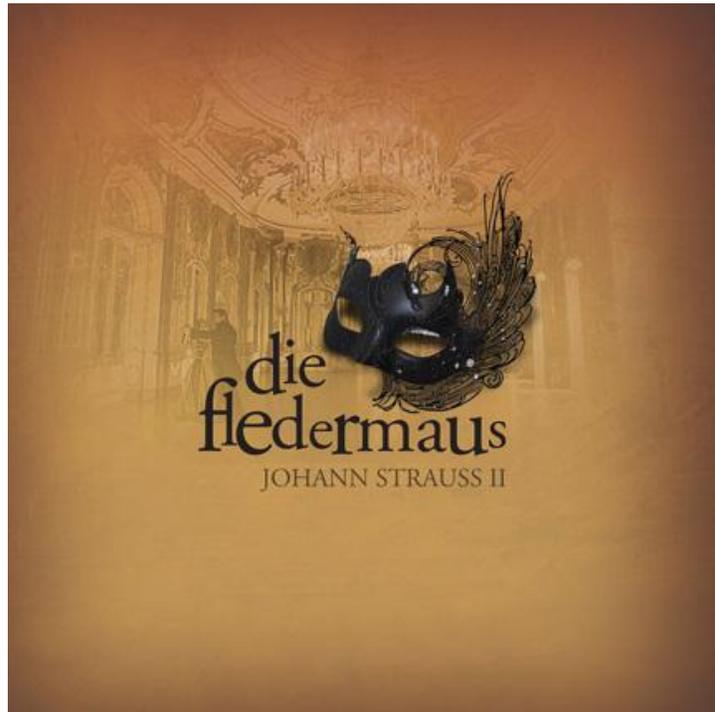


Virginia  
Opera



## Study Guide

Comic Opera in 3 acts

**In English**

**Music by JOHANN STRAUSS II**

**Libretto by Carl Haffner and Richard Genée**  
**Based on Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy's *Le Réveillon***

# 2012-2013 SEASON

**Virginia Opera thanks the following sponsors for their generous support:**



**THE RICHARD S. REYNOLDS FOUNDATION**

## Preface

### Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of DIE FLEDERMAUS. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

### Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity which in turn produces a positive experience.

### The Language

DIE FLEDERMAUS was originally written in German. The Virginia Opera will perform DIE FLEDERMAUS in English. In addition, English supertitles will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these **Supertitles**, audiences can easily understand all that is being sung.

# Table of Contents

---

Principal Characters in the Opera	4
Historical Background	5
Detailed Story Narrative	8
Meet the Composer Johann Strauss II	11
Short History of Opera	13
The Operatic Voice	14
Opera Production	16
Die Fledermaus Essay Questions	17
Opera Etiquette	18

## Principal Characters in the Opera

Gabriel von Eisenstein, a wealthy Viennese gentleman, (owner of a large newspaper).....	Tenor Buffo
Rosalinde, his wife.....	Soprano
Frank, governor of the prison.....	Baritone
Prince Orlofsky, a rich Russian prince.....	Mezzo Soprano
Alfred, the Prince's singing teacher.....	Tenor
Dr. Falke, notary.....	Light Baritone
Dr. Blind, lawyer.....	Tenor Buffo
Adele, Rosalinde's chambermaid.....	Soprano
Ida, Adele's sister.....	Soprano
Frosch, a jailer.....	Speaking Role
Ivan, Prince Orlofsky's servant.....	Speaking Role

**Premiere:** Theater an der Wien, 5 April 1874

## Historical Background

Vienna's Theater an der Wien had witnessed the historic premieres of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*, but by the 1870s the management was looking to produce works in German that would parallel the French craze for operettas, as exemplified in the works of Jacques Offenbach such as *La Belle Hélène*, *La Périochole*, and *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein* (the latter two of these works may be heard in modern recordings featuring the inimitable Régine Crespin). Marie Geistinger, co-manager with Maximilian Steiner, had herself been a celebrated "belle Hélène." In 1871 the theater presented Johann Strauss' first staged operetta, *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber* (Indigo and the Forty Thieves), which received seventy performances and was heard in a number of other cities besides Vienna. The libretto was such a hodgepodge that the joke in Viennese coffeehouses was that all forty thieves had contributed to the text. (In Vienna, still today, everyone has an opinion on what's going on in the theater and opera house, even those who have never even entered, or have any intention of entering, such institutions). His next work, *Der Karneval in Rom*, was a success but its run was interrupted by the stock market crash that crippled Vienna in 1873 and also had a huge impact on the immediate fortunes of *Die Fledermaus*.

