GRANT PARK ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS
Carlos Kalmar  Artistic Director and Principal Conductor
Christopher Bell  Chorus Director

Wednesday, June 26, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.
Jay Pritzker Pavilion

A NIGHT IN VIENNA

Grant Park Orchestra
Carlos Kalmar  Conductor

Johann Strauss, Jr.
Overture to The Gypsy Baron, Op. 417

Josef Strauss
Fireproof! Polka Française, Op. 269

Johann Strauss, Jr.
Praise of Women, Polka-Mazurka, Op. 315
Morning Papers, Waltz, Op. 279
Egyptian March, Op. 335
Overture to Indigo and the Forty Thieves, Op. 343

Josef Strauss
Chatterbox, Fast Polka, Op. 245

Johann Strauss, Jr.
Accelerations, Waltz, Op. 234
Explosions, Polka, Op. 43
Emperor Waltzes, Op. 437

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JOHANN STRAUSS, JR. (1825-1899)
OVERTURE TO THE GYPSY BARON, OP. 417 (1883-1885)

On a visit to Budapest to conduct his operetta Der lustige Krieg, Strauss met the celebrated Hungarian playwright Maurus Jókai. Strauss, like most Viennese, was addicted to the exoticism of Magyar food, wine, stories and folk music, and he decided that a new novel by Jókai, called Saffi, would make an excellent operetta libretto. Jókai suggested that Ignaz Schnitzer, a Viennese journalist with an instinctive feeling both for the stage and for things Hungarian, write the text. Composer and librettist worked closely and carefully together, and The Gypsy Baron was not completed for two years. The premiere was scheduled for the Theater-an-der-Wien on October 24, 1885, the eve of the composer’s sixtieth birthday, an occasion that engendered celebrations throughout Austria. Strauss, who had not had an unqualified stage success since Die Fledermaus eleven years earlier, paced the wings in nervous anxiety. It worked. The Gypsy Baron was a triumph. Emperor Franz Josef himself attended, stayed for the entire performance (surprisingly, this leader of the world’s most music-mad city did not care much for music, and usually exited at the first intermission), and after the final curtain told the thrilled composer, “I enjoyed myself immensely.” The Overture, like the operetta it prefaces, blends exotic Hungarian Gypsy songs and dances with lighthearted Viennese waltzes.

JOSEF STRAUSS (1827-1870)
FIREPROOF!, POLKA FRANÇAISE, OP. 269 (1869)

Papa Johann Strauss tried to discourage his sons from following him into the music business. Only Josef, the second-born, initially took his advice. Though he did not join the military as his father wished, Josef did train as an engineer and architect and started a promising career in those fields. Older brother Johann, however, was working himself into a nervous exhaustion with the Strauss Orchestra at the time — he came home late one night and collapsed at his mother’s feet. Young Eduard was only eighteen, so the sole choice seemed to be Josef. He was brought into the family discussion and at first refused to take over, pleading lack of training and ability, the duties of another occupation, and an awkward and unattractive personal appearance. Finally his objections were overcome when Johann, from his sickbed, told him, “You are the most talented of us all.” Josef acquiesced, and, after some lessons in music theory and violin, he made his debut as conductor of the Strauss Orchestra on July 23, 1853, for which he wrote a waltz called Die Ersten und die Letzten (“The First and the Last”). Hardly the last. He wrote 283 works, including 222 waltzes, during the remaining seventeen years of his life.

Feuerfest! — Fireproof! — was the marketing slogan of Vienna’s Wertheim Safe Company, founded by Franz von Wertheim in 1852 to manufacture a line of products to keep “cash, securities and documents safe from burglary and fire.” Wertheim demonstrated the efficacy of his safes in a spectacular publicity stunt in Constantinople in 1857, when he set one into a bonfire before a gathering of international dignitaries and the Sultan himself; the contents emerged unscathed. The orders for 3,000 safes that flooded in from Constantinople were matched by similar demand throughout the Habsburg Empire, and Wertheim was soon one of Vienna’s wealthiest and most influential businessmen. For the staff party on March 13, 1869 celebrating the completion of the firm’s 20,000th safe, Wertheim hired the Strauss Orchestra to provide
the music and commissioned Josef to write *Feuerfest!,* a delightful *Polka Française* whose delicate strains are wittily countered by the metallic clangs emanating from the percussion section to evoke the company’s ironworks.

**JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.**

*Praise the Women, Polka-Mazurka, Op. 315 (1867)*

Following the defeat of the Austrian forces at Königgrätz on July 3, 1866 in the decisive battle of the Austro-Prussian War and the resultant diminishing of Habsburg influence in central Europe, the mood of the Viennese public at the beginning of the following winter’s usually festive Carnival season was markedly sour. It was the most important time of the year for the Strauss family musical organization and the brothers knew they had to provide something special to brighten the mood of their audiences. They did, composing a record 24 pieces for the 1867 season: five by Johann, eleven by Josef and eight by Eduard, including *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* and *Artist’s Life.* Supplementing these iconic waltzes were a number of spirit-lifting polkas as well as Johann’s “polka-mazurka” *Lob den Frauen* (“Praise the Women”), a stylistic hybrid that adapts the dance movements of the quick, duple-meter polka to the moderate tempo and triple-meter music of the Polish mazurka. Its title was borrowed from a poem by Schiller: *Praise the women who braid and weave/Heavenly roses into earthly life.*

**MORNING PAPERS, WALTZ, OP. 279 (1863)**

When Jacques Offenbach, Europe’s leading composer of operetta, visited Vienna in the fall of 1863, the Vienna Authors’ and Journalists’ Association, called “Concordia” probably as much in irony as in optimism, commissioned him to write a new waltz for their upcoming January ball. He sent them an untitled piece from Paris about the same time that Johann Strauss, Jr. and his orchestra were engaged to perform at the event. Strauss was therefore obliged to write his own new waltz for the gala and submit it to the organizing committee, which titled his contribution *Morgenblätter* (“Morning Papers”) and Offenbach’s *Abendblätter* (“Evening Papers”). Strauss conducted the premieres of both works, and the press judiciously limited its coverage to uncritical reportage, but history has recognized *Morgenblätter* as one of his finest creations while *Abendblätter* has faded into the historical twilight.

**EGYPTIAN MARCH, OP. 335 (1869)**

The tintinnabulous *Egyptian March* was written in celebration of the opening of the Suez Canal on November 16, 1869 and introduced in anticipation of that event at the Strauss orchestra’s June 24th concert during their annual summer season at Pavlovsk, Russia. The *March* was heard again to accompany the entry of Egyptian soldiers in the final scene of Anton Bittner’s play *Nach Ägypten* (“*Into Egypt*”), introduced at Vienna’s Theater-an-der-Wien on December 26, 1869.

**OVERTURE TO INDIGO AND THE FORTY THIEVES, OP. 343 (1871)**

Johann Strauss was famed throughout the world for his waltzes and polkas for many years before he wrote his first operetta. In 1871, after much cajoling from his wife, Jetty, an ex-opera singer whose fortune allowed him to give up the drudgery of conducting that had worn out his father, Strauss completed *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber* (“*Indigo
“and the Forty Thieves”), which appeared just as the popularity of Jacques Offenbach’s operettas in Vienna was waning. Strauss’ irresistible music made Indigo a success at its premiere on February 10, 1871 at the Theater-an-der-Wien — the date usually cited as beginning the “Golden Age” of Viennese operetta — but Maximilian Steiner’s nearly impenetrable libretto, adapted from The Arabian Nights, eventually forced the piece from the stage, though it did establish Strauss as a composer for the theater. In 1906, seven years after Strauss’ death, Ernest Reiterer adapted Indigo’s music to a completely revised text by Leo Stein and Carl Lindau, and the new work was premiered at the Volksoper in Vienna on October 27, 1907 as 1,001 Nights. The exotic story deals with themes characteristic of the Arabian Nights — harems, tales spun by alluringly veiled ladies, dreams of brave deeds, and sacrifice out of love.

