

Johann Strauss and Vienna

Operetta and the Politics of Popular Culture

Camille Crittenden



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1 | The birth of a genre

At the end of the nineteenth century, Vienna provided an ideal environment for the creation of a new musical genre, the Viennese operetta. Following the conservatism of the Biedermeier period (1815–48) and the neo-absolutism that prevailed after the revolutions of 1848, Vienna opened itself in the 1850s and 1860s to the political, social, and technological advances already underway in the rest of western Europe. Growing industrial development made manufacturing jobs in the city more plentiful and more economically rewarding than agricultural careers in the country. Modernization also increased the size and spending power of the bourgeoisie, who now required service amenities and household staffs to demonstrate their affluence. Immigrants from Habsburg provinces streamed into Vienna in search of employment, creating a more ethnically diverse population than the city had ever known. Within a few decades Vienna grew from a small imperial capital of 500,000 to an important gateway between east and west of almost 2 million residents. The rapid economic expansion and changes in the profile of Vienna's population encouraged, if not required, a new means of musico-dramatic expression.

Despite explosive population growth and intense industrialization, the seat of the Habsburg empire provided an image of calm stability in the figure of Franz Joseph. His coronation in 1848 marked the beginning of a 68-year reign, an unprecedented tenure among modern European nations. As ruler over a geographically immense and multi-lingual empire, he faced increasing obstacles to peaceful rule as various ethnic groups lobbied for autonomy. But the political undercurrents of nationalism and irredentism that eventually threatened to tear the empire apart from within were only just beginning in the last third of the century.

Aside from the temporary effects of a stock market crash in 1873, the city thrived economically with rapid growth in industry, banking, and the railroad.¹ Civic building projects such as channeling the Vienna River, widening streets, and building new roads, bridges, and schools, were all undertaken during the *Gründerzeit* of the 1860s and later. Construction boomed along the newly established Ringstrasse, where monumental public buildings were erected in the Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles in a project of beautification unparalleled in Austria's history. Expansive apartment buildings, both owned and inhabited by Vienna's elite, shared the prime real estate. The chief purpose of these buildings was not utilitarian but rather symbolic, for in them the Liberal bourgeoisie saw reflected their own economic power and cultural sophistication.²

The destruction of the city wall in 1857 granted the private *Vorstadt* theaters a new lease on life.³ As the *Vorstadt* districts became incorporated into the city, their theaters attracted a larger urban audience. Business barons, eager to speculate on theaters and productions, plowed money into both, bringing financial support as well as a willingness to risk novelty. The star system that had developed in concert and theater life in the nineteenth century, exemplified by performers like Franz Liszt, Adeline Patti, and Sarah Bernhardt, finally reached the private theaters as well. Once bastions of ensemble performance, *Vorstadt* theaters would pay extraordinary sums by the end of the century to secure popular performers for their houses. All these economic circumstances and artistic trends directly affected the development of Viennese operetta.

Formally, the genre evolved from a confluence of several traditions, the most direct of which were Offenbach's operettas and spoken Viennese stage works. Offenbach achieved enormous popularity in Vienna during the late 1850s and 1860s, and his operettas provided a natural point of departure for Viennese composers hoping to make the genre their own. Further influences came from contemporary popular music, *Volkslieder* and *Schrammelmusik*, but the farces (*Possen*), folk plays (*Volksstücke*), and comedies (*Lustspiele*) of

Ferdinand Raimund, Johann Nestroy, and Ludwig Anzengruber provided an important narrative model. These dramatic works – performed in the same theaters as operetta and by the same actors – featured incidental music by Franz von Suppé, Carl Millöcker, and Adolf Müller, Jr., all of whom became leading operetta composers. Although Suppé and others had written one-act operettas in the 1860s, it was not until 1871, with Johann Strauss’s *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber*, that the first full-length Viennese operetta emerged.

As the genre increased in popularity, music and theater critics devoted more attention not only to specific works but also to broader aesthetic issues. While opera had long received careful critical scrutiny, journalists soon began reporting on operetta as well; Eduard Hanslick, the unrivalled *éminence grise* among Viennese music critics, paid close attention to musical developments in the *Vorstadt* theaters. Hanslick gained a reputation in his own day for barely restrained pedantry, but he was not alone among Viennese journalists in his concern for generic categorization. Strauss’s *Simplicius* (1887) aroused much speculation and consternation when it was advertised without a defining rubric; several newspapers noted the lack of a descriptive term like “opera,” “operetta,” or “folk opera,” and suggested that it might be a transitional work for the composer, leading him from the *Vorstadt* theater into the Court Opera.⁴ Strauss had labeled his previous work, *Der Zigeunerbaron* [*The Gypsy Baron*, 1885], a “comic opera,” but although it departed from his previous operetta style, it was clearly intended for performance at the Theater an der Wien. He may have hoped this label would gain the work entry into the Court Opera some day, despite its more modest origins. Only a few years later Hanslick lamented that “the concept ‘opera’ is so broad and so liberal that it encompasses every kind of the most beautiful and most dramatic music.”⁵

As broad as the concept “opera” may have become by the 1890s, operetta had always defined itself against the established genre in several ways. The table below compares traits associated with each genre.

