surprised to see Adele in attendance, and she explains that she was not the one who issued the invitation. Realizing that a domestic worker would not be welcome at the high-class event, Ida decides to introduce Adele as an actress named Olga. Falke enters with Prince Orlofsky, explaining that he has arranged a real-life comedy for his entertainment, "The Revenge of the Bat." Eisenstein enters and is introduced as the Frenchman Marquis Renard.

Prince Orlofsky welcomes him, and in his aria "Chacun a son gout" (using the French phrase essentially meaning "anything goes") he explains his philosophy of party-giving – unbridled licentiousness. In the

words of Charles Mitchell Carroll, “It is obvious that when Prince Orlofsky sings his famous line ‘Chacun a son gout’ he means not what people do for amusement at this party, but how they seek pleasure in other matters as well.”

On one hand, the Prince’s attitude is expressive of the atmosphere of pre-depression Vienna, where anything could happen during carnival season between New Years Day and Lent. However, there is a darker side to the Prince’s personality. He also explains in some lines often altered in translation that he may become violent with any guests who refuse to drink to excess. Camille Crittenden (in her detailed analysis of *Fledermaus*) has suggested that his boorish qualities may reflect the Austrians’ negative views of Russians in general. Furthermore, she points out that characters whose parts are written as trouser roles – women portraying male characters – are generally adolescents. Portraying a Russian prince in this manner may have been meant to feminize the character as a form of ridicule.

Eisenstein comments that Mademoiselle Olga looks just like his family maid, an allegation that she vehemently denies in her famous “Laughing Aria,” in which she demonstrates that she is much too elegant to be a maid.

Falke’s comedy continues as Frank enters, introduced as the Frenchman Chevalier Chagrin. Considerable humor ensues as he and Eisenstein try to keep up the ruse by speaking French, though both know only a few phrases in that language. Finally, Rosalinde arrives, masked, and is introduced as a Hungarian Countess. Eisenstein, failing to recognize her tries to seduce her by using his favorite pick-up line, an offer to see his expensive watch (It is a convention of comedy that people rarely see through others’ disguises, unrealistic as this may be). He pointedly informs her that he is not married. The attempted seduction is carried out in a comic duet, during which she grabs the watch to be used later as evidence of his infidelity. Frank asks her to unmask, but the prince announces that one of the rules of his parties – as was actually customary at Vienna’s masked balls – is that no one can be forced to unmask. When her authenticity as a Hungarian is questioned, she replies by singing a Czardas, a traditional Hungarian gypsy melody, a musical style which Strauss skillfully imitates in her aria.



Orlofsky now inquires about the reference to the “bat,” and Eisenstein relates the story of a practical joke he played on Falke when, following a costume party where everyone had too much to drink, he allowed his friend to fall asleep on a park bench still dressed as a bat, only to be discovered in the morning still wearing his ridiculous costume. He adds that he is too clever to allow Falke to get his revenge.

Orlofsky now decides to liven up the party by getting out the bubbly. He begins a lively tribute to champagne in which he, Adele, and Eisenstein each sing a verse while the assembled guests join in the chorus. (This structure may remind us of the concluding ensemble of *The Barber of Seville* or “Never Mind the Why or Wherefore” from *H.M.S. Pinafore*, to cite just a couple of well-known examples. Verdi used a variation of this form in a more ominous context in the final act of *Rigoletto*.) Eisenstein’s description of drunken monks in the final verse may reflect the growing anti-clerical sentiment in Vienna at that time.

At this point we might find a ballet inserted, or some party guests being invited to sing some arias that are not part of the original score, or both.

Orlofsky now begins a rousing finale. Eisenstein tries in vain to retrieve his watch, but the chimes sounding the hour of 6:00 a.m. remind Eisenstein and Frank that it is time to head to the prison as the curtain falls.

### **ACT III: Frank’s office at the jail, early in the morning**

Frosch, the jailer, is alone on stage, complaining about Alfred’s interminable singing. At this point, he may recite an original comic monologue, which often includes topical references to events in our own time. Frank enters, quite drunk, singing jumbled phrases from the Act II music. Adele enters. Based on their conversation at the party, she believes him to be an impresario, and she “auditions” by singing a three-part aria in which Strauss effectively parodies the musical styles of his time. She begins by playing a simple country girl to a folk-like melody in 6/8 time. To impersonate a queen, she switches to a march tempo (inspiring the others to join in a march step). Finally, she plays a Parisienne, in a more elaborate, operatic style, whose text ridicules the stock melodramatic plot that was popular at the time.

