



Colonel Michael J. Colburn, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, January 12, 2014 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Colonel Michael J. Colburn, conducting

Happy Viennese New Year

Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Morgenblätter Waltzes, Opus 279
Josef Strauss (1827–70)	Polka, “Feuerfest!” Opus 269
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Vergnügungszug Polka, Opus 281
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Overture to <i>The Gypsy Baron</i>
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99) and Josef Strauss (1827–70)	Pizzicato Polka
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Polka, “Éljen a Magyar!” Opus 332
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Voices of Spring Waltzes, Opus 410

INTERMISSION

Otto Nicolai (1810–49)	Overture to <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Czárdás from <i>Ritter Pásmán</i> , Opus 441
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Tritsch-Tratsch Polka, Opus 214
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	Overture to <i>Die Fledermaus</i>
Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–99)	On the Beautiful Blue Danube Waltzes, Opus 314
Johann Strauss Sr. (1804–49)	Radetzky March, Opus 228

The Marine Chamber Ensembles will perform Sunday, January 19 at 2:00 P.M. in John Philip Sousa Band Hall at the Marine Barracks Annex in Washington, DC. The program will feature the works of Cooke, Ibert, Bax, and Mozart.
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PLEASE NOTE: The use of recording devices and flash photography is prohibited during the concert.

PROGRAM NOTES

On December 31, 1939, Austrian conductor Clemens Krauss led a concert of music composed by members of the Strauss family, that dynasty of popular composers who provided the musical backdrop to the Viennese society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Little did Krauss know that he was beginning a tradition that would continue to be celebrated annually not only by Austrians, but also by classical music fans around the world. Each of these New Year's programs, now broadcast to more than eighty countries, includes waltzes, polkas, quick-steps, and operetta overtures composed by Johann Strauss I, Johann Strauss II (The Waltz King), Josef Strauss, and their contemporaries. Our concert today is modeled on these beloved programs, and we hope this music will give you some sense of what it's like to ring in the New Year like the Viennese do!

Although the Viennese musical intelligentsia now proudly claim the music of The Waltz King, this has not always been the case. Perhaps concerned with associating themselves too closely with the popular music of the day, the musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic largely eschewed public performances of these works, at least in their official capacity. (One can't help but suspect that some of these musicians may have played a Strauss waltz or two in an off-duty engagement.) This attitude toward the music of the Strauss family is somewhat surprising in light of the high esteem that established contemporary composers such as Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, and Johannes Brahms had for this music. According to biographer Jan Swafford, Brahms and respected conductor Hans von Bülow shared a passion for Johann Strauss Jr.'s waltzes: "Conductor and composer took to spending evenings together sitting over beer in the summer air, plunged in the lilting stream of Strauss's melodies, watching their driving force swaying around his fiddle in front of the band." As genteel and refined as this music sounds to modern audiences, this was not the perception during Strauss's lifetime. Swafford tells us that one contemporary observer described Strauss as "African and hot-blooded, crazy with life . . . he exorcises the wicked devils from our bodies and does it with waltzes, which are the modern exorcism."

The collective attitude toward the music of the Strauss family began to evolve in the early twentieth century, due in part to legendary conductor Arthur Nikisch. For the 1921 unveiling of a statue of Johann Strauss Jr. in Vienna's City Park, Nikisch conducted several Strauss waltzes, demonstrating not only his affection for the music of The Waltz King, but giving license to other serious musicians to do the same. Clemens Krauss took Nikisch's cue and in 1929 began conducting annual concerts of music from the Strauss family at the Salzburg Festival, precursors to the Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's concerts.

Krauss's first New Year's concert in 1939 began with the **Morgenblätter** (Morning Papers) Waltzes, a work whose title portended a brighter future than many Viennese may have been able to imagine in 1939. The work was written in 1863 at the behest of the Vienna Authors and Journalists Association, also known as "Concordia." The title of the work was decided upon by the organization, which had already commissioned French composer Jacques Offenbach to write a work they titled *Abendblätter* (Evening Papers), and they decided a bit of friendly competition between the two composers might be enjoyable for all in attendance. We will never know how fair the contest really was, for both works were premièred by Johann Strauss Jr. and his orchestra, which had been engaged by the association to perform at their "Concordia Ball." Regardless of the immediate winner, Strauss's *Morgenblätter* has proven to be the long-term victor, and it has been featured in many New Year's programs since 1939.

While there was only one Waltz King—Johann Strauss Jr.—there was some friendly competition for the title from within the Strauss family. Johann Strauss Sr. was a successful composer in his own right, as were all three of his sons: Johann Jr., Eduard, and the composer of "**Feuerfest!**" Josef Strauss. He trained as an engineer and enjoyed great professional success in this role, as well as that of designer, inventor, and author of mathematical texts. He also somehow found time to compose nearly 300 works

by the time of his untimely death at age forty-three. He composed his “Feuerfest!” polka in 1869 at the request of a Viennese company that specialized in the manufacture of fireproof (the translation of Feuerfest) safes. Perhaps it was the opportunity to combine his musical and engineering worlds that led him to accept a commission that allowed him to include the anvil as a musical instrument.

Like marches, polkas come in different styles and tempos. Josef Strauss’s “Feuerfest!” is of the slower, more measured variety, a style described as the “polka française.” Johann Strauss Jr.’s **Vergnügungszug** (Pleasure Train) is a “polka schnell” or “fast polka.” The work was inspired by the opening of the Austrian Southern Railway, which offered many “pleasure train” trips into the countryside. The work is replete with the sounds of train travel, including chugging engines, train whistles, screeching brakes, chiming bells, and even the distinctive sound of a nineteenth century Austrian train conductor’s horn.

