



DISCOVERY

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ON THE BEAUTIFUL BLUE DANUBE

Favourite Strauss Waltzes and Polkas

Queensland Symphony Orchestra • Ponkin





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Favourite Strauss Waltzes and Polkas

	JOHANN STRAUSS II 1825-1899	
1	Thunder and Lightning Polka, Op. 324	3'06
2	Voices of Spring: Waltz, Op. 410	5'38
3	At the Hunt Gallop, Op. 373 (arr. Schönherr)	2'13
4	Emperor Waltz, Op. 437	9'43
	JOSEF STRAUSS 1827-1870	
5	Fireworks Polka, Op. 269	3'04
	JOHANN STRAUSS II	
6	Tales from the Vienna Woods, Op. 325	11'52
7	Excursion Train Polka, Op. 281 (arr. Schönherr)	2'50
8	On the Beautiful Blue Danube: Waltz, Op. 314	10'03
	JOSEF STRAUSS	
9	Chatterbox Polka, Op. 245 (arr. Schönherr)	3'46
	JOHANN STRAUSS II	
10	Cuckoo Polka, Op. 336 (arr. Schönherr)	4'37
11	Vienna Blood Waltz, Op. 354	8'57
	JOHANN STRAUSS I 1804-1849	
12	Radetzky March, Op. 228	3'20
	Total Playing Time	66'41

Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Vladimir Ponkin *conductor*

Johann Strauss, 'the first', was perhaps the most colourful of the famous 'first family of the Waltz'. He was a born opportunist, as is witnessed by his meteoric rise from the lowest to the highest echelons of Viennese music. Out of vanity, or simply to further his career, Strauss seems to have made no attempt to scotch a rumour that he was the natural son of a Russian count. This at least diverted attention from his lowly and less socially-acceptable origin in a family of Jewish innkeepers in suburban Vienna. The same inns and dance halls gave him his professional start in music, and by 1825 he had his own orchestra and the beginning of a reputation among the fashion-conscious young bloods of the Austrian capital.

The young Wagner heard him leading his orchestra from the violin in 1838, and described Strauss as a 'magic fiddler, the genius of Vienna's innate musical spirit'. Realising that Viennese musical spirit was not only a saleable, but also an exportable commodity, Strauss took his band on tour regularly throughout the 1830s, visiting among other places Paris, where he impressed Berlioz with the precision of his conducting, and London, where in 1838 he played at Buckingham Palace for the newly crowned Queen Victoria. In 1846, he received imperial recognition at home as well, becoming official director of music for court balls, where his waltzes, quadrilles and gallops were now also much in demand. He had reached the peak of his career. Another appointment, as musical director of one of Vienna's citizen's regiments, gave him the opportunity to try his hand at military marches. The most famous of these, the *Radetzky March*, Op. 228 (1848), was also one of his last works.

Strauss' personal life was no less colourful than his professional career. When he married Maria Anna Streim (also the child of an innkeeper) in July 1825, it was not a moment too soon, for his first son was born only three months later. Christened 'Johann', like his father, this son could as easily have been consigned to oblivion as to the fame which awaited him. In fact, the elder Johann was so adamant that his son should not become a musician that Maria Anna had to arrange music lessons for the boy in secret. This she did with the connivance of the leader of Johann's own band, who obviously realised that the boy had inherited his father's talent. Even this ploy would probably have failed had it not been for the elder Johann's overpowering attraction to a young seamstress, for whose tender embrace he left his wife and five children in 1842. Only then was Maria Anna at last free to insist on a formal musical education for her teenage son.

After the desertion of 1842, Johann Strauss junior's attitude towards his father could well have been entirely negative. But when, following two years of intensive training, the talented young man gave his first professional concert at Dommayer's Casino in October 1844, he included a new waltz sequence by his father on the program. There was still room for reprisals, of course, but as it proved they arose naturally out of the son's skill rather than of vindictiveness. Through sheer talent, the younger Johann became his father's most serious rival as a fashionable violinist and dance master in Vienna, a rivalry terminated only by the father's death. The elder Strauss met his nemesis in 1849 when, having spawned seven more children by his defacto wife in as many years, he caught scarlet fever from one of them and died – as he had been born – in an inn (albeit a fashionable one, in the Leopoldstadt). While the elder Johann had been rightly praised during his lifetime for the precision and elegance of his compositions, history has shown that the son, Johann Strauss 'the second', was the greater melodist.

Indeed, in almost every respect, the younger Strauss not only succeeded his father, but exceeded him as well. He took over his father's old orchestra, and (after being cleared of some suspicion of revolutionary tendencies) his old post as imperial director of music for balls. He, too, travelled widely. He visited England in 1867, the year in which he wrote what was to become his most famous piece, the *Blue Danube Waltz* (Op. 314). He was prosperous and prolific, with over 470 musical opuses to his credit (compared to his father's 250 or so), which included – as well as dance pieces – numerous operettas (such as *Die Fledermaus*) and other music for the stage.

He was married three times, and to be rid of his second tempestuous liaison renounced his Catholicism to become a Protestant. This had the unfortunate side-effect that he was forced to give up his Austrian citizenship. But, in practice, the change in official status had little effect on his professional life as Vienna's most popular musician. Strauss was not merely popular. He was considered, even in his own day, to be the artist who most perfectly encapsulated the spirit of Hapsburg Vienna. Another Viennese, the more serious Brahms, was all but eclipsed by his friend and colleague, not least when he attempted to challenge Strauss on his 'home' ground – the waltz.

Waltzes and waltz-sequences such as *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, Op. 325 (1868), *Vienna Blood*, Op. 354 (1873) and *Voices of Spring*, Op. 410 (1883), not only entertained Vienna's middle and upper classes, it was even claimed that with their air of elegance and optimism, they helped to

underpin the Austrian State itself. The *Emperor Waltz*, Op. 437 (1889), is perhaps the most telling memorial to an age in which, it was rumoured, the Emperor reigned only as long as Strauss, the 'Waltz King', lived! The more carefree, flippant side of the Viennese life in this era is memorialised in Strauss' racy polkas, such as the *Excursion-Train* and *Cuckoo Polkas*, and gallops (the latter frequently played at the incredible speed of almost 126 bars per minute) such as *At the Hunt*, Op. 373 (1875).

As Strauss' career prospered, his younger brother Josef Strauss took over many aspects of the day-to-day administration of what had truly become a family enterprise. Josef, and another brother, Eduard, had both – like Johann the younger – been destined for non-musical careers, but after their father's desertion also trained as dance musicians. Together they took over the direction of the Strauss orchestra, and at various times served in the, by then, almost hereditary post of imperial director of music for balls.

Josef is the third of the Strauss dynasty to be remembered today as a composer. He was a fine craftsman, perhaps even more gifted than his brother Johann, and it is even suggested that he may have written some of the music that became known under Johann's name. Among his best-known pieces are the *Chatterbox Polka*, Op. 245, published in 1868, and the *Fireworks Polka*, Op. 269, dating from 1870.

The last member of the family to serve the Imperial court as a dance musician was Josef's nephew, Johann 'the third'. Thereafter, his nephew, Eduard 'the second', carried on the family name as Director of the Vienna Strauss Orchestra until 1969. Both men lived to see the great waltz tradition of their family immortalised in the waltz-opera *Der Rosenkavalier*, by another (but unrelated) Strauss, Richard.

Graeme Skinner

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