



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.

Biography of Eduard Strauss

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His name is almost always only mentioned only together with those of his brothers Johann and Josef, and then only in a modest third place. This is not just because he was the youngest, but above all it expresses the place which the history of music has assigned to him when it assesses the three brothers. Despite this third place Eduard's dashing polkas are welcome items on concert programmers, but when it comes to the top genre of Viennese dance music, the waltz, a delicate polka française or a lilting polka mazurka, the preference is for a piece by Johann or Josef.

However, justified this verdict may seem to be, who really knows all those compositions of Eduard's at which people tend to turn their noses up? It is certainly the case that in the opinion of his contemporaries, especially in Vienna, Eduard took third place behind his brothers. However, could this be due to the fact that dance music in general, whether performed to fulfil its original function or in the concert hall, had, by the time that Eduard was conducting the Strauss Orchestra, lost the social status that it had enjoyed in earlier decades?

One thing is certain: Eduard Strauss was not an innovator who led dance music along new paths. His compositions show solid craftsmanship, but he did not provide any new stimulus for the waltz, nor did he take up the new dances from North and South America that took Europe by storm towards the end of his career. By nature, he was conservative through and through, and he had his principles, also – in contrast to his brothers – with regard to political and social issues. For example, he despised the Hungarians, while having nothing but sympathy for the German Empire and its citizens. In addition, he was deeply rooted in the Catholic faith.

Eduard Strauss was born in Vienna, in the Leopoldstadt suburb, on 15 March 1835, nearly ten years after brother Johann and eight after Josef. At the time of his birth his father Johann was also about to become the father of an illegitimate child, and so Eduard never experienced a peaceful relationship between his parents. He was fourteen years old when Johann Strauss I died, and from that time at the latest his upbringing was entirely in the hands of his mother Anna. It was his older brothers who had to ensure the family income, especially Johann, already established as a director of music. Eduard contemplated a career as a diplomat, but his mother, certainly not without an ulterior motive, made sure that he received a solid musical education. He was to learn the violin, piano and harp; in the case of the harp there was a shortage of good performers. However, when offered a position as a harpist in Germany, he apparently felt that his nerves could not cope, even though he later clearly overcame any such problems. In any case, there were plenty of other opportunities at home within the family business.

The next step was thus Eduard Strauss's debut as a harpist in the Strauss Orchestra in 1855. In 1861 he made his first appearance as a conductor and violinist standing in front of the orchestra at a 'Monster Ball' in the Sofiensaal establishment in Vienna at which each of the three Strauss brothers conducted his own orchestra. A year later, when Johann broke off his annual summer season as a guest conductor in Pavlovsk near St Petersburg, apparently because of illness, Josef was dispatched to Russia to take his place. Johann then returned to Vienna, got married and went on his honeymoon. It was thus now Eduard who had to take charge of the Strauss Orchestra and its activities. By the end of the year, he had presented his first composition, having meanwhile reached a professional level in music theory.

Now fully integrated into the family business, in 1863 Eduard married Maria Klenkhart, the daughter of the proprietor of a café and once a friend of his father's. His first journey abroad took him to Pavlovsk in 1865. There he stood in for Johann for the first half of the season, conducting an orchestra assembled by his brother. The following years saw the births of his sons Johann and Josef, who were later to cause him a great deal of trouble.

The next step in Eduard's career came in 1870, when Josef died unexpectedly, and Johann devoted himself to composing operettas. He now took on sole responsibility for the Strauss Orchestra. Just two years later he was granted the title of *Hofballmusikdirektor* (Director of Music for Court Balls), which his father and brother Johann had held previously. A new feature of his programme was a weekly Sunday afternoon concert in the newly opened Musikverein hall. These concerts enjoyed great popularity. While Johann appeared occasionally as a conductor at them only in order to present his own compositions, Eduard, keeping up the tradition of the Strauss Orchestra, always provided a programme with both light and more serious music.

As the years passed, the civilian orchestras came increasingly to feel the competition from the military bands, who were paid by the state and had reached a high level of performance in orchestral music. The Strauss Orchestra was no exception. Eduard reacted by going on concert tours, but this initially led to a crisis, because many of his musicians did not want to lose the other lucrative engagements they had in Vienna. At this point Carl Michael Ziehrer, who had just given up his post as a military bandmaster, quickly took over as their conductor and chose 'Former Eduard Strauss Orchestra' as the ensemble's name. Strauss took the matter to court and had the use of that name forbidden. Shortly afterwards Ziehrer was able to take up a personal invitation to conduct in Bucharest, and after a summer tour of Germany and Sweden as a guest conductor, Eduard Strauss was able to reconstitute the Strauss Orchestra. By his own account he then went on to perform with it in 840 towns and cities on two continents. Over more than two decades he made many tours of Germany; there were also three visits to London, and he went further afield, to North America in 1890 and St Petersburg in 1894.

In 1897 Eduard Strauss was thinking of retiring, but he then learned that behind his back his two sons had spent their way through more or less his entire fortune and that this misappropriation had been made possible by his wife. He immediately broke with his family and saw himself forced to continue his career. He also resumed his concert tours. The climax and final tour was a second journey to America, which took him as far as the west coast of the United States. Shortly before the planned end of the tour his shoulder was injured in a serious railway accident; as a result, he was unable to play the violin and only able to conduct with his left hand. On 13 February 1901 he wound up the Strauss Orchestra in the seventy-fourth year of its existence and withdrew to private life, not without bitterness. In 1902 he had the instruments of the Strauss Orchestra put up for auction; in 1906 he published his memoirs, which document his successes but also his disappointments.

Towards the end of 1906 his elder son Johann was given a week's prison sentence for culpable bankruptcy. He had already had to give up his career as a civil servant when he was investigated for financial irregularities, subsequently trying to keep up the family tradition as a director of music. He even composed an operetta, *Katze und Maus* (Cat and Mouse), performed in Vienna in 1898, but his musical activities were dogged by misfortune. He was, however, invited to provide the music for balls at the imperial court from 1901, probably thanks to his illustrious family name. Johann hoped to be granted the title of *Hofballmusikdirektor*, but all contact with the court ended abruptly with his prison sentence. In 1907 the prestigious title was awarded to Carl Michael Ziehrer, and Johann Strauss III moved to Berlin.

After his return from America Eduard compiled and had printed a catalogue of the music in the Strauss Orchestra's archive. He was still thinking of selling it; he is even supposed to have offered it to his son. The plan failed, because nobody was prepared to take the whole archive, and so Eduard had all the musical material incinerated. When asked what had ultimately made him commit this act of wanton destruction, he replied by referring to a clause in the contract that he and Josef had negotiated when they took over the Strauss Orchestra. But why hadn't this argument become compelling at a much earlier date? Was the real reason to be found in the injurious way that he had so often been treated and that had affected him more and more deeply? Or was it the problems that might be expected to arise because of all the archive's unpublished arrangements of works by other composers in the wake of new copyright laws that drove him to such an act? The loss of such valuable and irreplaceable cultural material will remain a source of infinite regret.