



Straussmania: Popculture of the 19th 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) and the Library of Vienna.

Eduard Strauss I – Two Tours of America with the Strauss Orchestra

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Concert tour 1890

'In 1890 I got my first engagement to tour with my orchestra through the United States of America (excluding California),' Eduard Strauss I (1835–1916) writes in his *Erinnerungen* (Memoirs), which were published in Vienna in 1906.

During a concert tour of Germany Eduard Strauss got to know the American concert agent David Blakely. After lengthy negotiations a contract was signed at the end of February 1890: concerts and matinees were to be given in more than 70 towns and cities in the north-east of the USA and Canada with the Strauss Orchestra (42 musicians and three assistants) between May and December 1890. In particular, regular events were to be held on the newly opened Madison Square Garden in New York.

Eduard enjoyed a warm and attentive reception when he arrived in New York on 13 May. He went on immediately to Boston, where he gave his first concert the following day, 14 May. It was a great success: when the orchestra played music by the Strauss dynasty, especially waltzes, they were unbeatable. That was always the tenor of the newspaper reviews, while the arrangements of 'classical' compositions, for example by Liszt or Wagner, were repeatedly the target of criticism.

It was hard labour to perform one or two concerts every day from 14 May to 16 June, and then again daily from 15 September to 5 December, and to do so in some 70 to 80 locations, together with the journeys from one venue to another. Nevertheless the tour was a great success.

The world can be deceived: in Eduard's memoirs, published in Vienna in 1906, there is a photo which claims to show the Strauss Orchestra beside the Niagara Falls. However, the formal way in which he and his orchestra are dressed in such a setting looks rather strange.

Image 1: Eduard Strauss (middle of fourth row, standing) and the Strauss Orchestra beside the Niagara Falls. In: Eduard Strauss, *Erinnerungen*. Vienna, 1906. (Private collection Rubey)

There is another photo as a souvenir of the 1890 tour, supposedly taken in a saloon car of an American railroad at the time, showing the impresario Mr Blakely, his daughter sitting opposite him, on the left a secretary at her typewriter, with Eduard in charge at the narrow end of the long table, with his secretary and his chef beside him. Eduard is dressed in exactly the same way as in the photo beside the Niagara Falls.

But things get even better in another photo. This shows Strauss and Blakely beside the Niagara Falls with the two ladies, that is to say Blakely's daughter and the typist. They are both dressed in exactly the same way as in the railway car; even their jewellery is the same, but they have their hats on.

Quod erat demonstrandum: at least two of the three photos must have been taken before a backdrop in an American photographer's studio.

Concert tour 1900/01

'In autumn 1899 the contract was signed according to which I was to give a daily concert with my orchestra in North America from 22 October 1900 to 12 February 1901.' New York, Montreal, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh, Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Omaha, Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis, Cleveland and Baltimore were just some of the stops on this tour, which in general was given a positive reception, with Eduard being seen as an ambassador for Viennese music in America, especially the music of his family.

Towards the end of the tour Eduard injured his shoulder in a railway accident and could only conduct with his left hand. He was thus with a feeling of relief that, on the day after his final concert in New York on 12 February 1901, he disbanded the Strauss Orchestra, which his father had founded in 1827. Now, at the age of 65, he could retire. He had been able to provide for his retirement once again, especially thank to the proceeds from the American tour, after his two sons had blackmailed his wife Marie into misappropriating virtually his entire fortune to cover their debts. Eduard subsequently broke off all contact with them, and had his wife's affairs placed in the hands of a guardian.

Literature:

.) Eduard Strauss, *Erinnerungen*. Vienna, 1906.

.) Leigh Bailey, *Eduard Strauss: The Third Man of the Strauss Family*. Vienna, 2017.