

SEATTLE OPERA  
SPOTLIGHT  
2005/06 SEASON

# DIE FLEDERMAUS

## BLAME IT ON CHAMPAGNE

MUSIC BY JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.

Libretto by Carl Haffner and Richard Genée

First Performed Vienna, 1874 • Sung in English with English captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall: Evenings: 7:30 p.m. Matinees: 2:00 p.m.

Estimated Running Time: Approximately 3 hours, 15 minutes, with two intermissions

JANUARY 14, 15M, 18, 20, 21, 22M, 25, 27, AND 28, 2006

### RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

London, 1960 (Herbert von Karajan, with Waldemar Kmentt, Hilde Gueden, Erika Köth, Regina Resnik)

Philips, 1991 (André Previn, with Wolfgang Brendel, Kiri te Kanawa, Edita Gruberova, Brigitte Fassbaender)

2005/06 SEASON SPONSOR: MICROSOFT

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OFFICE OF ARTS & CULTURAL AFFAIRS, CITY OF SEATTLE



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Seattle Opera, 1999  
—Gary Smith photos

1020 JOHN STREET  
P.O. BOX 9248  
SEATTLE, WA 98109-0248  
WEB SITE: [WWW.SEATTLEOPERA.COM](http://WWW.SEATTLEOPERA.COM)  
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SEATTLE OPERA

"Seattle Opera fans have saluted stage director  
Chris Alexander with one of the company's Artist  
of the Year awards. It's the first time anyone has  
won two back-to-back Artist of the Year awards."  
—Melinda Bargreen; *Seattle Times*



SEATTLE OPERA  
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

# DIE FLEDERMAUS

## BLAME IT ON CHAMPAGNE

### LONG STORY SHORT...

The ultimate Viennese operetta: disguises, mistaken identities, practical jokes, and frothy, infectious music.

### WHO'S WHO?

**GABRIEL VON EISENSTEIN**, a wealthy banker, has a taste for champagne and a nice gold watch. At the ball, he is disguised as the French Marquis Renard.



**ROSALINDE** is Eisenstein's lovely wife. At the ball, she is disguised as a Hungarian, Countess Hunyani.

**FALKE** is Eisenstein's best friend. He plays a practical joke on Eisenstein to get back at him because a few weeks earlier, after a costume party, Eisenstein had abandoned Falke, passed out drunk in the park, in his costume as a *Fledermaus*—a bat.

**ALFRED**, an opera tenor with a big ego, was once an admirer of Rosalinde. He is now trying to find his way back into her heart—or at least into her bed.

**FRANK** is the director of the prison. At the ball, he is disguised as a Frenchman named Chevalier Chagrin.

**ADELE** is Rosalinde's maid—but she wants more out of life. She “borrows” one of Rosalinde's dresses and attends the ball, passing herself off as an actress.

**BLIND** is Eisenstein's stuttering clod of a lawyer.

**PRINCE ORLOFSKY** is a young, rich Russian who is utterly bored by everything. He is played by a woman.

**FROSCH** is a drunken prison warden. He does not sing.

### WHERE AND WHEN?

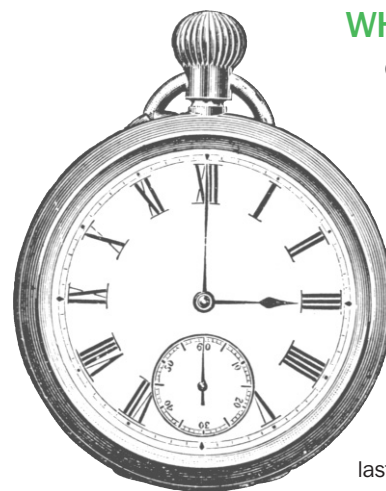
The operetta takes place in Vienna in the 1870s.

“We toast Champagne, the essence of the essence! The King of Effervescence!” —All, Act Two

### WHAT'S GOING ON?

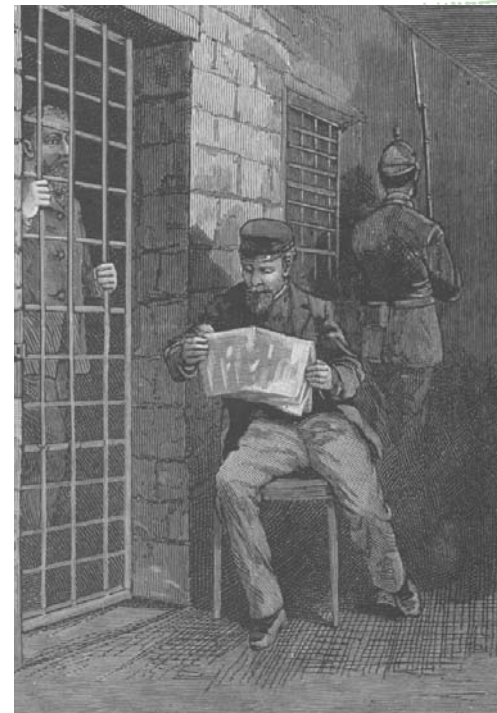
One afternoon, Mrs. Rosalinde Eisenstein hears the voice of her old flame Alfred serenading her from the garden.

