

in good company. Brahms, a personal friend, once signed his autograph, jotting down the first bars of the Blue Danube, and underneath, "Unfortunately not by Johannes Brahms." Wagner even conducted a Strauss waltz in his Bayreuth sanctum.

In Vienna, it is sometimes claimed that no one without a Viennese grandmother really knows how to play the genuine Strauss waltz, but many Viennese grandmothers come from nearby Moravia, Slovakia and Hungary, and there are few people in the world today who have actually heard Strauss, who died in 1899. Fritz Reiner, who was born not far from Vienna, knows all the little idiosyncrasies and superstitions around the genuine Strauss waltz. It must not be played at the same speed throughout. There are almost-imperceptible rubati and near-inaudible ritardandi. There are subtle nuances in rhythm, mood and dynamics, which (the Viennese say) you can't learn but must feel. A waltz by Johann Strauss must have the right mixture of happiness and sorrow, sentiment and buoyancy, smiles and tears. Reiner, who will walk for an hour to get a real Wiener Tafelspitz and Milchrahmstrudel, knows all that and more, and in this music, his Chicago Symphony Orchestra sounds like a Viennese orchestra. He even makes them do that almost inaudible pause before the second beat. After all, Strauss waltzes are certainly played by the angels in heaven where they have no metronomes.

Original Notes



The people who make recordings (and fortunately also those who buy them) never seem to tire of Strauss waltzes. There is magic, fascination and excitement in the three-quarter rhythm of a Viennese waltz, the universal appeal and indestructible charm of which have become a major musical phenomenon. Some of the waltzes on this disc are now over a hundred years old and still have the freshness of youth.

Like all good things, the Viennese waltz had tough going at first. "I can imagine that mothers are fond of the new waltzes," wrote the chronicler Vigne in Vienna, "but I don't think they will let their daughters dance them." Lord Byron was said to be shocked by the sight of happily waltzing couples. At the (dancing) Congress of Vienna, the waltz finally was generally accepted. It has become as popular with composers as with their listeners. The great Bach himself wrote a rustic waltz in the overture to his Peasant Cantata. Waltzes have been written by Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Weber, Ravel, Richard Strauss and others, but the best of all was written by Johann (Father) Strauss and his son "Schani," the Waltz King.

Johann Strauss, Jr., wrote 479 waltzes, schnell-polkas, marches, operettas and other works. Each is different, yet all have the unmistakable touch of genius. In some ways he can be compared to Mozart and Verdi. He never ran out of wonderful melodies and set them down with

astounding speed. He would start to write a new waltz in the morning; in the early afternoon, the members of his orchestra would come to his apartment to copy and rehearse their parts; that night, Strauss would conduct the. Premiere of his latest opus, with fiddle and bow in his hand. At one time, Strauss, Inc., was a thriving organization of over two hundred musicians, associated conductors, copyists, vocalists, publicity men, business managers, and lots of cashiers. Strauss would have three orchestras going simultaneously in various ballrooms, and he would dash from place to place, making brief personal appearances. In a city dedicated to the pursuit of waltzes, Strauss was the uncrowned king.

The early Strauss waltzes are charming and often naive, but his most significant works are mature masterpieces—symphonic poems with lovely introductions, exciting climaxes and magnificent codas. Strauss' happiness is always mingled with a light touch of sorrow; he knew life. Artists' Life and Vienna Blood are "original" waltzes; Roses from the South is from his operetta *Das Spitzentuch der Königin* (The Queen's Lace Handkerchief), and the Treasure Waltz from *The Gypsy Baron*. Thunder and Lightning is a typical polka. (Mein Lebenslauf ist Lieb' und Lust [My Life Is Love and Laughter] is by brother Josef Strauss, a master of tender melancholy.)

Strauss was popular with his fellow composers. Halevy, Auber, Chopin, Berlioz, Schumann, Delibes and Tchaikovsky were Strauss fans. You are

Strauss Waltzes

REINER CHICAGO SYMPHONY

- 1 Vienna Blood, Op. 354 8:49
- 2 Artists' Life, Op. 316 6:46
- 3 My Life Is Love And Laughter 6:38
- 4 Roses From The South, Op. 388 8:36
- 5 Treasure Waltz, Op. 418 8:00
- 6 Thunder And Lightning Polka, Op. 324 2:46

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