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Die Fledermaus

The year is 1874. Beautiful Vienna and its empire is still shaken by the catastrophic stock market crash of May 1873 where many fortunes were lost. Luxurious all-night parties suddenly became rare, but that is not the case in *die Fledermaus*. This operetta is a two hour and a half journey of very real but intense characters that go from ballroom to jail, all of them intoxicated by champagne. In a sense, we could say that *Die Fledermaus* embodies both a reminiscence and a biting satire of those past follies.

Johann Strauss II is almost 50 years old. He has been in the shadow of his father for a long time, but no more. He is now the Waltz King and the better Johann Strauss in the eyes of many Austrians. In his lifetime he composed more than 500 waltzes including the most famous of all; the Blue Danube. His waltzes were played at every ball all over the continent. And since waltzes were so very popular in central Europe, he was an actual star! Another style has been in vogue in the musical world in the last few decades: operetta -and especially those of Jacques Offenbach-. Operetta was a typical French style and since there had been many wars between Austria and France, the austrians were not so keen on French music and were anxious to have homegrown music for the theater. This is when Johann decided to try his hand at operetta. He eventually decided to dedicate himself completely to theater music. His first operetta (Indigo

und die vierzig Räuber) was premiered in 1871. By the end of his life he had written fifteen operettas and one opera.

Johann Strauss composed *Die Fledermaus* (his third operetta) in 43 inspired days; from October 1873 to February 1874. Ironically, the libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée was adapted from a French Vaudeville by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy called *Le Réveillon*. It is said that this vaudeville was first and foremost a loose adaptation of a German stage comedy by Roderich Benedix called *Das Gefängnis* and this was enough for the Austrians to erase all French merit to the operetta. *Die Fledermaus* was premiered on April 5th, 1874 at the Theater an der Wien. It was an instant success and within a few months it had been played in many different countries and languages.

The score contains some of the most famous arias in the vocal repertoire and is full of irresistible melodies and dances. Strauss embodied well the essence of each character in the arias by giving them very different and sometimes even comical musical gestures. For example, Adele's arias are full of life, of words and of extremes. To illustrate her young age and her bubbly personality we can also find in *Mein Herr Marquis* and in *Spiel ich die Unschuld* many staccatos and high notes. But however catchy the arias are, a lot of them are very vocally demanding. *Die Fledermaus's* success is not only due to the music but also to the libretto. Haffner and Genée wrote a libretto that is funny, witty and full of very relatable characters. Even in 2017, it is easy to put ourselves in Adele's shoes; she is just a young girl with big dreams. She actually just wants to be a movie star and since she does not have a lot of money she is forced to work as a maid in some rich family. Many Hollywood movies have this exact same

plot. Even the rich prince Orlofsky and his constant boredom is still relevant and brings forth a question often asked: Does having a lot of money truly bring happiness? Thanks to a memorable musical score and a well written comical libretto, it is difficult to watch *Die Fledermaus* without smiling, dancing and laughing.

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.