Johann Strauss is believed to have drafted all of *Fledermaus* in forty-three days. Six months, however, elapsed before the operetta was produced. In addition, Marie Geistinger had already performed the *Czárdás* at a charity function, and her disguise as a Hungarian at Orlofsky's party was a means of allowing her to take this performance into the operetta. The work, commissioned by the director of the Viennese Theater an der Wien, was Strauss' third operetta and has become his most enduring creation for the stage and the most popular operetta ever written. The source of the libretto was *Le Réveillon*, first heard at the Palais Royal in Paris in 1872, a French revue based on a German comedy of manners by Julius Roderich Benedix, *Das Gefängnis* (The Prison, 1851). The authors of the French version were Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, who had written a number of works set by the master of Parisina *opéra-bouffe*, Jacques Offenbach; they were also the creators of the libretto for Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. *Die Fledermaus* was a free translation of the French comedy, done by two Prussians who lived in Vienna and knew what pleased Viennese audiences, Carl Haffner and Richard Genée. The French *réveillon* (a midnight supper party) by Meilhac and Halévy was initially translated for Viennese audiences by Haffner as a straight play. It was then decided to adapt the play as a libretto for Strauss, with the supper party replaced by a Viennese ball. Haffner's translation was given to Genée for this purpose. Genée later claimed that he had made his own translation and in fact had never even met Haffner. Because of its close French origins, *Die Fledermaus* could not at first be performed in Paris; Meilhac and Halévy initiated a lawsuit, claiming the libretto as their own.

At the Theater an der Wien Genée was responsible for many splendid Viennese adaptations of French operettas. He also composed the music for a great many works himself. His operetta *Der Seekadett* (The Naval Cadet) appeared in 1876 and a year later appeared *Nanon*, both huge hits at the time. In writing librettos, he was often teamed with "F. Zell," the pen name

of Camillo Walzel. Together they are still famous for their texts to Strauss' *Eine Nacht in Venedig* (A Night in Venice), Millöcker's *Der Bettelstudent* (The Student Beggar) and Suppé's *Boccaccio*, works that are still essentials of the Viennese operetta tradition. Genée also provided the piano-vocal reduction for *Die Fledermaus*; all in all, a very talented man! Many features of *Le Réveillon* were retained (such as the pocket-watch, heart-tick scene between Eisenstein and his wife and the jail scene in act 3), but changes were also made. The most significant of these was the transformation of the midnight supper party into a Viennese ball, but there were also other changes. (In Paris, the guests at the onstage supper party ate real food, drank real champagne, and had their backs to the audience). In Meilhac and Halévy, Alfred was the Hungarian violinist-leader of Prince Vermontoff's orchestra, whereas in *Die Fledermaus*, it is Rosalinde--to accommodate the talents of Marie Geistinger--who is disguised as a Hungarian with fake accent. A huge amount of money and effort was poured into the Viennese premiere in 1874; there were brand-new sets and costumes and a large company, which included dancers for the second act, which called for *spanisch*, *scottisch*, *russisch*, and *ungarisch* character dances. Today, instead of those dances, waltzes by Johann Strauss are usually substituted.

At its premiere, on Easter Sunday, 5 April, 1874, with Strauss himself in the pit, *Fledermaus* enjoyed a success (many numbers had to be encoed) but was given only sixteen times. Legend has it that the work was a failure, but this is not true: it had to be taken off the stage because of a pre-booked visiting season of operetta, after which it returned to the stage. Reviews of the glittering premiere confirm the work's triumph. The critic of the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* wrote "The whole evening was altogether a really fine success," and a long, glowing review also appeared in the Viennese *Morgen-Post*: "It is difficult to choose one piece out of this rich score to award a prize, as they are all of equal beauty." And certain numbers were immediately designated as "hit tunes": Orlofsky's "Chacun à son goût" was "already, on the first night, hummed by a thousand lips." There were a few dissenting voices, principally the stodgy Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, who a few decades later approved of Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*. Hanslick was detested by Richard Wagner, who lampooned him for his narrow view of art as Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*. Hanslick called Strauss' work "a potpourri oif waltz and polka motifs," which of course it is. The goal of Viennese operetta was to entertain--and to turn a profit.

