

THE VIRTUOSO JOHANN STRAUSS

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LINER NOTES

At the end of Johann Strauss' 1875 operetta *Die Fledermaus*, all of the characters drink a toast to the real culprit of the story—"Champagner hat's verschuldet"—a fitting conclusion to the most renowned and potent evocation of the carefree life of post-revolution imperial Vienna. Strauss' sparkling score (never mind that the libretto is an amalgam of German and French sources), infused with that most famous of Viennese dances, the waltz, lent eloquent expression to the transitory atmosphere of confidence and prosperity induced by the Hapsburg monarchs. "The Emperor Franz Joseph I," it would later be said, "only reigned until the death of Johann Strauss."

And what could have provided more perfect source material than the music of Strauss, for the pastiche creations of the illustrious composer-pianists who roamed the world in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, forever seeking vehicles with which to exploit the possibilities of their instrument and display their pianistic prowess? This disc presents a succession of such indulgent enterprises, all fashioned from Strauss' music, for four notable composer-pianists: Moriz Rosenthal, Karl Tausig, Leopold Godowsky, and Adolf Schulz-Evler. In a number of instances, Strauss himself gave implicit approval to arrangements of his work, and whose great enthusiasm for the Johann Strauss paraphrases of Moriz Rosenthal.

Having established the *raison d'être* for the compositions performed on this disc, it should come as no surprise that the waltz—that seemingly inexhaustible socio-musical phenomenon of the 19th century—runs its course through all of these works. I am speaking not of the provincial dance of close embrace from the late 18th century that caused alarm to Goethe's young Werther and provoked satire from Lord Byron, but rather a waltz elevated in social position by the opening of Vienna's cavernous dances halls (including the Sperl in 1807 and the Apollo in 1808). The waltz had risen in purely musical stature as well, through the efforts of Franz Schubert (who also demonstrated the value of affixing a descriptive title with the *Trauerwalzer*, D 365), Carl Maria von Weber (who prepared the waltz for the concert stage by adding an introduction and coda to his *Aufforderung zum Tanz*), and through the myriad contributions of Joseph Lanner, the elder Johann Strauss, and their lesser colleagues. However, it remained for Johann Strauss, Jr. to

bring the waltz to its apotheosis as a dance form of unparalleled elegance and sophistication. Strauss achieved this remarkable transformation through the series of renowned waltz sets he composed during the 1860s and early 1870s while serving in the position created for his father: - *k.k. Hofballmusikdirektor*. In its new splendor, the waltz was capable of garnering the admiration of musicians as ideologically disparate as Brahms and Wagner.

Moriz Rosenthal (1862-1946) studied with Liszt from 1876-78, after which time he passed from concertizing to study philosophy at the University of Vienna. He returned to concert life in 1884, eventually settling in the United States in 1938. The *Carnaval de Vienne*, as the title suggests, offers a pastiche of melodies drawn from waltz and operetta compositions alike. Imaginative figuration (including a brief fugal episode) and daring exploration of the highest and lowest reaches of the piano encircle the themes).

Karl Tausig (1841-71), the most brilliant and famous among the first generation of Liszt's pupils, died of typhoid fever at the early age of twenty-nine. Tausig greatly admired Liszt's *Soirées de Vienne* (arrangements of some of Schubert's waltzes) and his own *Nouvelles soirées de Vienne*, after Strauss waltzes, were dedicated to Liszt. Tausig strays far from the original compositions, preferring a rhapsodic approach. Amy Fay, a young American pianist, who went to Berlin in 1869 to study at Tausig's Akademie, aptly described the discursive nature of the piece: "Calling the waltz itself the warp of the composition, then through its simple threads we find darting backwards and forwards a subtle, complicated and tragic mind, an exquisitely refined and delicate sentiment, and a piquante, aerial fancy, until finally is wrought a brilliant and bewildering transcription—transfiguration rather—of endless fascination and tantalizing beauty, which no one but a virtuoso can play and no one but a connoisseur can comprehend."

Born in Russian Poland, **Leopold Godowsky** (1870-1938) embarked on an international performing career firmly established following a successful Berlin recital in 1900. At the outbreak of World War I he settled permanently in the United States, suffering a stroke in 1930 that ended his performing career. The Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes from *Wein, Weib und Gesang* retains the sequence of themes found in the waltz set, but Godowsky contributes his own lengthy introduction which bears little relation to the Strauss original. The rather formidable title alludes to the extravagant contrapuntalism infused into the music; indeed, Godowsky takes pleasure in simultaneously presenting two or more melodies. This technique is exploited further in the Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes from *Die Fledermaus* where in several passages Godowsky ingeniously combines three melodies—an event as challenging to the listener as the performer. Unrestricted by a fixed sequence of waltzes, Godowsky draws liberally on the most attractive melodies in the operetta, intentionally beginning with a devilish presentation of the trio from Act I. Here (as the music tells us) Rosalinde, Eisenstein and Adele, though outwardly sad, clearly are looking forward to their respective evening plans.

The famed Blue Danube waltz presented here in the piano arrangement of **Adolf Schulz-Evler** (1852-1905), receives the most straightforward account of any Strauss work on this disc. Polish-born Schulz-Evler studied at the Warsaw Conservatory, and later with Karl Tausig. From 1884-1904 he taught at the Kharhov Music School. *An der schönen blauen Donau* exhibits the characteristic form of a Strauss waltz set—five numbered waltzes bound together with an introduction (usually slow) and a coda (often reflective). Schulz-Evler adheres closely to the original, applying decorative figuration (hence the term "arabesques") intended to fashion the work for concert performance according to typical 19th century convention. Schulz-Evler's original compositions are all but forgotten. However, his treatment of the Blue Danube was once quite popular, as evidenced by the critical misgivings expressed in the 1954 edition of Sir George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, where it is described as a work "designed for display and without musical quality, which is still remembered by some elderly recitalgoers as a meretricious encore piece."