Adele bursts into the room and asks for the evening off; she wants to attend a party at Prince Orlofsky's mansion. Rosalinde refuses to let her go, because Eisenstein has been sentenced to five days in jail for kicking a tax collector and intends to spend his last evening at home.



Eisenstein enters, furious with his lawyer because his sentence has been extended. Falke persuades Eisenstein not to report to prison on time but to spend the night at Orlofsky's party. Hiding his party plans from Rosalinde, Eisenstein leaves “for jail.” After he leaves, Alfred enters, makes himself comfortable in Eisenstein's dressing gown, and renews his wooing. In comes Frank, the prison governor, ready to escort Eisenstein to jail. He assumes Alfred is Eisenstein, and to preserve Rosalinde's reputation, Alfred gallantly plays the part of her husband. Rosalinde departs for Orlofsky's party, disguised as a Hungarian countess.

That evening, at the Prince's party, the bored Orlofsky begs Falke to amuse him. Falke explains he has arranged an unmatched entertainment. Adele, Eisenstein, Frank, and Rosalinde arrive, each in disguise and bearing a false name. Amid the festivities, the champagne, and the waltzing, Falke's elaborate practical joke



comes to full bloom: Eisenstein tries to charm a Hungarian countess (who is really his wife, Rosalinde) with his golden watch. Rosalinde recognizes her husband and takes the watch as incriminating evidence of his faithlessness. When the clock strikes six in the morning, Eisenstein and Frank jump up and stumble off, little suspecting that they will soon meet each other again at the prison.

The next morning, in the prison, everything will eventually be straightened out—after much hangover-induced confusion.

## THE MUSIC OF *DIE FLEDERMAUS*

**Opera, Operetta, and the Musical.** *Die Fledermaus* is one of the world's favorite operettas. The distinction between opera and operetta is never hard and fast, but you'll notice three important differences between *Die Fledermaus* and our more typical Seattle Opera fare. **#1. Dialogue.** In opera, the singers don't talk much, if at all. But in *Die Fledermaus* there are dialogues between each musical number, some of them long and hilarious. **#2. Music or Plot?** In our greatest operas, the music tells the story; the plot unfolds while music is playing. Not so in *Die Fledermaus*; here, the silly plot makes its twists and turns while the singers are talking, and the songs are opportunities for them to show off their voices or to delight us with catchy tunes. And **#3. Do we take it seriously?** Many of our composers of serious opera really tried to say something in their works, to use music and poetry and drama to reflect the human condition. Operettas like *Die Fledermaus*, however, don't try to make the audience think profound thoughts or experience strong emotions; Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* is happy merely to entertain its audience.

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The first operettas were written in the 1850s. Up to that point, operas typically mixed comedy and tragedy, with one mode predominating. But in the late nineteenth-century, serious operas became much more serious, and people who weren't interested went to hear new kinds of musical theater: the French *opéra-bouffes* of Offenbach, or the Viennese operettas of Johann Strauss, Jr., or the British operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan. Sometimes these shows are referred to as "light opera." By implication, the more serious operas are "heavy."

The early years of the twentieth century were the Golden Age of operetta. But several forces combined to bring the period to an end. In Europe, the cultural devastation wrought by the World Wars made operetta *passé*. In America, operetta gave way to the



**Demonstration of the waltz**

—©Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

*musical*, our native genre of musical drama. Whereas operettas were typically set in some pastel neverland vaguely resembling happy Eastern European aristocracies, musicals are usually set in America and deal seriously with American issues. Finally, the rise of technology—of radio, movies, television,

## Why in English?

In America, operas are usually performed in their original language while a translation into English is projected above the stage. But *Die Fledermaus*, originally written in the Viennese dialect of German, is typically sung in English in this country. This way, the audience can enjoy the humorous dialogues between the songs. Seattle Opera will perform *Die Fledermaus* in English, with English captions projected above the stage during the music.

and, in the theater, microphones—siphoned off musical and dramatic talent from operetta to other, more lucrative, endeavors.