The composition of Strauss' operettas and their great popularity must be seen in the context of social and financial conditions in contemporary Vienna. In the 1860s the city was enjoying great prosperity. When Franz Josef came to power in 1848 he was determined to bring Austria on a par with France and Great Britain by promoting industry and building railways. He also created the architecture of "imperial" Vienna, ordering the demolition of many old buildings, the raising of many new ones (including the Vienna opera house), and the construction of the Ringstrasse. Strauss chronicled this change, as he did with many events of his time, in a piece of music called the "Demolierpolka." Money was plentiful and speculation made it more so. Many new companies were formed and the middle-class poured their money into them; investors became wealthy overnight. (Does this sound familiar?) A night life existed that afforded gentlemen hitherto forbidden pleasures among the *demi-monde* of the city, a night life from which their respectable wives were of course excluded. Perhaps the only outlet for "naughtiness" among women was to attend a masked ball in disguise and flirt incognito, just as Rosalinde does (with her own husband) in *Die Fledermaus*. Champagne was introduced into Vienna and, as it was expensive, became a status symbol. Vienna was becoming more "Parisian" by the minute. Titles were bought and the new "aristocracy" whirled away at fancy dress balls to the waltzes of Johann Strauss. To show off his new state, Franz Josef organized an International Exhibition along the lines of those already presented in London in 1851 and Paris in 1867. Among the visitors were Kaiser Wilhelm and the Shah of Persia, who titillated the Viennese hedonistic

proclivities by bringing his entire harem. But eight days after the glorious Exhibition opened, Austria suffered the disaster of “Black Friday,” when the market crashed and hundreds of thousands of ordinary people lost all their savings. As stated by Gordon Stewart (see the booklet to the CD led by Herbert von Karajan, below, to which I am indebted for a number of ideas presented here), “The old fatted-calf routine was over and the hangover from the champagne party was beyond the reach of any coffee.”

Such was the atmosphere in Vienna when *Die Fledermaus* opened and one might even say that the work was an immediate anachronism, a reflection of a brief golden period that was already over forever. No wonder the word “twilight” is so often used in reference to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. With such a widespread, crippling financial disaster, naturally blame had to be assigned. The fury of the bourgeoisie who had lost all their foolishly-invested money was turned not only against the financiers but against the aristocracy in general, who were now regarded as parasites on society. Whether anyone at the time predicted, the stock market crash of 1873 initiated the decline of liberalism in Austria (reflected in intense anti-Semitism directed against Jewish stock brokers, who themselves had of course been ruined by the crash) and the country’s inevitable descent from empire after World War I, to annexation and collaboration with Nazi Germany in the 1930s. One can see the relevance of all this to *Die Fledermaus*, which pictured the frivolous, glittering antics of the aristocracy and a way of life now closed to the destitute, which was now most of the population. One might have thought that the Viennese were in no mood for Strauss’ operetta. In true Viennese fashion, however, *Die Fledermaus* became a vehicle of escapism and Vienna continued to waltz right into the twentieth century, after which it soon hit a wall. After all, while others might say “The situation is serious but not hopeless,” the Viennese say “The situation is hopeless but not serious.”

Within two years *Die Fledermaus* had achieved 100 performances and by 1880 the work had been performed on 170 German stages and had been translated and adapted for many other countries. In Vienna alone, the work was performed 300 times by 1899. Already in 1876, only two years after its Viennese premiere, *Die Fledermaus* had been given in Berlin 200 times--more than twice as many performances as in Vienna! In November 1874 there were performances in German in New York, in London in the vernacular in 1876, and finally in 1877 the French version was heard in Paris. Due to the lawsuit initiated by Meilhac and Halévy, this was entitled *La Tzigane* (The Gypsy) and was a bowdlerization incorporating music from *Fledermaus* and another Strauss operetta, the successor to *Fledermaus*, *Cagliostro in Wien*. The original version, in French as *La Chauve-souris* (The Bat), was not heard in Paris until 1904.

