



## 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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## Straussmania: Pop culture before 1900

### Gerald Heidegger and Oliver Rathkolb

Our image of the Biedermeier era is slightly distorted. It is not completely true that the era of the authoritarian state Chancellor Metternich only led us to retreat into a private sphere when one considers the music played in public. Even before the revolution of 1848, a popular culture was emerging in the imperial capital and royal seat of Vienna that was supported by new dance music. Instead of being barricaded in the dark at home, thousands joined in the movement. This revolution was founded not least by the Strauss family, but also by Lanner, Ziehrer and many other creative musicians.

Present day pop culture was already visible in the concerts by the Strausses. Venues of that time were at least as large as current locations. Straussmania, in its 31 chapters, tells of the lost venues of popular culture in Vienna. Joseph Lanner and Carl Michael Ziehrer - and ultimately the Strauss family - reset the playing field of popular music culture and developed the waltz as the driving force of a new form of entertainment. Using his experience as an innkeeper, Johann Strauss senior developed his vision for professionalizing the orchestra business, and virtually becoming the nucleus of the Strauss dynasty. He also developed his music to be played in promising venues: People enjoyed reliable quality entertainment – they took new dance and song styles home, embodied them and spread them further.

In the 19th century, the publishing business produced sheet music, with cover images of recognizable brands, what was later known as LP or CD albums. Dancing in public not only led one out of the dark and into the light – but also led to the resumption of harmonious physical connections. Everything that constitutes pop culture today was thus shaped in the 19th century: the financing of bands, their concerts and also business deals for their own music – plus the dissemination of the great pieces, including classical music, to a wide audience.

### 31 chapters on places that have disappeared

Throughout December, in the run-up to the New Year's concert, Straussmania will tell the story of the unusual, even crazy, places in which 19th-century popular culture took root. Dance music was to be heard in even very small pubs - but also in venues such the Lerchenfeld, where ten thousand guests had something akin to their own “town hall.” For example, Josef Lanner and Johann Strauss senior played almost daily, and there were a number of other bandmasters with their orchestras who multiplied the musical offerings. Vienna's booming population, which had quintupled to over two million between 1830 and 1914, enthusiastically embraced this cultural force. “A pop idol of the 19th century” is what Anton Mayer called Johann Strauss junior in

his cultural history of the Strauss family's rise and success. "Had music distribution and royalty payments that are common today existed in the 19th century, Johann Strauss would have effortlessly equaled or surpassed the mega-stars and pop icons of our time, indeed he would have become the pop idol par excellence," wrote Mayer in his late 1990s book, at a time which could not yet fathom a platform like Spotify.

### **A new look at the Strauss universe**

Now it's time for a new look at Strauss and the Strausses - plus the connection between pop culture and quality standards. To do so, one must know that the difference between serious and popular music is an artificial one. One that needs to be torn down, especially in view of the Strauss family's powerful impact. This is part and parcel to Straussmania testimonials levied by Andreas Schett von Franui to Lotte de Baer, Eduard Strauss, Johanna Doderer, the Vienna Philharmonic and Stefanie Reinsperger.

In the mid-1970s, the movie director and *Enfant terrible*, Ken Russel, tried to grind, beyond all known pain thresholds, the boundary lines between entertainment and classical music in the 19th century with his surreal biographical musical comedy film "Lisztomania." The Who front man Roger Daltrey, as Franz Liszt, is at the center of a 19th-century worship of musical idols that has gotten out of hand. Richard Wagner, as the man in the sailor's cap, has the sole role of bystander in the eclectic Villa Wahnfried cinema. Straussmania picks up the frenzy of the popular again, carrying the culture of 19th century classicism back into the broad field of its creation. Readers will engage ingenious composers, daring business leaders - and great musicians. In addition, there was a woman in the background, Anna Strauss, who wanted to use her husband's success to escape their marriage. As a tough businesswoman, she also drove her sons' businesses forward.

