

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

The Merry Wives of Windsor (1846-1849) is only German opera of Otto Nicolai (1810-1849), principal conductor of the Vienna Court Opera and founder of the Vienna Philharmonic. Its libretto follows closely the progress of Shakespeare's play, including Falstaff's romantic intrigues, his ignoble toss into the Thames, and his midnight retribution in Windsor Park. The evergreen Overture that precedes the opera begins with the lovely moonlit music of this last scene as introduction. The main theme that initiates the new tempo accompanies Falstaff's bedevilment in the ensuing action. The complementary melody is not heard again in the opera, though Richard Wagner so admired it that he borrowed it an episode in for *Die Meistersinger*.

In his biography of Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Maurice J.E. Brown described Wilhelmine von Chezy's fantasy play *Rosamunde* (1823), for which Schubert provided incidental music: "The actual play is lost, but a very full summary of the plot survives from contemporary records. There are some strange flowers in the rotting undergrowth of the 'Romantic' jungle-world, but nothing stranger than this play, with its secret passages, princesses brought up by fisher-folk, poisoned letters, shepherd princes and the rest." Schubert's Ballet Music No. 2 from *Rosamunde* uses a jaunty country dance tune in its opening and closing sections to surround several contrasting episodes in the middle of the movement.

Though a few of his operettas, most notably *Boccaccio* and *The Beautiful*

Galatea, are occasionally staged, Franz von Suppé (1819-1895) is best remembered for his overtures. *A Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna*, Suppé's tribute to his adopted home, grew from a "play with songs" that he composed for the Josefstadt Theater in 1844.

One of the favorite and most talented pupils of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) in 1784 was Barbara Ployer, daughter of Gottfried Ignaz von Ployer, the Viennese agent at the Habsburg court for Mozart's old employer and nemesis, the Archbishop Hieronymous Colloredo of Salzburg. On February 9, 1784, Mozart finished for her the Concerto in E-flat major (No. 14, K. 449), which "Fräulein Babette" (as Mozart called her) first played on March 23rd. This handsome piece was so well received in the Ployer household that Mozart created for it a sequel, the G major Concerto (K. 453), and presented it to his student/patron just three weeks later, on April 12th.

With only the possible exception of Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, *The Merry Widow* is the most popular operetta ever written. It has been heard around the world, in at least two dozen languages, thousands of times since its premiere. Its initial run in London lasted for 778 performances. In Buenos Aires in 1907, it played simultaneously in five theaters in five different languages. It took New York by storm. Fashions, confections and restaurants were named for it. Hollywood made it into a movie three times: a silent version (!) in 1925, with John Gilbert and Mae Murray; the clas-

sic black-and-white 1934 film, starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald, directed by Ernest Lubitsch; and a Technicolor remake in 1952, featuring Lana Turner and Fernando Lamas. *The Merry Widow* continues its infectious waltz across the world's opera stages, and was even admitted, belatedly, to the pantheon of the repertory of the Metropolitan Opera for New Year 2000.

In the plot of *Die Fledermaus* (1874) by Johann Strauss, Jr. (1825-1899), Baron Eisenstein has been sentenced to jail for five days for some minor offense, but decides to attend Prince Orlofsky's ball before surrendering himself. Meanwhile, his wife's maid, Adele, has made up an excuse to get the night off, and borrowed one of her mistress' gowns so that she can sneak into Orlofsky's ball and practice her talents as an actress by imitating an aristocratic lady. Eisenstein is struck by the resemblance of this "lady" to his household maid, but Adele continues to play her part and laughs off the Baron's suggestion that she could be a servant (*Mein Herr Marquis*).

Orlofsky's wife, Rosalinde, takes advantage of his absence to entertain a sweetheart, Alfred, who is mistakenly carted off to jail when the police arrive to arrest Eisenstein. Undeterred, Rosalinde heads for Orlofsky's party by herself disguised as a Hungarian countess and entertains the crowd when she arrives with a fiery *Czárdás*, a musical souvenir of her supposed homeland.