In addition to Geistinger, the original Viennese cast included Jani Szika as Eisenstein, Ferdinand Lebrecht as Falke, Caroline Charles-Hirsch as Adele, and Irma Nittinger as Orlofsky. Lebrecht died onstage at the Theater an der Wien, thus giving Alexander Girardi, who was to become a celebrated interpreter of Strauss’ stage works, the opportunity to take on the role of Falke. Gustav Mahler conducted the work at the Vienna Hofoper in 1894 and other famous revivals featuring illustrious voices and conductors include one in 1920 with Maria Jeritza as Rosalinde, conducted by Richard Strauss, and one at Covent Garden in 1930 with Lotte Lehmann as Rosalinde, Gerhard Hüsch as Falke, Elisabeth Schumann as Adele, and Maria Olszewska as Orlofsky, conducted by Bruno Walter. When Rudolf Bing came to the Metropolitan Opera in the early 1950s, operettas had not been presented there for some twenty years. He believed they should be included in the repertory, as they are in German opera houses, and his English-language version of *Fledermaus* was one of the greatest successes of his régime. It had been Gustav Mahler, however, who was most responsible for introducing performances of *Fledermaus* into the opera house. He first conducted it at the Hamburg Stadttheater in 1894, which led to special matinee performances at the Vienna Hofoper (now the Staatsoper). Mahler subsequently,

as artistic director of the Vienna court opera, conducted evening performances of *Fledermaus* there. He also introduced Strauss' *Der Zigeunerbaron* (The Gypsy Baron) into the operatic repertory. Mahler considered Strauss' vocal writing to be quite operatic and found similarities between Strauss and Mozart in the way they wrote for the voice.

By the 1920s, under the august baton of Richard Strauss, glittering performances were being given in that theater by the most illustrious of opera singers: Maria Jeritza, Leo Slezak, and Richard Tauber. In 1905 a performance at the Metropolitan Opera included twenty-nine artists in the act 2 party scene, including Enrico Caruso, Pol Plançon, Antonio Scotti, Emma Eames, Louise Homer, Olive Fremstad, Lillian Nordica, and Marcel Journet, performing ensembles from *Rigoletto* and *Faust*, among other items.

In addition to numerous immortal waltzes as "On the Beautiful Blue Danube," *Die Fledermaus* is Strauss' masterpiece. And is it any wonder? The Waltz king and conductor of the orchestra for the court balls responded to the fact that *Fledermaus* is centered on a gala ball and his inspiration was thus ignited, as evidenced in the waltz theme heard in the Overture and on every page throughout the score. This tune took Vienna by storm and, even though we live in a completely different world from Vienna of the 1870s, it continues to delight us with its explosion of vitality--as indeed does the entire operetta. With *Die Fledermaus*, Strauss has captured in time the Vienna of our fantasy: the glittering chandeliers, the champagne (which *Fledermaus* raises to the status of royalty), the masked balls, the restaurants with their supreme Wiener Schnitzel, dangerously rich pastries, and coffee mit Schlag, the carefree hedonistic Vienna--everything, naturally, experienced in three-quarter time.

# Detailed Story Narrative

The action takes place in a spa town, near a large city.

## Act 1 *A room in Eisenstein's house.*

Gabriel von Eisenstein is the editor of a large newspaper. From outside the window of his home is heard a tenor voice (“**Täubchen, das entflattert ist**”), serenading his wife, Rosalinde. Adele, the Eisensteins’ maid, reads a letter from her sister Ida inviting her to a ball that evening at the villa of Prince Orlofsky, a rich young Russian aristocrat. She asks Rosalinde for the evening off in order “to visit a sick aunt.” Rosalinde is not able to grant her request, however, because her husband is due to begin a short prison sentence that evening. He must spend five days in jail for insulting an official. Alfred is now revealed as the off-stage voice. He is an operatic tenor, a singing teacher, and an erstwhile lover of Rosalinde. He wants a rendezvous with Rosalinde, who puts up no objection; he is persuaded to leave for the moment and asked to return after Eisenstein has gone to jail. He leaves just before Eisenstein storms in with his lawyer, Doctor Blind (“**Nein, mit solchem Advokaten**”). The prison sentence has been reconsidered and three days have been added. Eisenstein blames the lawyer for this and orders him out of the house.