### **Straussmania every day in December**

Straussmania is an exclusive multimedia project for the new ORF platform Topos. Through 31 daily chapters throughout December, Straussmania will present insights about the disappeared places of Viennese popular culture of the 19th century, such as the "New World" in Hietzing (Vienna's 13<sup>th</sup> district). These places are connected with the music of the Strauss family and their contemporaries. In collaboration with the newly founded Vienna Institute for Cultural and Contemporary History ([www.Vicca.at](http://www.Vicca.at)) under the direction of Oliver Rathkolb, University of Vienna, and in close cooperation with the Library of Vienna and materials from the Museum of Vienna, these vanished places will be brought back to life in the form of small chapters and with multimedia materials (images, slides overlaying yesterday and today, plus audio and video material). Combined, this will enable a historical encounter in the form of a unique experience. The Straussmania series will end with the New Year's Concert 2023, which will also be presented live and on demand on Topos.

Through the individual chapters and places of Vienna, there will be countless discoveries and multimedia encounters presented. For example, you'll hear an ensemble of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra playing a chamber concert in the legendary Villa Beer. There, where Josef Strauss once premiered, later stood one of the landmark buildings of modernism in Europe with the architectural works of Josef Frank and Oskar Wlach. With Straussmania, new, unexpected encounters take place in such locations. Flying over to the New World one will meet artists who will help us to understand that what the Strauss family meant for the 19th century equals what Wanda or Bilderbuch mean today: Musicians who, even in difficult situations, strove to bring their productions to large audiences.

## Dance music and the funeral march

The Journal of the Austrian Lloyd reported aptly in 1849 after the funeral of Johann Strauss senior: “Strauss completed what his master Lanner, who had preceded him into the afterlife by only a few years, ingeniously began. They both reformed dance music, toppled the folk dance (*Ländler*) from its height, and cut off the stately wobbling braid of the slowly tripping, coyly bending and creeping minuets. “Actually,” according to Andreas Schett von Franui to Straussmania, “all dance music comes from a beautiful funeral march - especially if you play it four times as fast.”

When the eponymous son of the older Strauss died in 1899, the grief and dismay was even greater. An epoch ended. “Yesterday at eight o'clock in the evening Johann Strauss junior died,” noted the then twenty-year-old Alma Schindler, later known as Alma Mahler-Werfel, in her diary of June 4, 1899, adding: “In my opinion an absolute classic and the greatest musical genius who ever lived.” This opinion would have been shared by many, including Richard Wagner, who, although the greatest musician in his own mind, always had an eye for the skill and impact of Johann Strauss junior’s music.

Though the expression “waltz king” (*Walzerkönig*), came from Wagner, two people put the world into a form of great ecstasy before 1900: Richard Wagner and Johann Strauss son. This phenomenon must include the entire Strauss family, since it is difficult to look at just one single person in this machinery of talent, business and megalomania that has materialized in, and through, this family since the father initially entered the brass band business. What the Strausses mastered, like few others, was the creation of music for a variety of purposes, for the big band up to the chamber orchestra. Each waltz, each polka - are in themselves symphonies of just a few minutes. “Actually,” Strauss descendant Eduard Strauss told Topos, “a waltz is a miniature work that unites many moods in a very short time - and which was often written as a counter to the mood of a time, just think of the waltz “On the beautiful blue Danube” (*An der schönen blauen Donau*) penned after the defeat by Prussia.”

## Mediator to the classical

Without fear of stirring-up the highest genres and the greatest operas, the Strauss family band popularized more than just dance music. Venues were created for these new forms of dance craze, ones with capacity for ten thousand dancers; buildings and architecture with the design to give the waltz and the dance fever of the time its own space. The risks that the Strausses took for this craze were enormous. If you want to understand the mass fever that the waltz caused, look no farther than at a father-son conflict that ensued. Look to a local venue still known today as Dommayer, but at that time was not known as the current dignified coffee house.