Eisenstein enters, and he is surprised to see that the supposed French nobleman he met a few hours earlier is actually the prison warden. Frank, in turn, is surprised to learn that the man in custody is not Eisenstein. When he learns that Alfred was escorted to prison after kissing Rosalinde goodbye, Eisenstein decides to get to the bottom of things. One more disguise remains to be utilized. Alfred has summoned Dr. Blind, but Eisenstein appropriates the latter's outfit and interrogates Rosalinde and Alfred. In a scene that may remind us of the conclusion of *The Marriage of Figaro*, he declares he will not forgive his wife's infidelity, until she produces the watch.

Falke and Orlofsky enter to observe the finale of the comedy. Eisenstein tells Rosalinde that the champagne he consumed was responsible for his behavior, conveniently ignoring the fact that he was sober when he decided to attend the party. Falke exults that he has had his revenge. Alfred falsely claims that he was not really seducing Rosalinde but was actually a party to the joke. Orlofsky, meanwhile, has been so impressed by Adele's singing that he offers to support her stage career. All ends happily, with Rosalinde reprising the toast to champagne.

## **JOHANN STRAUSS II AND THE CREATION OF "FLEDERMAUS"**

Any biography of Johann Strauss II must begin with the story of his father, Johann Strauss I. The elder Strauss was born March 14, 1804, the son of a tavern owner. An orphan at a young age, raised by other relatives, he was somewhat of a musical prodigy, taking up violin at a young age when he was inspired by a traveling musician. By the age of 15 he was proficient enough to become a professional musician. He first made his mark as a conductor, but soon took up composing in order to provide new material for his orchestra. In time he became the original "Waltz King," taking his orchestra throughout Europe, and he received the honor of playing at the coronation of Queen Victoria. In the meantime, a love affair led to an unexpected pregnancy and a quickly planned marriage, in time for the birth of Johann II on October 25, 1825. He eventually split with his wife, leaving her the task of raising their young son.

To the extent that the elder Strauss was involved in his son's life, he actively discouraged him from taking up music. Despite this lack of encouragement, however, the younger Strauss showed musical talent from the beginning, picking out tunes on the piano as early as age 6. By the age of 19 he was already giving professional concerts. Contrary to the adage that no one can be jealous of his or her children because they are extensions of oneself, Johann I became extremely jealous of his son's success and actually worked to undermine his son's career, as the younger Strauss's talent clearly exceeded that of the father. Their rivalry took on a more bitter turn when Austria became embroiled in a civil war and Johann II took the side of the rebels while Johann I sided with the royalists and wrote marches to support their cause. Johann I died of scarlet fever in 1848, having never reconciled with his son.

Following the death of his father, Johann joined forces with his father's orchestra and began to cut back on his conducting chores in order to devote more time to composition. He succeeded his father as the "Waltz King," though it should be noted that the term "waltz" may be somewhat a misnomer, because while the principal themes of his major compositions were written in three-quarter – or waltz – tempo, they were not simply dances but rather elaborate tone poems written to be listened to rather than to serve as background music for social dancing.

Perhaps one of the keys to Strauss's success was his total identification with the city of his birth. He was as closely associated with Vienna as much as Offenbach was identified with Paris and Leonard Bernstein was later to be associated with New York. "If it is true that I have talent," he wrote, "I owe it, above everything else, to my beloved city of Vienna...in whose soil is rooted my whole strength, in whose air floats the melodies which my ear has caught, my heart has drunk in, and my hand has written down."

In 1862 he married Jetty Treffz, who was ten years older and former mistress of a wealthy man. She had saved enough money to allow Strauss to devote even more time to composition, and it was during the early days of his marriage that he wrote some of his best-known orchestral pieces, including "Tales From the Vienna Woods" and "The Blue Danube."

Originally Strauss had no interest in composing for the stage, but as the Viennese became entranced with French operetta, local impresarios desired to create a home-grown operetta tradition. According to some reports, it was Offenbach who first persuaded Strauss to try writing for the stage, but this may be more of a legend than literal fact. A better documented story describes how Vienna theater impresario Maxmillian Steiner had Jetty surreptitiously obtain one of Strauss's new scores and had lyrics written for it. When Strauss heard the finished product, he was convinced that he could indeed write for the human voice. His first attempt at the genre never got off the ground, but his 1871 operetta, *Indigo*, was successful enough to encourage him to continue writing for the stage.

His next project was to be his biggest success, and adaptation of a French play *Le Revillon*, written by the same duo who had written the libretto for *Carmen*, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halevy. This comedy, relocated to Vienna, was to become *Die Fledermaus*, with a libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée. Strauss composed it over a period of six months, releasing some of the individual arias along the way in order to build anticipation for the finished work. The premiere on April 5, 1874, was largely panned by the critics but was popular enough with the public to assure its success. There are differing accounts of the reason that the first run consisted of only sixteen performances. Some people blamed the short run on the fact that the stock market had crashed the year before, followed

by hundreds of bank closures, which not only cut into the incomes of prospective ticket buyers but also lessened the appeal of satires of upper-class living. However, it appears that the theater where it was being performed had to cut the run short in any event due to a prior commitment that had been made to another work.

