

## Die Fledermaus Program Notes

*Die Fledermaus* was composed by Johann Strauss II in six short weeks in 1873 and had its premiere six months later on April 5 1874. The story was adapted from the comic play *Das Gefängnis (The Prison)* written by Roderich Benedix in 1851. The play was first adapted by French writers Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy as a comedy in three acts titled *Le Réveillon (The Party)* in 1872. Following the success of the French adaptation the Viennese Theater an der Wien purchased the rights and commissioned Johann Strauss II to set it to music. Johann Strauss II also known as the Waltz King comes from a very successful musical family. His father Johann Strauss is credited as a significant figure in bringing the waltz to popularity in Vienna. Although Johann Strauss Jr. had already composed two operettas by this time, *Die Fledermaus* is by far his most famous and enduring stage work. *Die Fledermaus* was not an immediate success in Vienna, possibly due to the stock market crash of the previous year lessening the number of extravagant balls. However, the opera shortly gained much acclaim throughout Europe, especially in Germany where it had over 170 performances by 1880. Today *Die Fledermaus* continues to be a staple in opera houses across the globe with frequent productions being mounted at the Metropolitan Opera, Volksoper Wien, and Bayerische Staatsoper.

I am playing Gabriel von Eisenstein in Opera McGill's production of *Die Fledermaus*. Although the role was premiered by Jani Szika a tenor, Eisenstein is famously played by either tenor or baritone, which is due to the range/tessitura of the role. When discussing the range of a role we are discussing the highest and lowest notes sung by a character in an entire opera. When discussing tessitura we are looking at the the range within which most notes of a vocal part fall. The range for Eisenstein is from C3 to A4 while the tessitura is C4 to G4. While the range is similar to that of a high baritone role it is the tessitura that proves challenging for baritones and tenors alike. In my preparation of Gabriel von Eisenstein for Opera McGill's production of *Die Fledermaus* I have had to rethink my approach to both singing and acting. Ever since I

transitioned to tenor at the start of this school year I have been focused on reworking my approach to high notes. However this challenging role has forced me to rework my entire voice and not just the upper register of my voice. To be specific I have been focusing on lightening the amount of chest voice used above my passaggio, not “digging” on notes below E3, and keeping a low larynx with tall narrow vowels. I have no choice but to focus on all of these in nearly every scene Eisenstein is in. This year in major houses in Vienna, Toronto, London, and New York Eisenstein is played by a tenor. However, this year at houses in Berlin, Tokyo, and Cardiff Eisenstein is being played by a baritone.

Gabriel von Eisenstein is a wealthy man and member of the elite in Austrian society. However he is a self made man, making his own fortune and not inheriting it, which makes him a member of the nouveau riche. This is apparent in his use of an expensive lady’s watch to try and seduce women during the second act of the operetta. Further examples of his low class behavior are from his first entrance in Act One where he furiously screams at his lawyer and wife, shamelessly skips his jail sentence to party, and impersonates his own lawyer to confront Alfred and Rosalinda.

On top of the vocal challenges this role has presented I have also been challenged to find a new physicality on stage. Over the past few months I have been working hard on my stagecraft, specifically how to physically present a character on stage with a new poise and sophistication that I do not embody in my everyday life. Being assistant director for Alcina helped me study this in others and now this role has given me the opportunity to explore different physical choices on stage. From the way I walk to how closely I interact with the other actors on stage I have had to rethink every physical action. I have gotten a good head start on exploring these new aspects of my craft from working on Eisenstein, I plan to continue to work on my stage movements and always seek to refine my vocal technique.

*The program notes are written by the student performing, and are presented by the student in partial fulfilment of the requirements of their course.*

*Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.*