In Dommayer's Casino, as the popular pub was called, in the current location of the Parkhotel Schönbrunn, the 19-year-old son of Johann Strauss invited a twentyfive-piece orchestra to an evening dance (*Soirée dansante*) on October 15, 1844. At the last minute, fighting the influence of his father, the son succeeded in obtaining a license to conduct an orchestra independently; he had previously taken out a loan to finance the business at the urging of his mother Anna, who had separated from her husband the year before. Everyone came, from veteran Strauss fans, to the curious and the young.

All of Vienna knew about this conflict and everyone was eager to see how the young Strauss would prove himself. The result was ecstasy – newspapers articles gushing in their assessment of the event. “It was a great festive evening for the Viennese dance world, full of hope, desires and trembling, as if one were standing on the eve of a great battle,” wrote the poet Johann Nepomuk Vogl afterwards in the Austrian Morning Daily paper (*Österreichisches Morgenblatt*): “Strauss Jr, around whom all these hopes and fears had revolved, appeared, and with the first stroke of the bow, the thousands who stood by expectantly were reassured, even elated.”

“The relationship between father and son was always very secretive,” says Strauss descendant Eduard Strauss: “Johann Strauss senior never thought of founding a musical dynasty, he lived too much in the here and now for that.” Rather, it was his wife who wanted to achieve a certain independence from her husband through her son’s work. Therefore, she promoted “her Jean” and put him in position to do so.

The young Strauss had even more talent to take the world by storm as evidenced by the years following the legendary Dommayer evening and lasting until 1899. The fact that the son was a rebel and the father a conservative is not apparent to the last descendant: “For example, the father also played a freedom march at Casino Zögernitz - and if you look at the original version of the “Radetzky March,” you can see that it was also more dance than military music.” In any case, a new chapter in the history of the Strauss family began with the young Johann Strauss son, a chapter leading through many crazy places in Vienna and as far as Russia and the USA.

### **Strauss music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The magic of Strauss's music was still so great in 1945 that the members of the Red Army, who liberated Vienna from Nazism in 1945 and at the same time looted and raped it, decorated Johann Strauss's grave in the Central Cemetery with red roses. The Nazi regime deliberately concealed the Jewish ancestry of the Strauss family and had the marriage certificate of 1762 falsified, since great-great-grandfather Wolf Strauss, great-great-grandmother Therese and great-grandfather Johann Michael Strauss were of Jewish descent. Johann Strauss was turned into a representative of the “German dance” with anti-Semitic press claiming: “There is probably no other music that is as German and as close to the people as that of the great waltz king (*großen Walzerkönigs*).”

After the end of the war, on the other hand, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra played “Tales from the Vienna Woods” (*Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald*) by Johann Strauss as early as April 30, 1945, as a kind of Austrian liberation anthem. Following a concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which was exclusively dedicated to “Strauss music,” music critic Zeno von Liebl wrote in the daily newspaper “*Neues Österreich*,” Strauss music was “the best and most delightful symbol of Austrian serenity.” Subsequently, Strauss music, and 19th century repertoire in general, was to accompany the construction of the Austrian doctrine of innocence, i.e., the suppression of co-responsibility for World War II and the Holocaust.

This form of uncritical waltzing bliss has subsequently dissipated. The image of the Strauss family music has also given way to a much more differentiated view in the shadow of the great concerts, not only the Vienna New Year's Concert. “You can still find a lot of sweet icing in Strauss's music,” notes Volksoper director Lotte de Baer of the Netherlands. Her opera house, like that of the Vienna State Opera, has a tradition of staging “*Fledermaus*” on New Year's Eve, which is never to be underestimated any case. “In the music of Strauss, all abysses open up, without which beauty can never be had,” said de Baer, who considers the double basis of Johann Strauss junior's music a defining characteristic of Austrian culture: “This is neither positive nor negative, rather it is holistically part of this country noting that nothing is simply beautiful, nor solely abysmal.”

## LINKS

<https://www.johann-strauss.at>

[www.vicca.at](http://www.vicca.at)