Johann Strauss (Sohn) (1825-1899)

Music of Johann Strauss

The "Waltz King", Johann Strauss, at the time nearly 70 and a composer and conductor for half a century, once described his waltzes modesty as a "feeble attempt to extend the form handed down to me by my father and Lanner". This was a patent understatement, for it was with the younger Strauss that the Viennese waltz attained its classical perfection. Weber had established the general form in his *Invitation to the Dance* of 1819: slow introduction, chain of waltzes, coda of reminiscences. This was the model for the elder Johann Strauss and Joseph Lanner, and it was adopted in turn by Johann Strauss jr. Gradually, however, he expanded both introduction and coda, turning the former into a poetic mood-painting and treating both sections in a quasi-symphonic manner. But the essence of his accomplishment lay in the waltzes themselves. In his hands they took on an organic structure, in which coherent musical logic replaced the rather jerky kaleidoscope of waltzes by his father and Lanner, with motives and themes now growing out of one another with apparent inevitability. Add to this his inexhaustible fund of memorable tunes (there are eight to ten different themes in a Strauss waltz set), his keen sense of contrast between sustained cantabile and strongly rhythmic ideas, and his ear for brilliant orchestration, and you have the secret of his great waltzes. They transform pure *Gebrauchsmusik* (utility music) into music to be enjoyed for its own sake: they are equally at home in the ball room or the concert hall.

An der schönen, blauen Donau op. 314

Walzer

Among Strauss's 160-odd waltzes there are a dozen or so which represent the peak of his achievement in this genre; most of them were written between 1860 and 1873. Of these pride of place must go to *The Blue Danube*, today regarded as Austria's unofficial national anthem. It was composed in 1867 for the Vienna Men's Choral Society but found little favour with the Viennese in its original choral version. Not until the Paris World Exhibition in the spring of that year, when it was performed without chorus, did the work first receive with the acclaim that has accompanied it ever since.

Accelerationen op. 234

Walzer

Accelerations (1860) initiated the series of Strauss's master waltzes. It is said that he wrote it in the morning after a ball and played it with his orchestra that very evening! The title evidently derives from the scurrying quaver (eigth-note) movement of the first of its five waltzes.

Künstlerleben op. 316

Walzer

Artists' Life (1867), composed just five days after the *Blue Danube*, is no less alluring in its suggestion of the grace and lightheartedness of Vienna's artistic world of the day. Typically, the introduction in both cases adumbrates the theme of the first waltz.

Kaiser-Walzer op. 437

The noble *Emperor Waltz* (1888) was composed in celebration of the 40th anniversary of Emperor Franz Joseph's accession to the throne. An extended march like introduction leads to the first of four

sharply contrasting waltzes with a subdued, poetic passage on the solo cello and horn. In the coda several of the waltzes pass in review, and there is a last, wistful reminiscence of the opening waltz.

Rosen aus dem Süden op. 388

Walzer

Roses from the South (1880) is one of the composer's lyrical gems. Its coda, unusually, introduces a new waltz before launching into the recapitulation of the preceding ones.

Wein, Weib, Gesang op. 333

Walzer

Like *The Blue Danube*, *Wine, Women and Song* (1869) was originally written for the Vienna Men's Choral Society. It immortalizes Luther's maxim, "Who loves not wine, woman and song remains a fool all his life". The strikingly long introduction is marked *Andante quasi religioso*: like some of Haydn's symphonic introductions it completely belies the spirit of the music that follows.

G'schichten aus dem Wienerwald op. 325

Walzer

Between 1860 and 1873 Johann Strauss jr. composed a group of about a dozen master waltzes. *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (1868) breathes a strong rustic air, that of the country around Vienna, above all in the zither solo (introduction and coda) whose theme Strauss took from a *ländler* in one of his father's late waltzes (*Die Schwalben*, 1847). There are five waltzes, with "sweet" thirds and sixths in the violin melodies.

Wiener Blut op. 354

Walzer

The combination of *Schmiss und Schmalz*, a Viennese expression denoting rhythmic élan and heavy-lidded sentiment, is also characteristic of *Wiener Blut* ("Vienna Blood", 1873). This set consists of four waltzes, mostly in a lyrical vein, of which the first features the typically languid Viennese violin thirds. We must not forget that Strauss was an excellent violinist and that the waltzes he composed, played and conducted as leader of his orchestra sprang in the first place from his genius on the instrument.