**The Waltz.** Certain time periods swing to certain dances. In the 1920s, everybody was doing the Charleston. Those of you who survived the early 1980s may recall some of your old break-dancing moves. The waltz was the pulse of Vienna for a hundred years, developing from the simple *ländler* (a peasant dance

from the Austrian Alps) into the glorious concert pieces of Johann Strauss, Jr. The Strauss waltzes are known and adored throughout the world, and operetta audiences always

look forward to the scene at Orlofsky's party when the characters and chorus dance the delightful *Die Fledermaus* waltz. What is a waltz? The waltz is a dance in 3/4 time (meaning that every third beat is accented). But unlike the minuet, another dance in 3/4, the waltz is not subdivided; the beats are going by so fast you barely notice the unaccented two beats, and the melodies and dance steps are organized in multiples of six and twelve beats. Executed correctly, the waltz is complicated, elegant, and intoxicating.

**Musical Highlights.** *Die Fledermaus* features two hilarious trios in the first act (the first with Eisenstein, Rosalinde, and the stuttering Blind, the second with Eisenstein, Rosalinde, and Adele); three famous arias in the second act (Orlofsky's "*Chacun à son goût*," Adele's "Laughing Song," and Rosalinde's Hungarian aria,

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Listen to music clips from *DIE FLEDERMAUS* online at [www.seattleopera.org](http://www.seattleopera.org).

the "*Czárdás*"), and, of course, the great hymn to champagne and the waltz. And then there is Alfred, an opera tenor by trade, who keeps tossing off famous melodies from his favorite operas. Our production will be performed in English, with dialogues by director Chris Alexander and lyrics from the Ruth and Thomas Martin translation.

## ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Johann Strauss, Jr. was born on October 25, 1825, in Vienna. His father, Johann Strauss (1804–1849) was a distinguished composer and conductor of his own dance orchestra. He didn't want his son following in his footsteps and so the younger Strauss was at first intended for a banking career. However, with his mother's encouragement, he took violin lessons and subsequently studied music theory. At the age of 19, Strauss, Jr. formed a rival orchestra to his father's and began to establish



Johann Strauss, Jr.

himself as his father's most serious competitor. During the revolution of 1848, father and son ended up political enemies, as well; Strauss, Jr. opposed the aging Prince Metternich, a supporter of his father. Metternich fled Vienna during the revolution, after

**"Brahms is the spirit of Vienna; Strauss is its fragrance."**

which Emperor Franz Josef began his long reign.

—From *The Book of Musical Anecdotes* by Norman Lebrecht; The Free Press, 1985.

When Strauss, Sr. died, in 1849, Strauss, Jr. merged their two orchestras and enlisted his brothers Josef and Eduard to conduct them. Strauss extended the family's reputation both in Vienna and abroad and eventually inherited from his father the title "Waltz King." Over the next 20 years,



Die Fledermaus poster by Georges Dola.

Strauss, Jr. wrote many famous waltzes, including “The Blue Danube” and “Tales from the Vienna Woods.” He also conducted and directed his orchestra, became the musical director of Viennese court balls, and toured from Russia to America. Under Strauss, the waltz became a great social equalizer: rich and poor alike danced to its lively strains. Then in 1871, at the age of 45 and the height of success, Strauss refocused his career.

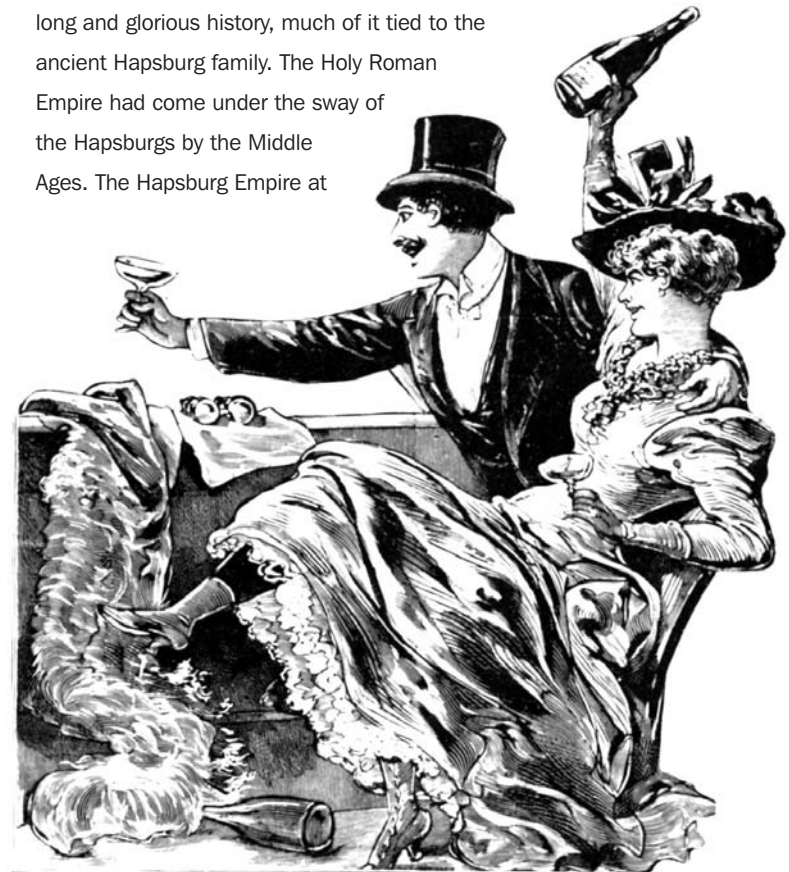
He decided to concentrate almost entirely on composition for the stage. Leaving the direction of the family orchestra to his brother, Strauss began writing operettas. His first attempt came to nothing due to complications with the leading singer. But Strauss’s second operetta, *Indigo and the Forty Thieves*, packed them in. Its success must have been due to the music, because the story was very poor. Strauss’s next operetta, *Roman Carnival*, was also a success, but it was with *Die Fledermaus* that Strauss created the greatest nineteenth-century Viennese operetta. *Die Fledermaus* was composed in just a few weeks and closed after only sixteen performances because of a schedule conflict in the theater. But it soon boomeranged back into the repertory and has never left the stage since. Strauss’s next five operettas were comparative disappointments. It was not until 1881, when Strauss composed *The Merry Battle*, that he created another masterpiece, one which remained successful throughout his lifetime. In 1883 Strauss composed perhaps the most purely beautiful of all his operettas, *A Night in Venice*. And on the eve of his 60th birthday in 1885, *The Gypsy Baron* was presented to much acclaim; in this