Doctor Falke enters and persuades Eisenstein not to report to the prison that evening but to attend Prince Orlofsky’s party instead (“**Komm mit mir zum Souper**”). Eisenstein thinks this a grand idea but does not tell his wife. Adele, Rosalinde, and Eisenstein sing a trio, each pretending a regret none of them feels (“**So muss allein ich bleiben**”). Rosalinde sees Eisenstein leave the house in evening dress and is bewildered. As she is expecting Alfred, she decides to give Adele the evening off after all. Adele hurries off to the party wearing one of her mistress’s ball gowns. Alfred arrives and makes himself comfortable in one of Eisenstein’s dressing gowns (“**Trinke, Liebchen, trinke schnell**”). Frank, the governor of the prison, appears. He has come in person to take Eisenstein to jail. In order not to cause a scandal, Rosalinde is obliged to pretend he is her husband (“**Mein Herr, was dächten Sie von mir?**”) and Alfred is led off to prison, sustained by a lingering kiss from Rosalinde.

## Act 2 *The Ball at Prince Orlofsky's Villa*

Orlofsky’s guests are praising his famous hospitality (“**Ein Souper heut’ uns winkt**”). Adele meets her sister Ida. Falke introduces Adele to Orlofsky as “Miss Olga” an actress, but Orlofsky knows that the two sisters, as well as others, are involved in a plot that Falke has hatched in order to revenge himself on Eisenstein for a trick he had played on him three years earlier. After a masked ball Eisenstein exposed Falke to public humiliation by abandoning him when he was drunk and dressed as a bat, a “Fledermaus.” Now Falke in turn wants to cause him public humiliation.

Eisenstein appears and is announced as the French marquis Renard (the French word for “fox”). He comes close to recognizing his wife’s maid, Adele, but she as Miss Olga skillfully deceives him, in her famous “Laughing Song” (“**Mein Herr Marquis**”). Orlofsky, rich but bored, commands his guests to make merry (“**Ich lade gern mir Gäste ein**”). When Frank the prison governor arrives and is introduced as the Chevalier Chagrin he is taken to his fellow “countryman,” Renard. The two attempt to hold a conversation in schoolboy French. At last Rosalinde arrives, invited by Falke to observe how her husband is serving his prison sentence. She is disguised as a Hungarian countess; Eisenstein, who has been flirting outrageously with the

ladies at the party, showing them his famous repeater watch, immediately begins to court her. The two sing a duet ("**Dieser Anstand, so männlich**"). Rosalinde pockets the gold watch, intending to keep it as incriminating evidence.

As the guests consume more and more champagne, the atmosphere at the party becomes more abandoned. The guests attempt to get the Countess to take off her mask but Rosalinde shows her "Hungarian" heritage by dancing and singing a fiery *Czárdás* ("**Klänge der Heimat**"). The guests ask Falke to tell them the story of the bat and Eisenstein triumphantly boasts of how several years ago, after a masked ball, he had abandoned Falke to make his way home alone, dressed as a bat. As the guests sit down to supper, Orlofsky proposes a toast to champagne, king of wines ("**Im Feuerstrom der Reben**"), and Falke, singing a slow sentimental waltz, proposes that everyone drink to friendship ("**Brüderlein und Schwesterlein**"). Everyone joins in dancing a fast waltz, the one heard already in the overture, which has become known as the "Fledermaus Waltz." Famous soloists from the Vienna Opera perform for the guests. The clock strikes six and Marquis Renard and Chevalier Chagrin grab their cloaks and hurry to leave, little realizing they will meet again in prison as Eisenstein and Falke.