JOSEF STRAUSS

CHATTERBOX, FAST POLKA, OP. 245 (1868)

Among the Strauss family’s many lighthearted pieces referencing such matters as current events, humorous topics or local personalities is Josef’s polka Plappermäulchen — “Chatterbox” — premiered under his direction on April 26, 1868 at the “Neue Welt,” a popular amusement park in suburban Vienna. With the work’s rumbustious motion, percussion effects and evocative title, the musicians of the Strauss Orchestra knew as soon as the parts for the piece showed up on their music stands that it referred to Josef’s loquacious ten-year-old daughter, Karoline Anna Strauss, known affectionately as “Plappermäulchen.”
JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.
ACCELERATIONS, WALTZ, OP. 234 (1860)

Strauss composed his *Accelerations* for the Valentine’s Day 1860 celebration of the student society of engineers at Vienna University and premiered it with his orchestra that evening at the city’s elegant Sofienbad Ballroom. The title, a tribute to the engineering profession, is more than justified by the work’s introduction and first waltz, and made visual on the cover of its first publication, which was adorned with images of Zephyrus (the Greek god of the west wind), a paddle-wheel steamer, hot air balloon, telegraph wires and steam train.

EXPLOSIONS POLKA, OP. 43 (1847)

The German chemist Christian Friedrich Schönbein (1799-1868) established the principle of the fuel cell in 1839, identified and named the gas ozone in 1840, and in 1845 invented nitrocellulose when he grabbed his wife’s cotton apron to mop up a mixture of nitric acid and sulfuric acid he had spilled in the kitchen. When he hung the sopping rag on the clothesline to dry, the heat of the sun made it burst spontaneously into flame, so he developed this serendipitous discovery into “guncotton,” which could be used as a propellant in firearms to replace smoky and barrel-clogging black gunpowder. This new product set off a Viennese vogue for the term “explosive”—a comedian could be explosively funny; an evening gown might have an explosive effect; one humor magazine warned mothers to avoid using cotton nappies for fear of exploding the baby—and for his 1847 season, Johann Strauss capitalized on the fashion with the *Explosions Polka*, which he premiered at the “Fun Explosions Festival” he staged at Vienna’s Josefštädter Theater on February 8th. The piece, of course, met with explosive applause.

EMPEROR WALTZES, OP. 437 (1889)

In October 1889, Strauss was invited to give a series of five concerts at the newly opened concert hall in the Berlin Königsbau, the magnificent complex housing the court of the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II. Strauss composed a new waltz for his appearances that he titled *Hand in Hand*, a reference to Austrian Emperor Franz Josef’s visit to Wilhelm in August, when he extended “the hand of friendship” to Germany. By the time of the work’s premiere, however, on October 21, 1889, it had become the *Kaiser Walzer — Emperor Waltzes*—a shrewd bit of politicking suggested by Strauss’ publisher, Fritz Simrock, that obviated the need to dedicate the piece to one monarch or the other while satisfying the vanity of both. The *Emperor Waltzes* is the last of the great works in the form composed by Johann, Jr., “the most beautiful flower that the incredible tree of Strauss music had produced in 75 years,” according to French writer Guillaume Ritter. Conceived for the concert hall rather than for the ballroom, it opens with an introductory march, akin in spirit to the serenades of Mozart, which gives presentiments of the upcoming waltz. The body of the work comprises four separate waltzes in complimentary keys and moods. A wistful coda recalls the themes of the first and third waltzes. Of the *Emperor Waltzes*, Joseph Wechsberg wrote, “The mood is nostalgic, a short, last reminiscence; there is a moment of sadness — life goes so fast, and with it everything that is beautiful — but in the very end there is that final expression of ‘live and let live.’”

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