



## Straussmania: Popculture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The multimedia project Straussmania, beginning in December 2022, is dedicated to the places and protagonists of popular culture of the 19th century. In individual chapters, Straussmania tells of remarkable venues throughout the districts of Vienna such as the New World (Neue Welt) in Hietzing, Sperl in Leopoldstadt, and the Apollo Hall (Apollosaal) in Schottenfeld. All of the visited locations appropriately vibrate in three-quarter time because they are connected to the music of the Strauss family and their contemporaries. Straussmania is a joint project of ORF.at, the Vienna Institute for Cultural and Contemporary History ([vicca.at](http://vicca.at)) and the Library of Vienna.

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## Contemporary History Sketches of the Ball of the City of Vienna

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It was to take nineteen years before the distinguished “Citizens' Ball”, which premiered in 1872 in the presence of Emperor Franz Joseph, moved from the *Redoutensaal* of the Vienna Hofburg to the newly built City Hall as the “Ball of the City of Vienna”. Quite deliberately, the increasingly self-confident bourgeoisie symbolically stood up to the “court balls” and the particularly exclusive aristocratic “court balls”. Joining this progressive trend at the opening on February 1, 1890 were Carl Michael Zierer, who composed the Viennese Citizen (*Wiener Bürger*) waltz (op. 419), and Johann Strauss with his City Hall Ball Dances (*Rathaus-Ball-Tänzen*) (op. 439). The Strauss band and the band of the infantry regiment *Hoch- und Deutschmeister* No. 4 greatly inspired the imperial highnesses Archduke Wilhelm and Duke Ernst Augst of Cumberland. The net profit from the balls was used for needy citizens relief, amounting to 13,314 guilders in 1896, for example. According to Habsburg family statute, archdukes received about 45,000 guilders appanage per year (today, about 800,000 euros), archduchesses 24,000 guilders. The emperor's brothers and sons received 75,000 guilders, daughters and sisters 42,000 guilders. In comparison, a University of Vienna professor of the lowest salary grade earned 3,200 guilders, which did not include collegiate allowances of as much as 1,000 guilders.

Even in the newly built Vienna City Hall, however, the splendor of the aristocracy and officers was not renounced. Instead, their presence ensured that this ball was not to be converted for revolutionary democratic purposes. The emerging Social-Democratic workers' movement of 1868 began utilizing the Viennese Workers' Ball for its own political purposes. It hosted more than 3,000 visitors in the Flower Halls of the Horticultural Society, with even some ministers taking part; only the emperor did not accept an invitation. Later, this ball was held in the Schwender Colosseum (*Schwender Kolloseum*) located at Mariahilferstrasse 189, where Palais Arnstein once stood. Attendees danced and sang boisterously in their best garb and, in the case of men, “with a most beautiful fiery red tie,” though this repeatedly prompted intervention by police censors. For example, in 1889 authorities banned Mendelssohn's song Oath of Free Men (*Schwur freier Männer*). Despite this intervention, the playing of the *Marseillaise* and the Song of Labor were oft repeated. The new city hall, on the other hand, remained closed to workers; their ball was not permitted to take place there.

In the early 19th century, law enforcement was not comfortable with the ostentatious promotion of ball productions by the authoritarian state, and repeatedly requested to intervene in an orderly manner. Thus, in 1816 even house balls had to be made open to the public, with a fee paid to the arts and entertainment commission “of 15 kreutzer for each musician”. Greek Catholics

and Jews were forbidden to host balls during Catholic periods of fasting. More strict moral guardians were agitated by alleged “shameless women” who were “running and jumping through the hall with small whips in their hands, striking the men they meet...jumping on their backs and letting themselves be carried through the hall” – resulting in “sinful engagements”, as “only such dances of an impudent manner could create”. Men, on the other hand, were portrayed as poor victims - typical of the zeitgeist of the time, but one that can certainly be found then.

The situation was much more off-putting at court balls, to which often circa 3,000 guests were often invited. The imperial court music director Carl Michael Zierer said that “it was a posh affair (*a spreitze Sach*)” like most prestigious balls. It was a grand affair, but no one warmed up to it. Gentlemen stood on one side of the hall, ladies on the other, like painted dolls, and both had to wait an eternity before the signal was given for the first dance.”

In the Habsburg Monarchy remaining public balls were open to all strata of society. The wealthier and nobler families, on the other hand, organized their own social and house balls exclusively for themselves. In any case, the Citizens' Ball in the Redouten Hall was a highlight of the ball season. Similar open-society balls included the Ball of Industrial Societies, the Journalists' and Writers' Association Concordia, and, the Doctors', Technicians' and Architects' Ball, which were held in the Redouten Hall or the Hall at the Sophia Spa or Diana Spa, respectively.