### **Act 3** *The prison governor's office.*

Alfred has spent the night in jail, singing operatic excerpts, despite the attempts of the drunken jailer, Frosch, to silence him. Frosch, in his day job as jailer, recalls his triumphs on stage and performs a play he has written as he awaits the return of Frank, his governor. Frank staggers in, clearly disheveled after the party, dances tipsily with Frosch and then falls asleep. He is soon awakened, however, by two females, Adele and her sister Ida, who remind Frank of his earlier attentions to them as "Chevalier Chagrin." Adele, who admits she is not really an actress but would like to be one, wants the Chevalier to help launch her stage career and begins to show off her Thespian skills ("**Spiel' ich die Unschuld vom Lande**"). "Marquis Renard" is announced and the two girls are ushered into an empty cell. The visitor claims he is Eisenstein, to Frank's astonishment, for he declares he himself had arrested Eisenstein the previous evening. The two men discover each other's identities and Eisenstein is surprised to find that someone has been arrested in his place. Rosalinde is announced and Frank goes to meet her. Blind enters, having been summoned by Alfred to represent him as "Eisenstein." The real Eisenstein intercepts him and demands that he and the lawyer exchange clothes, Eisenstein taking the lawyer's coat, wig, and spectacles and affecting his stutter. As Alfred emerges from his cell he is confronted by the disguised Eisenstein. Rosalinde enters and does not recognize her husband in disguise. She is trying to figure out what to say to save her reputation. Eisenstein learns about Alfred's assignation with his wife the previous evening and is so angry that he can barely stand to stay in character ("**Ich stehe voll Zagen**"). When Rosalinde responds that her husband was out on the town himself, Eisenstein sheds his disguise and vents his jealousy, to the music heard at the beginning of the overture. Doctor Falke arrives with other guests from the party. Orlofsky is delighted with Adele and promises to underwrite her theatrical career. She laughs with great pleasure and Falke pronounces Orlofsky cured of his depression. Falke tells Rosalinde the outcome of the prank is in her hands. She confronts her husband with the gold watch, explaining away Alfred's presence as part of Falke's intrigue. Eisenstein apologizes, blaming King Champagne for all the trouble, promises to change his ways and signs up with Falke for treatment. Eisenstein enters his cell and Alfred approaches Rosalinde. She rebuffs him. Champagne is brought in and there is a general toast ("**O Fledermaus, O Fledermaus**").

## Meet the Composer Johann Strauss II

Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) was born into the Viennese musical family known as “The Waltz Kings.” In the early part of the nineteenth century the elder Johann Strauss (1804-1849) had refashioned the rural dances in three-quarter time known as *Ländler*, smoothing them out for elegant Viennese balls, making them “glide.” Strauss had three sons--Johann, Josef, and Eduard--whom he did not want to become musicians, for he knew it was a precarious life. Their mother, however, made sure her sons had music training and in 1844, when he was nineteen, young Johann made his debut as a musician, conducting his own waltzes at the famous Dommayer’s café in the suburb of Hietzing. Supposedly his father hired thugs to interrupt the concert but they, along with the rest of the audience, were enchanted with Strauss’ music and failed to do so. Much was made of the rivalry between father and son, which lasted for five years, until the elder Strauss’ death in 1849. Johann’s brother Josef had studied both music and engineering but eventually succumbed to his elder brother’s wishes to help conduct his orchestra, which had acquired an international reputation during immensely successful concert tours. Josef also composed waltzes, and such is their quality that they are often mistaken for the work of his more famous brother. Sadly, the self-effacing Josef died young, falling from the conductor’s podium in Warsaw. Johann’s relationship with Eduard, a capable but not brilliant musician, was quite different. Eduard remained poisonously jealous of his brother and after his death started a huge bonfire, in which he burned Johann’s unpublished manuscripts.



All of the Strausses wrote waltzes but Johann II was the only one to compose vocal music. During a meeting with Strauss in 1865, the master of French operetta, Jacques Offenbach, whose works were currently enjoying triumphs in Vienna, suggested that he write for the stage. At first Strauss was perplexed by this. He had never considered such a thing and in any case the local demand for operetta was being fulfilled by Franz von Suppé. For a while Strauss remained adamant, even though urged by publishers and theater managers to write for the theater. Eventually he changed his mind--his wife, Jetty, a singer, played a major role in this--and with Offenbach’s works as his model, Strauss created sixteen operettas in the years between 1870 to 1890. The first work from his pen was to a libretto by Josef Braun, von Suppé’s librettist, *Die lustigen Weiber von Wien* (The Merry Wives of Vienna). It never saw production, however, for the two Viennese “goddesses of the light muse,” sopranos Marie Geistinger and Josefina Gallmeyer, quarrelled bitterly over who should undertake the principal role. Strauss withdrew the piece in disgust.