It is impossible to overstate the influence of the Romani (Gypsy) culture on classical music of the nineteenth century. While composers throughout Europe fell under its sway, the composers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were undoubtedly its greatest champions. In 1885 Johann Strauss Jr. composed an operetta that capitalized on this “zeitgeist,” his *Zigeunerbaron* (**The Gypsy Baron**). The operetta was an enormous success, surpassed only by Strauss’s own *Die Fledermaus*, and the overture has continued to be a favorite of the concert hall since the day it was composed. The Romani influences are evident throughout, from the darkly modal opening to the breathtaking galop that closes the overture. But these gypsy moments are balanced out by episodes that are vintage Strauss, including one of his most distinctive and charming waltzes. Another example of the Romani influence on Johann Strauss Jr. can be found in his “**Éljen a Magyar!**,” which translates as “Long live the Hungarians!” Dedicated to the nation of Hungary, the work was premièred in the city of Pest (now part of Budapest) in 1869.

Another work from 1869 is the **Pizzicato Polka**, a work co-composed by Johann Strauss Jr. and his brother Josef for a tour of Russia. While the genre of the polka was hardly new in 1869, the instrumentation and musical techniques employed in this charming work are unique. In addition to the pizzicato, or plucking, approach alluded to in the title, the only additional instrument employed is the delicate glockenspiel, an appropriate complement to the diaphanous timbre of the pizzicato strings.

Although *Frühlingsstimmen* (**Voices of Spring**) is one of Johann Strauss Jr.’s most famous waltzes, it was not especially well received in its debut performance in 1882. Originally scored for soprano voice and orchestra, it was written for the famous Austrian coloratura soprano Bianca Bianchi, a member of the Vienna Court Opera whose real name was the much less exotic sounding Bertha Schwarz. Undiscouraged by the tepid initial reception, Strauss created a piano arrangement of the waltz that helped it become an international bestseller. Even without the aid of the lyrics, which were provided by the playwright Richard Genée, the music brilliantly evokes images of spring, including bird calls, spring showers, and pastoral scenes.

Although the Vienna Philharmonic New Year’s concerts are traditionally a showcase for music of the Strauss family, there are occasional inclusions of music from their contemporaries. One such peer is Otto Nicolai, composer of the **Overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor***. Born in Königsberg, Prussia, in 1810, Otto Nicolai was a multi-talented musician who was professionally active as a pianist, singer, conductor, and composer. Although most of his training occurred in Germany, he spent several years in Italy and credited the influence of this experience for his unique compositional voice. According to the composer, “Had I never left Germany, I should never have written as I do. German schooling one must have, but Italian facility must be added to it. This is how Mozart came to be, and if I had his spirit I too could produce something good.” Nicolai was appointed Kapellmeister of the Royal Opera in Berlin in 1848. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to write a new German comic opera, for which he chose as his subject Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It was premièred at the Hofoper, Berlin, on March 9, 1849, and was an immediate success. In its first sixty years of existence it was performed 250 times in Berlin alone, and it remains Nicolai’s only enduring work.

Although he composed several operettas, Johann Strauss Jr. composed only one opera, his *Ritter Pásmán*. Based on a Hungarian narrative poem, it should come as no surprise that Strauss infused the

score with elements of the Gypsy music that was so dear to him. The third act of the opera features a ballet sequence of native Hungarian dances, including a polka, ballabile, waltz, and a **Czárdás**, the brisk folk-dance style that is still a staple of Romani folk bands throughout Europe. The fact that the this dance did not yet exist in the fourteenth century, the time period in which the opera was set, was an anachronism that did not seem to trouble Strauss. Although the opera was unsuccessful, its Czárdás has become a concert hall favorite that has been regularly programmed in the Vienna Philharmonic New Year's programs since Clemens Krauss's first program in 1939.

Composed after an 1858 tour of Russia, Johann Strauss Jr.'s **Tritsch-Tratsch Polka** immediately became one of his most beloved works. Almost since its inception, speculation has abounded as to the meaning of the title. The most common translation is "chit-chat," leading to the assumption that the work alludes to the Viennese proclivity for gossip. But other theories abound, including one that posits that the title refers to Strauss's first wife's beloved poodle, who was given the name Tritsch-Tratsch. Regardless of the source of the title, this "polka schnell" (fast polka) remains one of Strauss's most popular polkas.

Johann Strauss Jr. was so successful in the genre of the waltz that it took considerable coaxing from French composer Jacques Offenbach and Strauss's own wife to convince him to venture into operetta in 1874. Strauss had been unsuccessful in his previous attempts at music theatre, but in *Die Fledermaus* his efforts seemed to be charmed, as the operetta was an immediate success and has been part of the regular repertoire ever since. The overture has been one of the most frequently featured works on New Year's programs since its first appearance in 1939.

There is no waltz more famous or associated with the Strauss family's Vienna than *An der schönen blauen Donau* (**On the Beautiful Blue Danube**). Played at midnight on all Austrian public airwaves, it is the unofficial anthem of that country, and it traditionally appears as an encore for every Vienna New Year's concert. All this for a work that was barely noticed at its première performance! Originally scored for men's voices and orchestra, Strauss reworked it as an instrumental-only feature for the 1867 Paris World's Fair, and it is this version that is most commonly played these days. In a touching homage to The Waltz King, when Johannes Brahms was asked by Strauss's stepdaughter for an autograph, he jotted down the opening measures of this waltz along with the comment, "Leider nicht von Johannes Brahms" ("Alas! not by Johannes Brahms.")

The final customary encore of every New Year's concert is Johann Strauss Sr.'s rousing **Radetzky March**. Composed for Field Marshal Joseph Radetzky von Radetz in 1848, its initial popularity was evident among the soldiers who rhythmically clapped their hands and stomped their feet whenever they heard this music, a tradition lovingly continued by modern Viennese audiences.