On the Beautiful Blue Danube (1867) almost sank beneath the waves at its launching. Johann Herbeck, director of the Vienna Men's Chorus, asked Strauss if he could provide a new piece for his ensemble, and Strauss responded with a melody inspired by a line from a poem of Karl Isidor Beck: "On the Danube, on the beautiful, blue Danube." Herbeck

assigned Josef Weyl, a police clerk who sang in the chorus and a poet-*manqué*, to concoct some verses to fit Strauss' exquisite melody. "*Vienna, be gay! And what for, pray? The light of the arc! Here it's still dark!*" was the best that Weyl could do. (Hans Fantel suggested that this doggerel may have been prompted by the carbon-electrode lights just beginning to sprout on Vienna's street corners.) Later that year, he was invited to take part in the International Exhibition in Paris that Napoleon III was staging in honor of himself. His music proved so successful there that he dusted off *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* and displayed it to the delirious Parisians. Within weeks, demand for the work had spread across the western world, and *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* has since come to be regarded as the quintessential expression of the Viennese waltz.

The *Wiener Männergesang-Verein* ("Vienna Men's Chorus") was founded in 1843, just one year after the Vienna Philharmonic had been established, and quickly became (and remains) one of the city's leading musical organizations. In 1867, Johann Herbeck, the group's retiring director, commissioned Johann Strauss to write *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*. To celebrate its silver anniversary the following year, the *Verien's* new director, Rudolf Weinwurm, asked Strauss for another work and received the infectious *Sängerslust Polka* ("Singer's Joy Polka"), for which Josef Weyl provided an exactly apposite text: *He who sings merrily and dances gleefully/is armed against every sorrow./ Cheerfulness stirs the sluggish blood/to new passion/and raises the spirit.* Johann and his brother Josef provided the piano accompaniment for the singers at the 25th Anniversary Gala held on October 12, 1868 at Vienna's elegant Sofienbad-

Saal. The guests demanded an immediate encore, after which Strauss was made an honorary member of the organization.

Though Strauss was in constant demand throughout Europe after he began touring in 1856, he devoted many summers to the fashionable Russian resort of Pavlovsk, south of St. Petersburg. For his 1858 season there, he composed the quicksilver polka titled *Tritsch-Tratsch* (“Tittle-Tattle”).

Other than *The Blue Danube*, no piece is more beloved by the Viennese than the *Radetzky March* of Johann Strauss the Elder (1804-1849). On the traditional New Year’s concert given by the Vienna Philharmonic, it is always the final encore, immediately preceded by *The Blue Danube*. The *March* was written in 1848 in honor of the Habsburg army’s victory under the leadership of its 82-year-old Commander-in-Chief, Count Joseph Radetzky von Radetz, over the Italian nationalist forces at Custozza. The piece was premiered on August 31, 1848 at Vienna’s Wasser-Glaxis, now the site of the Stadtpark. Though Radetzky was a popular figure, not everyone agreed with the ruthless manner in which the democratic ambitions of the Italians had been crushed, and a certain animosity sprang up toward Strauss for glorifying the General in music. (Strauss the Younger tended to side with the rebels, and he wrote marches on their behalf.) Johann the Elder thought it a good time to take his orchestra on an extended tour, and when he returned to Vienna the ill will had largely disappeared. Indeed, he was asked to write another march for a banquet on September 22, 1849 honoring Radetzky, but finished only twenty measures of the piece (now known as *Last Thoughts*) before he fell ill and died from scarlet fever on September 25th.

Selections from *Die Fledermaus*

Laughing Song

Mein Herr Marquis,
 Ein Mann wie Sie
 Sollt' besser das verstehen,
 Darum rate ich
 Nur genauer sich
 Die Leute anzusehen!
 Die Hand ist doch wohl gar so fein, ach!

Dies Füßchen, so zierlich, so klein, ach!
 Die Sprache, die ich führe,
 Die Taille, die Tournüre,
 Dergleichen finden Sie
 Bei einer Zofe nie!
 Gestehen müssen Sie fürwahr,
 Sehr komisch dieser Irrtum war!
 Ja, sehr komisch,
 Ha ha ha,
 Ist die Sache,
 Ha ha ha,
 D'rum verzeih'n Sie,
 Ha ha ha,
 Wenn ich lache,
 Ha ha ha ...

Mit dem Profil
 Im griech'schen Stil
 Beschenkte mich Natur,
 Wenn nicht dies Gesicht
 Schon genügend spricht,
 Dann seh'n Sie die Figur!
 Schau'n durch das Lorgnette Sie dann!
 Sich diese Toilette nur an, ach!
 Mir scheint wohl, die Liebe
 Macht Ihre Augen trübe,
 Der schönen Zofe Bild
 Hat ganz Ihr Herz erfüllt!
 Nun sehen Sie sie überall,
 Sehr komisch ist fürwahr der Fall!

Ja, sehr komisch,
 Ha ha ha usw.