operetta, text and music are integrated more closely than was usual for Strauss, making it more of a genuine opera. After these successes, Strauss went on to compose almost a dozen more operettas, none of which have held the stage. He died on June 3, 1899. He had an ability to compose irresistible, melodically graceful pieces with great vitality. Richard Wagner wrote that Strauss had “the most musical brain in Europe.” The appeal of his music has ensured the survival of Strauss’s greatest works.

## DIE FLEDERMAUS AND VIENNA

Strauss’s beloved operetta *Die Fledermaus* is inextricably bound to its setting, the city of Vienna. *Die Fledermaus* celebrates this great city, looking at its citizens and culture through rose-tinted glasses.

Vienna, the most cosmopolitan of central European cities, nestled amid the Vienna Woods along the beautiful, blue Danube, has a long and glorious history, much of it tied to the ancient Hapsburg family. The Holy Roman Empire had come under the sway of the Hapsburgs by the Middle Ages. The Hapsburg Empire at





one point included almost all of Europe except France, England, and Scandinavia, and was headquartered in Vienna. During the eighteenth century, Hapsburg

Vienna was at its strongest under Empress Maria Theresa, who built Vienna's lovely Schönbrunn Palace. Her empire included most of Eastern Europe and finally beat

back the Turks, whose Ottoman Empire was beginning to unravel. Nineteenth-century Vienna saw both the rise of the great tradition of classical music (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Mahler all lived in Vienna) and the decline of the Hapsburgs, who, under Emperor Franz Josef, were losing power to rising nation-states like Italy and Germany. When *Die Fledermaus* premiered in 1874, wealthy Viennese opera-goers were reeling in the aftermath of a tremendous stock-market crash. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud was showing the Viennese and the world how to look at that mysterious world inside of each of us, Viennese artists like Klimt, Schönberg, and Gropius were leading the charge toward Modernism, and the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires were about to crumble into dust during the first World War.

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beautiful, scantily clad actresses and ballerinas hobnob with distinguished foreign visitors, where everyone appears in disguise or wearing a mask, where everyone is lying and the winner is the one who can get people to believe the most ridiculous lie. This world of fun-loving party-goers, mirth and frivolity doused with champagne and waltzes, and wealthy, educated, pretentious people deceiving and duping one another has become a widespread stereotype of what Vienna is really like. Every year on New Year's Eve, the world's most chic New Year's Eve party happens in Vienna, with entertainment provided by one of the world's greatest orchestras, the Vienna Philharmonic

The world of *Die Fledermaus* is a fantasy of Vienna, centering on a terrific party given by the mad Russian, Prince Orlofsky. Champagne flows through the hallways of Orlofsky's mansion, where



Seattle Opera Production, 1999  
—Gary Smith photo

(which plays waltzes by Johann Strauss, Jr. every year). These distinguished and highly cultured Viennese stereotypes love to gather in coffee shops to discuss art, music, and psychology for hours on end, to eat rich foods and sinfully sweet desserts, and to carry on discreet affairs in which all parties involved maintain a sweet unhappiness.

**The world of party-goers, doused with champagne and waltzes, has become a widespread stereotype of what Vienna is really like.**



Seattle Opera Production, 1999  
—Gary Smith photo