Strauss's fame soon spread around the world. Later in the decade he was invited to give a number of concerts in the United States, including playing at the Boston Festival.

Following Jetty's death in 1877, he married a much younger woman, Angelika Dittrich, but she soon deserted him for Franz Steiner. Since as a Catholic he was unable to obtain a divorce, he conveniently converted to Protestantism so he could divorce her and marry his third wife, Adele Deutsch. He continued composing for several years afterwards but except for *The Gypsy Baron* in 1885, none of his other operettas achieved lasting popularity. In 1892 he tried his hand at writing an opera, *Ritter Pazman (Knight Pazman)*, but this work was both a critical and popular flop and was criticized as having an inferior text and for the composer's failure to distinguish the characters from each other in musical style. As Arthur Sullivan had learned a year earlier with *Ivanhoe*, the ability to write operettas does not necessarily translate into the talent needed for the opera house. (Composers of the American musical who have also succeeded in writing operas, such as Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin, have done so by using essentially the same musical style for both formats). Strauss did achieve the respectability he sought, however, in 1894, when *Die Fledermaus* was staged at the Vienna Opera House.

Strauss died of pneumonia June 3, 1899. It is estimated that 100,000 watched the funeral procession.

While it is tempting to think of Strauss as a lightweight in the world of classical music, that opinion has not been shared by many more "serious" composers. Richard Wagner, a contemporary whose style was diametrically opposite that of Strauss, called him "the most musical brain in Europe." And Richard Strauss (no relation) wrote of the waltzes he composed for *Der Rosenkavalier*, "How could I have composed those without thinking of the laughing genius of Vienna?" An amusing story

(verified by Brahms's biographers as well as Strauss's) tells that when Adele asked Brahms to autograph her fan, instead of inscribing a few measures of one of his own compositions, he wrote a few measures of "The Blue Danube" and added, "Unfortunately, not by Johannes Brahms."

Strauss's music never went out of fashion in the German-speaking world, and he was admired by the Nazi regime, who overlooked the fact that his third wife was Jewish, as a fine example of pure Germanic culture. He was praised for having rid the operetta form of the corrupt Jewish influence of Offenbach. The composer, however, an avowed opponent of tyranny, was able to get a posthumous last laugh, when it was discovered that his great-grandfather was Jewish, an inconvenient truth which caused the regime to rewrite his biography, just as they sought to suppress the public knowledge of the Jewish ancestry of other significant figures in the creation of the culture that they loved, including Franz Lehar's librettists and Lorenzo Da Ponte, Mozart's Jewish-born librettist.

## OPERETTA

*Die Fledermaus* is properly characterized not as an opera but as an operetta, an Italian term meaning “little opera.” (Ironically, despite the origin of the term, there are no Italian operettas of note.) While some people use the term to refer to almost any light musical play, it generally applies to a particular genre of musical entertainment that flourished in Europe – primarily in Paris and Vienna, and later in the U.S. – in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Among the features which define operetta are a certain lightness of tone, an appeal to popular taste, and the use of spoken dialogue between the set musical pieces. The works of Gilbert and Sullivan are often classified as operettas, although the writers themselves considered their works to be light operas in the tradition of Donizetti and Rossini, and a tradition of operetta writing did not develop in the U.K.

The form of musical play that we generally call operetta is essentially a French invention, which arose to some extent as a reaction to the excesses of French grand opera. The composer who went simply by the name Hervé is generally credited as having originated the form with his *Sanco Panca*, in 1848, but it wasn't until a decade later that the first operetta of lasting value appeared – Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, which is still performed occasionally, though it is best remembered for the Can-Can melody which characterizes high-kick dances down to the present day. His most enduring operetta is probably *La Périchole*, which introduced an element of sentimentality into the form. Other important French operetta composers were Le Coq and Messager, whose works are rarely staged today.

While Johann Strauss II was by far the most popular operetta composer of his era, he was not the first Viennese composer to try his hand at the form. Franz von Suppe was working in the genre as early as 1860. Many other operetta composers, most of them virtually forgotten today, combined to create what is now referred to as the “golden age” of Viennese operetta. After Strauss's death, operetta went into a period of decline, but it was later revived around the turn of the century in what music historians call the “silver age,” most prominently with Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* (1905), the one Viennese operetta which rivals *Die Fledermaus* in

popularity. This work represented a new trend in the genre toward a more sentimental tone, as opposed to the casual acceptance of adultery and other vices demonstrated in *Die Fledermaus*. Other prominent composers of this era were Oscar Strauss (no relation to the other musical Strausses) and the Hungarian Emmerich Kalman. Inspired by his friendship with Lehar, the great Italian opera composer Giacomo Puccini considered writing an operetta, but as he worked on *La Rondine* he realized that his talent was more suited to writing a fully integrated opera score rather than the set pieces which define the operetta form. The plot of *La Rondine* consists of an odd mixture of elements from *Die Fledermaus* and *La Traviata*.