My dear Marquis,
 a man like you
 really ought to know better!
 I advise you, therefore,
 to examine people
 more attentively!
 But my hand is so very soft
 and well-kept,
 my little foot so trim and tiny,
 my manner of speech,
 my waist, my figure —
 you'll never find the like
 in a lady's maid!
 In fact, you've got to admit
 your mistake was really very funny!
 Yes, the whole thing's
 ha ha ha
 extremely funny,
 ha ha ha
 so forgive me,
 ha ha ha,
 if I laugh,
 ha ha ha ...

Nature has endowed me
 with a profile
 of Grecian cut,
 if my face
 is not sufficient
 then consider my figure!
 Just take a look at my ball dress
 through your monocle.
 I can't help thinking Love
 has blurred your eyesight.
 The image of some pretty lady's maid
 has quite filled up your heart!
 Now you see her everywhere!
 The whole thing's really too funny
 for words!

Yes, awfully funny,
 ha ha ha, etc.

Czárdás

<p> Klänge der Heimat, Ihr weckt mir das Sehnen, Rufet die Tränen Ins Auge mir! Wenn ich euch höre, Ihr heimischen Lieder, Zieht mich's wieder, Mein Ungarland, zu dir! O Heimat so wunderbar, Wie strahlt dort die Sonne so klar! Wie grün deine Wälder, Wie lachend die Felder, O land, wo so glücklich ich war! Ja, dein geliebtes Bild Meine Seele so ganz erfüllt, Dein geliebtes Bild! Und bin ich auch von dir weit, ach weit Dir bleibt in Ewigkeit Doch mein Sinn immerdar Ganz allein geweiht! O Heimat so wunderbar, Wie strahlt dort die Sonne so klar! Wie grün deine Wälder! Wie lachend die Felder, O Land, wo so glücklich ich war! Feuer, Lebenslust, Schwellt echte Ungarbrust, Heil! Zum Tanze schnell, Czárdás tönt so hell! Braunes Mägdelein Musst meine Tänz'rin sein; Reich den Arm geschwind, Dunkeläugig Kind! Durst'ge Zecher, greift zum Becher, Lasst ihn kreisen Schnell von Hand zu Hand! Schlürft das Feuer im Tokayer, Bringt ein Hoch Aus dem Vaterland! Ha! Feuer, Lebe Schwellt echte Ungarbrust, Heil! Zum Tanze schnell! Czárdás tönt so hell! La, la, la, la, la! </p>	<p> Sounds of my homeland, You awaken my longing, Call forth tears To my eyes! When I hear you You songs of home, You draw me back, My Hungary, to you! O homeland, so wonderful, How clearly shines the sun there! How green your forests, How laughing the fields, Oh land, where I was so happy! Yes, your beloved image Entirely fills my soul, Your beloved image! And though I am far from you, ah so far, Yours remains for all eternity My soul, ever there, Dedicated to you alone! Oh homeland, so wondrous, How clearly shines the sun there! How green your forests! How laughing your fields! Oh land, where I was so happy! Fire, zest for living, Swell the true Hungarian breast, Hurrah! On to the dance, The Czárdás sounds so brightly! Brown-skinned girl, You must be my dancer; Give me your arm quickly, Dark-eyed child! Thirsty tipplers, grasp the cup, Pass it in a circle Quickly from hand to hand! Sip the fire in the Tokay, Give a toast From the fatherland! Ha! Fire, zest for life Swell the true Hungarian breast, Hurray! To the spirited dance! The Czárdás sounds loud and clear! La, la, la, la, la! </p>
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ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

FEBRUARY 11 AND 12, 2017
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* OTTO NICOLAI

Ballet Music No. 2 from the Incidental Music to *Rosamunde*, D. 797 FRANZ SCHUBERT

A Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna FRANZ VON SUPPÉ

Movement I (Allegro) from Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major, K. 453 WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Piano Soloist: Katie Mahan

Waltz from *The Merry Widow* FRANZ LEHÁR
Piano Soloist: Katie Mahan

Selections from *Die Fledermaus* JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.
Overture
Laughing Song
Czárdás
Soprano Soloist: Jessica Lennick

On the Beautiful Blue Danube, Waltzes, Op. 314 JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.

Sängerslust, Polka, Op. 328 JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.
Tritsch-Tratsch, Polka, Op. 214
Bel Canto Children's Chorus of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem
Artistic Director: Joy Hirokawa

Radetzky March, Op. 228 JOHANN STRAUSS, SR.
Bel Canto Children's Chorus of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem
Artistic Director: Joy Hirokawa

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