"Die Fledermaus": Ouvertüre

Die Fledermaus (1874) is the very epitome of the classical Viennese operetta, and its hallmark is, not unexpectedly, the waltz. The Overture is a pot-pourri of the most memorable of the operetta's tunes, with the coruscating waltz from Act II as centrepiece.

"Der Zigeunerbaron": Ouvertüre

The Gypsy Baron (1885) is next to *Die Fledermaus* Strauss's most celebrated operetta. It combines to extraordinary effect the romantic atmosphere of the Hungarian *puszta* with the elegance and infectious gaiety of imperial Vienna. The Overture, with its racy gypsy tunes and the heady Viennese waltz, conveys this mixture in concentrated form.

Leichtes Blut op. 319

Polka schnell

Unter Donner und Blitz op. 324

Polka schnell

Eljen a Magyar! op. 332

Ungarische Polka schnell

The polka, said to have originated in Bohemia and so popular in the 19th century, is in 2/4 time and takes the form A-B (Trio)-A. Strauss wrote some 120 polkas, virtually all containing humorous descriptive touches – as in the case of *Leichtes Blut* ("Light of Heart", 1867) and that of *Unter Donner und Blitz* ("Thunder and Lightning", 1868). *Eljen a Magyar!* (1869), which is based on popular Hungarian tunes, introduces in its coda the opening of the famous *Rákóczy March*.

Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka op. 214

(from "Das Spitzentuch der Königin")

The *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka* (1858) conjures up a scene of gossiping women with wagging heads and clacking tongues.

Annen-Polka op. 117*

Polka française

The elegant *Annen Polka* (1852) was written in honour of Strauss's mother, Anna, and is dedicated to an Austrian archduchess of that name.

Auf der Jagd op. 373*

Polka schnell
(from "Cagliostro in Wien")

The *Hunting* polka (1875) is a vivid "quick polka", which Strauss typically provides with amusing orchestral touches.

Perpetuum mobile op. 257*

Musikalischer Scherz

Perpetuum mobile (1862) is a delightful musical joke. An all but unchanging bass on the tonic and dominant of E flat major underpins a mosaic of successive eight-bar phrases whose particular scoring is part of the fun: for example, a solo for bassoon and piccolo and one for glockenspiel, an unexpected tutti crash on the dominant seventh of E major, and so on.

"Die Fledermaus": Quadrille op. 363

The quadrille was a popular dance imported from France into Central Europe in the 18305. Its music was largely derived from successful operas and operettas of the day – thus the *Fledermaus Quadrille* (1874) is based on themes from Strauss's best-loved operetta.

Persischer Marsch op. 289

The *Persian March* is composed in a marked quasi-oriental vein and uses a good deal of percussion to heighten its exotic effect.

Napoleon-Marsch op. 156

Like his father Johann Strauss was a prolific composer of marches, most of the m written to mark a special occasion, such as the *Napoleon March* (1854), supposedly to celebrate the marriage of

Napoleon III to the Empress Eugénie, It has great panache and is notable for the great variety of its rhythmic motives.

Johann Strauss (Vater) (1804–1849)

Radetzky-Marsch op. 228*

The "Golden Age" of Viennese light music was ushered in by Johann Strauss sr. and Joseph Lanner and their contemporaries, from whose pens flowed an unceasing stream· of waltzes, galops, quadrilles and marches to satisfy the demands of Vienna's dance-hungry, hedonistic public. But this generation of dance musicians was to be eclipsed by Johann Strauss jr. and his younger brother Josef; and today the elder Strauss's reputation rests chiefly on two facts: he founded the great waltz dynasty and he wrote the *Radetzky March*. Composed in 1848 to commemorate the Austrian victory at Custoza under Field Marshal Radetzky, it is perhaps the most celebrated of all military marches, electrifying in its rhythmic verve and insinuating in the melodic charm of its Trio section.

Josef Strauss (1827–1870)

Music of the spheres …

Sphärenklänge op. 235*

Walzer

Delirien-Walzer op.212*

Strauss's second son, Josef, possessed a profounder and more poetic talent than his more famous brother Johann; he also commanded greater technical refinement and showed a penchant for chromatic (Wagnerian) harmony and for modulation to minor keys. If Josef lacked his brother's galvanizing rhythmic vitality, he compesated for it by the charm and gracefulness of his melodic invention. *Sphärenklänge* ("Music of the Spheres", 1868) and the *Delirien-Walzer* ("Delirium Waltz", 1867) both have substantial introductions which reveal an exquisite sense of harmonic colour; and in both sets there are five beautifully contrasted waltzes and a coda of reminiscences.

Mosco Carner

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