Just as the popularity of French operetta in the German-speaking world created a desire for home-grown operetta, so did the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan in the U.S. create the desire for home-grown operetta. John Phillip Sousa tried his hand at the form before the turn of the century. The first operettas of lasting value were composed by European immigrants who had learned their craft before coming to the U.S. Among them were the Irish-born, German-trained Victor Herbert (*Naughty Marietta*, *Babes in Toyland*), and the Eastern European natives Sigmund Romberg (*The New Moon*, *The Student Prince*) and Rudolf Friml (*Rose Marie*).

Musical theater historians Richard Traubner and Gerald Bordman have argued that the modern Broadway musical is essentially a continuation of the operetta form, despite the fact that since the 1920's American composers have vehemently opposed this label. The key turning point came in 1927 with Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern's *Showboat*, which could be seen as the last great American operetta or the first great Broadway musical. Those who see it as a continuation of the operetta miss one key element – the degree of seriousness which can be seen in both the music and lyrics. The socially conscious Hammerstein never lets us forget that the gaiety of the entertainers and audiences is built on the back-breaking labor of the African-American workers. The play ends with Joe singing, "I keep laughing to keep from crying/I must keep living until I'm dying/But Old Man River, he just keeps rolling along." We have come a long way from the tribute to champagne which concludes *Die Fledermaus*.

Sixteen years would pass before then next revolutionary work would appear: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Not only did the



play usher in a greater integration of story and music than had been seen before in works for the popular American stage, it also took the radical step of including the death of a principal character near the conclusion. A few years later the same writers were to create the first Broadway musical tragedy in *Carousel*. This paved the way for a number of other musicals with tragic stories, including *West Side Story*, *Man of La Mancha*, and *Sweeney Todd*.

This is not to deny the important influence that operetta had on the Broadway musical. Most notably, many of the classic Broadway musicals down to the present day are written for operatic voices, and in the golden age of the Broadway musical (1943 through the 1960's), a number of successful opera singers took roles in Broadway shows: Ezio Pinza (*South Pacific*), Robert Weede (*Most Happy Fella*, *Milk and Honey*), Mimi Benzell (*Milk and Honey*), and Helen Traubel (*Pipe Dream*). Some writers appear to have deliberately sought to capture the atmosphere of European operettas, as in Lerner and Lowe's *My Fair Lady* or Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*. The most direct tribute to the operetta form is probably Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, in which nearly all of the music is written in a form of triple meter, though sometimes you need to look at the printed score to realize it.

In the final analysis, the question of whether a work is a singspiel (Mozart's term for works such as *The Magic Flute*), an opera, an operetta, or a musical is of no great significance. In the word of Broadway producer Harold Prince, "Opera and musical theater are exactly the same thing." An opera company's decision of whether to produce a work of musical theater is determined not by an arbitrary classification but rather by the question of whether the work is appropriate for the resources of an opera company and the skills of classically trained voices. By this criterion, *Die Fledermaus* has held the operatic stage for many years and seems destined to do so for many more.

## THE WALTZ

As we have discussed, the Strausses were referred to as the “Waltz Kings.” The most important characteristic of the waltz is that it is written in some form of triple meter, such as  $\frac{3}{4}$  or  $\frac{3}{8}$  meter rather than the more common double meter. In fact, one sometimes hears any music written in triple meter as being in waltz tempo even if it is not composed to be danced to.

The term waltz dates back to the late eighteenth century, and was first used in opera in Soler’s *Una Cosa Rara*, an opera best remembered today because Mozart and Da Ponte alluded to it in *Don Giovanni*. As a form of dance, its immediate successor was a Germanic folk dance called the Landler. Once introduced, it quickly replaced the minuet as the most popular form of social dancing, because it provided more close contact between the sexes. As a form of music, it has attracted numerous composers as diverse as Schubert, Chopin, Dvorak, Richard Strauss, and Richard Rodgers.

For many listeners, the waltz form represents a sense of elegance which differentiates it from compositions in double time. Hans Fantel writes, “Endlessness is inherent in three-quarter time. It lacks the final beat to close the measure. It remains open leading into the next circle and the next, in stylized infinity.” Local musician Kent Barnhart has lamented the disappearance of three-quarter time from American popular music since the 1950’s as endemic of the coarsening of American musical taste.

In the words of music historian Egon Gartenberg, Strauss’s contribution to the development of the form was that “he freed the waltz from the tyranny of the dance rhythm and carried it beyond the empty, regulated beat.” Today only ballroom-dance enthusiasts still dance the waltz, but the appeal of Strauss’s handling of the form is universal.

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