Strauss was on the podium at the Vienna Opera, conducting *Die Fledermaus* on 22 May 1899; he became overheated from exertion and developed a fatal case of pneumonia while walking home in the chilly evening weather. Hans Fantel, the author of a history of the Strauss family, *The Waltz Kings*, has the following perceptions about Johann’s place in musical and political history:

There is a certain fitness in the fact that Strauss did not live to see the dawn of the twentieth century. He would not have been at home in it. . . . According to an Austrian quip, “The Emperor of Austria ruled until the death of Johann Strauss.” The joke contains historic truth. With the

passing of the Waltz King, the real cohesion of the Austrian empire had gone. What held Austria together was the force of a myth--perhaps the profoundest element within the political imagination--and Johann Strauss, without knowing it, had become a keystone in the structure of that myth.

# A Short History of Opera

The word *opera* is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which translates quite literally as *work*. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word *opera* as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the *Camerata* which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of *recitative* sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*) which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo arias* which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character. The function of the *chorus* in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto*, and *verismo*. The Austrian Mozart also wrote operas in Italian and championed the *singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes d’Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*), and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led the adaptation by the French which ranged from the *opera comique* to the grand full-scale *tragedie lyrique*. German composers von Weber (*Der Freischütz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *singspiel* to through-composed spectacles unified through the use of the *leitmotif*. The English *ballad opera*, Spanish *zarzuela* and Viennese *operetta* helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country’s folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.

# The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<b>Soprano</b>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<b>Mezzo-Soprano</b>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball)
<b>Tenor</b>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<b>Baritone</b>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	Verdi Baritone Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<b>Bass</b>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	Buffo Bass Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	Basso Cantate Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

# Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

# Die Fledermaus Essay Questions

## Music

1. In many productions of *Die Fledermaus* the spoken text is in English however, the songs are in German. In this production, the entire piece was in English. Do you feel this was easier to understand or do you feel it took away from the production.
2. Why were waltzes by Johann Strauss, Jr., operettas like *Die Fledermaus*, and operas like *Der Rosenkavalier* so important to the Viennese at the turn of the century?

## History

3. What factors shaped the political and social situation in Vienna in the second half of the 19th century? How did the political atmosphere change toward the end of the century? Who were some of the major political figures of the time, and how did they affect or were they affected by these changes?

# Opera Etiquette at an opera performance

**Before bringing a group to the Opera, please go over etiquette with your students to ensure an enjoyable experience for all audience members.**

## **What to Wear**

Most people like to dress up when they go to the opera because it's part of the fun! Nowadays you can pretty much wear whatever you want. However, an evening at the opera is usually considered to be a special occasion. We encourage dressing in layers so bring a sweater, wrap or jacket just in case.

## **Arrive On Time**

You should always make sure you get to the opera house in plenty of time to find parking, get your tickets and be seated before the performance starts. Thirty minutes before start time (curtain) is usually sufficient. If you are late, the ushers may let you in after the overture, but, if there is not an overture, you may have to wait until intermission and miss the entire first act!

## **Remain Quiet during the Performance**

There is nothing worse than sitting near a chatterbox, someone text messaging or a ringing cell phone during a performance. Please turn off anything that can make noise or light. Save your comments for intermission and, by all means, do not sing along! Remember recording devices, video and photography is not permitted of any Virginia Opera performance.

## **Applaud When Appropriate**

The correct times to applaud are when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance, after the overture, after a big aria, at the end of each act, and when the singers come out to take a bow. If you are unsure when those times are, it is best to wait and follow the lead of other audience members.

## **Applaud Appropriately**

Clapping while sitting or standing is always acceptable, and you can yell "*Bravo!*" to show appreciation for a male singer, "*Brava!*" to show appreciation for a female singer, and "*Bravi!*" to show appreciation for a group of singers. Yelling out anything other than those three words, as well as screaming or whistling, is inappropriate.

## ***Why we follow these etiquette rules:***

- Because it is respectful to the performers and the theater to dress nicely.
- Because it's dangerous to try to step over people in the dark, and because it's disrespectful to the performers and the other audience members.
- Because the performers really can hear the whispers from on stage, and other people are trying to watch.
- Gum, candy, and drinks make noise that will distract the performers, and are not permitted in the theatre.