In short order, aggressive polemical criticism by some newspapers targeted the Ball of the City of Vienna. During the period of liberal mayors, German nationalist newspapers fiercely antagonized ball goers – including liberal citizens and stigmatized their newspapers as “Jewish press” – in turn attacking Jewish ball attendees as well. They wrote of the “Semitic Atmosphere” (“*Semitic Colorite*”) of the “Purimball”. Behind this unfounded accusation lies the anti-Semitic idea that hatred and violence against non-Jews were preached during this ball in memory of the salvation of the Persian Jews (Purim). At the same time that the alleged snubbing of Christians was denounced, there were claims that “German nationalism (*Deutschthum*) was being suppressed out by Poles, young Czechs and Hungarians, while the Israeli press jumps for joy”.

Social Democrats, in turn, criticized Christian Socialist Mayor Karl Lueger and his “prestigious party” which did not shy away from anti-Semitic undercurrents in their criticism of capitalism: “The balance of wealth, splendor and vanity under the scepter of the “people's man” is not less than at the time when the ball of the city of Vienna was still a rallying point of the Jewish financial world. Expressions have changed but the faces have remained the same. Once a somewhat covetous person goes through the long lily of the high noble patronesses then it's on to the even much longer receiving line of factory owners and millionaires' sons”.

Following free elections in 1919, Social Democrats replaced the Christian Social Party as the governing power. Against the backdrop of the atrocities of the First World War, the terrible social and economic consequences of the city of Vienna – all still in the midst of the Spanish Flu – the Ball of the City of Vienna no longer fit into the ascetic political concept of top Social Democratic officials. Soon, thereafter, there was a move to revive workers' balls in certain places and federal states.

After the dismantling of parliamentary democracy via the 1933 contravention of the constitution, the civil war of February 1934, plus, through the ban on social democracy, the authoritarian Christian Social city administration under Mayor Richard Schmitz reintroduced the ball tradition on February 7, 1935. The illegal workers' newspaper strongly criticized this development: “Of all things, at the time of remembrance of Dollfuss' bloody demise, one year after proletarians fighting for their rights were bled to death, hanged and imprisoned, they want to celebrate the Ball of the City of Vienna as a celebration of triumph over the citizens of Vienna! They want to dance in wild fury on the volcano of Vienna, as it commemorates its dead!” The ball took place in the presence of chancellor-dictator Kurt Schuschnigg as well as

many ministers, plus, Archduke Eugene (of Austria-Teschen). A net profit of circa 100,000 schilling was raised by this ball for charitable purposes.

The Ball of the City of Vienna was opened for the 27th time on February 3, 1938. The opening featured a sea of flowers with “5,000 flowering plants, 3,000 magnificent palms, 3,000 laurel trees and 1,000 ivy canes; with the Festive Polonaise by a Young Ladies' and Young Gentlemen's Committee under the direction of Calvary Captain (ret.) Willibald “Willy” Elmayer-Vestenbrugg. At the same time, Adolf Hitler had long since decided in favor of the *Anschluss* of Austria. Against this background, the top representatives of the chancellor's dictatorship closed their eyes to political reality and danced into the abyss.

Often concealed in various brief historic accounts of societal balls is the fact that the Nazi regime also continued the standard ball tradition and tried to maintain the “Viennese sentiment” in 1939. The persecution, exploitation and expulsion of Jews of Vienna had long since begun with all its brutality, unbelievable harshness and treachery. Carnival parades also included aggressive incitement against Jews. Even without an explicit ban, Jews were excluded from Viennese balls. At the City Hall Balls, an astonishing artistic world was conveyed with “crowded boxes and galleries framed by the richest tasteful floral decorations”. Nazi mayor Neubacher dedicated this ball to the “poor” with 1,000 needy Viennese families each receiving 10 Reichsmark. The ballet of the Vienna State Opera performed in medieval dress. Calvary Captain (*Rittmeister*) Elmayer continuously practiced for perfection. In addition to the floral decorations, 30 upholsterers and 20 seamstresses processed 500 meters of artificial silk, 300 meters of gold cord and 500 meters of gold ribbon for the decoration of the People’s Hall (*Volkshalle*).

A few months later, in September 1939, the aggressive attack on Poland triggered World War II. Illusions of hosting balls disappeared, having been engulfed in the horrors of war and the Holocaust.

The Science Ball, to be hosted for the 4th time in 2018, was equally aware of the unjust and prejudice history of balls at City Hall as it was of the fact that these balls can be politically and publicly functionalized, thus misused as a tool of prejudice and racism. Against this background, the central message of the ball: “Fun with decency – dance with attitude” has even more weight and meaning.