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Re: Program notes

SP

Stefano Algieri, Prof.

Mon 1/23, 5:42 PM

Aaron Murphy



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Hi Aaron,

Terrific! I approve this.

Have fun at this evening's Rehearsal. I'll be there tomorrow evening and Wednesday, as well as the performances.

Best regards,
Prof. Algieri

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From: Aaron Murphy
Sent: Monday, January 23, 2017 3:29:45 PM
To: Stefano Algieri, Prof.
Subject: Re: Program notes

Hi Professor,

Thanks for the feedback! I've attached a revised version, with the most significant changes being a new opening paragraph and revision of the 5th paragraph. I may have been a bit too vague on some of the compositional aspects, so let me know if I need to keep working!

Cheers,

Aaron Murphy

From: Stefano Algieri, Prof.
Sent: Monday, January 23, 2017 2:14:55 PM
To: Aaron Murphy
Subject: Re: Program notes

Date du récital/Date of recital: 27 January 2017

Nom/Name: Aaron Murphy

Classe de/Class of: Stefano Algieri

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.

Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) remains the name most closely linked with the musical heritage of 19th-century Viennese composition, particularly of popular waltzes and the then-emerging genre of operetta. Beginning its rise in the 1830s and 40s as operatic productions began to increase in mounting and transport costs, operetta provided a lighter, less serious alternative for entertainment and gave Strauss a wider avenue for his searing commentary on the sociopolitical climate of his Vienna. Although not his first stage work, *Die Fledermaus* was his first to be performed outside the Habsburg Empire, enjoying its German premiere in Munich shortly after its 1874 Vienna premiere. *Die Fledermaus* is one such work that encapsulates the trademark Romantic Viennese sound: characterized heavily by infectious waltzes, rich orchestration and easily memorable standalone numbers that stay in the ear long after the curtain falls. This sound as we know of it carried much more weight in Strauss' life than perhaps it was meant to, but a deeply troubled and divided Vienna needed patch of common ground, and this idyllic sound and the emotions it carried provided just that.

Vienna during Johann Strauss II's life was the cultural and economic center of the Habsburg Empire which at the time consisted of Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Slovakia and parts of the Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania. During the majority of his working life, Vienna saw explosive population growth of nearly 4% per year during the 1840s and 50s with most of these migrants coming from within the empire itself. The major shift in migration coincided with the demolition of the old city walls and the completion of the *Ringstrasse*, a large promenade in almost the same spot as the walls that soon became the Viennese equivalent of the Champs-Élysées. But such radical change wasn't necessarily easy to adopt for natives and migrants alike, as the influx of new citizens and ambitious construction and urban revitalization projects brought with them new ways of doing business, new languages, new faiths and new fears for the loss of what it meant to live in Vienna.

Even though they were one united people under the law, the peoples of the Habsburg empire that coalesced in the city found their differences to be nearly insurmountable, with fierce nationalism (including anti-Semitism in the late 1880s) spreading from northern Europe among the student and younger German-speaking circles and eventually finding its way into politics and general society by the early 1870s. With the rise of nationalism, the stock market crash of 1873 and the rapid overcrowding in the city came a new wave of nostalgia for a way of Viennese life that frankly never really existed, referred to as *Alt-Wien*. Since the migrants were from vastly different backgrounds, a sense of comradeship and singular cultural identity amongst themselves never really formed and each resident became enraptured with this rose-tinted portrait of their beloved city and all it represented. When presented with profound change of environment and opposition from the established German-speaking Viennese, the charming

ideals of a “bygone era” were incredibly appealing and inspired them to stay and make a concerted effort and immersion. The *Alt-Wien* ideals also appealed to the native Catholic Viennese, who in general were worried that the heritage their city carried was en route to being lost forever.

So, what did *Alt-Wien* mean to natives and migrants alike? The common thread was the idea of what the city should be - moral, modest, educated and the elite capital of the empire. By idealizing the sentimentality and nostalgia of what was perceived as endangered culture, the focus and blame could shift from the self to the nameless “other” – for natives, the migrants and for migrants, the heartless social and commercial elite that prevented them from assimilation into this beloved fictional society. This divide was further widened by differences in both language and religion, with the area of present-day Austria being both a German-speaking and Catholic region. The majority of migrants were of either Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism or Judaism and a vast array of both major Slavic and eastern European languages and their respective unique dialects. The feeling that the German language and the Catholic faith were set to disappear horrified the Viennese and fueled their interest in anything that evoked *Alt-Wien*.

This sentimentality and nostalgia was both characterized and caricatured by the music, particularly the waltzes, of Johann Strauss II. Dubbed “the Waltz King,” his output of popular dances numbered nearly 500, with 152 being the ubiquitous waltz. With the runaway success of his waltz *An der schönen, blauen Donau*, a market immediately sprung forward for music that stirred the mind’s desire for *Alt-Wien* life while subtly yet unashamedly satirizing it. Strauss quickly became a master of placating the city with beautiful, truly Viennese music that gave the listener a sense of both pride and escape from the “diluted” way of life they left at the door of the hall. In his music, each listener had a place and the chance to be a true Viennese citizen, if even for a short dance. With the advent of operetta becoming the preferred genre of musical drama, Strauss could now put a face to the various elements that made up both *Alt-Wien* and everyday Vienna and turned a mirror to his audience from which no one in the room could hide.

In *Die Fledermaus* in particular, we see a cross-section of mid-19th century Viennese life: the social elite of Vienna behaving in manners that fly directly in the face of *Alt-Wien*, migrants attempting to adapt to unrealistic ideals and the average citizen attempting to balance the realities of life and human nature with the expectations upon them as the guardians of Viennese character and livelihood. The character of Frank, the prison warden, stands out as the most true-to-form example of the average native Viennese citizen striving for *Alt-Wien* with any modicum of success in the 1870s and his diametrically opposed yet realistic equal, the maid Adele, embodies that of the aspirational migrant doing all she can to live the traditional Viennese life. In these two characters we see the polar ends of the spectrum of Viennese citizens - the idealistic citizen and the challenging yet harmless “other.”

In the middle ground between fictional idealism and honest effort are found the other characters in their own messes. In the humorous and embarrassing situations in which they either find themselves or create is found the scathing social commentary that only Strauss the younger can devise and execute with such charming grace. The inherent messiness of the characters of Eisenstein, Rosalinde, Alfred and Falke is a caricature of the messiness of the social elite in Vienna. Beneath the charming and gilded exterior of the “golden era” of Viennese

life lies the truth of human nature and drive that, despite the best of intentions and effort, finds the cracks in the facade through which to shine. But, given Strauss' rapport with the city, authentic Viennese sound and his mastery of satire, this work does not incense or offend and instead lightly prods with a knowing wink and endears itself to the listener that sees a reflection of themselves on stage.

While the evasive paradise of *Alt-Wien* was never realized and the cultural problems plaguing fin-du-siècle Vienna only worsened through the turn of the century, Strauss' work remained a source of idealistic unity and national pride throughout the empire. Over time, the cultural context has become less relevant as works have gained their own footing as standalone pieces of art, and the extra-musical "scaffolding," as Karl Czerny calls it, has fallen away. We are left with a portrait of what is now truly a bygone era in terms of sensibility and style, but the realities of human nature and error remain.