Operetta

Performed in private suburban theaters, away from political centers of power

Improvisatory tradition continues

Authority lies with the performer

Popular music

Entertainment available to wide social spectrum

Plot could be “lascivious,” not held to high moral standards, censors more lenient

Women participated in management (Geistinger, Gallmeyer, von Schönerer)

Cross-dressing popular, titillation seeing women in pants

Local appeal

Value placed on simple melody

Opera

Performed in Court theaters, subvented and endorsed by monarchy and government, in physical proximity to the Court

Performers adhere to original text

Authority lies with the composer

Art music

Audience composed largely of aristocrats, civil servants, upper bourgeoisie

Proper moral stance must be maintained; here censors were most strict

Women involved only as performers

Except for breeches roles, women’s bodies remained “appropriately” clothed

International appeal

Complex melodic, harmonic, and timbral manipulation expected

In some cases, operetta composers deliberately aimed to differentiate their work from opera, while others strove to emulate the high-art genre, hoping that one day their work would be suitable for performance at the Court Opera.

How, then, did the Viennese operetta come to exist as an identifiable genre? Genre theorists have offered various explanations for this process. Frederic Jameson, for one, has argued that “*pure* textual exemplifications of a single genre do not exist; and this not merely because pure manifestations of anything are rare, but . . . because texts always come into being at the intersection of several genres and emerge from the tensions in the latter’s multiple force

fields.”⁶ Similarly, Tzvetan Todorov explains that “a new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination.”⁷ These and other authors stress not only precedents for a new genre but also the importance of the context in which it arose, granting the intended audience significant collaborative power. Jeffrey Kallberg, for example, adopts “an understanding of genre as a communicative concept shared by composers and listeners alike, one that therefore actively informs the experience of a musical work. Construing genre as a social phenomenon requires an investigation into the responses of the communities that encountered a particular genre.”⁸ Any examination of early Viennese operetta must take into account the intersecting genres, traditions, and expectations that created it. These include the operettas of Offenbach, the heritage of Viennese comic theater, the ubiquity of local folk singers, and the changing tastes of audiences clamoring for entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century.

THEATRICAL MODELS FOR VIENNESE OPERETTA

Offenbach in Vienna

By the mid-1850s Offenbach had found an enthusiastic following in Vienna, where the Carltheater, under the direction of Johann Nestroy, contributed more than any other theater to the growing popularity of French operetta. Nestroy planned a guest appearance of Offenbach’s troupe, the *Bouffes-Parisiens*, but the Carltheater’s uncertain financial position precluded the visit. Hopeful that a future offer might be tenable, Offenbach refused to grant performance rights for any of his works, but Nestroy evaded the issue in typical nineteenth-century fashion by presenting a pirated production of *Le Mariage aux lanternes* [*Die Verlobung bei der Laterne*; *Marriage by Lamplight*], translated by comic actor Karl Treumann and orchestrated by Karl Binder from the French piano-vocal score.⁹ The success of this production encouraged Nestroy to borrow illegally once again, and he followed it with a version of *Orphée aux enfers*

[*Orpheus in der Unterwelt*; *Orpheus in the Underworld*], playing the role of Jupiter himself.

When Treumann took over leadership of the Carltheater in 1860, he immediately invited Offenbach to conduct three of his operettas with a Viennese cast. The Frenchman received a warm welcome in Vienna in January 1861, when he led productions of *Le Violoneux* [*Die Zaubergeige*; *The Magic Violin*], *Le Mariage aux lanternes*, and *Un Mari à la porte* [*Ein Ehemann vor der Tür*; *A Husband at the Door*], winning acclaim from public and critics alike.¹⁰ Indeed, Hanslick became a supporter of his operettas from that time forward. Feeling increasingly at home in Vienna during the 1860s, Offenbach returned in February 1864 when the Court Opera prepared the premiere of his first opera, *Die Rheinixen* [*The Rhine Nymphs*]. Although the opera lasted only eight performances before disappearing, it was during this visit that he and Johann Strauss met for the first time. Legend has it that Offenbach then made the fateful suggestion that Strauss try his hand at operetta, but although the two men may indeed have discussed the issue, it was hardly the epiphany for Strauss that later biographers have construed it to be.¹¹

Demand for Offenbach's works continued into the early 1870s, and he visited Vienna regularly. In 1871 the humorous weekly *Kikeriki* even cautioned him not to come to Vienna for fear he would be "torn apart" by the four leading theater directors (Friedrich Strampfer, Heinrich Laube, Anton Ascher, and Maximilian Steiner), all seeking exclusive performance rights to his works.¹² His popularity declined somewhat after mid-decade as Viennese composers and librettists sought to distance themselves from French precedents in favor of their own musical and narrative styles. His importance for the inception of Viennese operetta, however, cannot be overlooked.

The success of Parisian operetta and light opera in Vienna was undoubtedly a strong impetus for Viennese authors to try their hand at the genre. (In addition to Offenbach's works, those by Adolphe Adam, Adrien Boieldieu, and Charles Lecocq were also frequently performed.) Although Viennese composers were inspired by their French colleagues, they modified the genre in various ways to suit

local tastes. One of the most obvious differences between Parisian and Viennese operetta is the choice of dance genres. The Viennese relied heavily on waltz and polka rhythms, whereas the French preferred the can-can and gallop, if they included dances at all. Offenbach required a smaller cast, chorus, and orchestra than did the Viennese composers, for while Strauss enjoyed access to the full staff at the Theater an der Wien, Offenbach's compositional choices were constrained by the resources available to him in Paris, where, until 1858, governmental regulations limited the number of performers allowed on stage at the *Bouffes-Parisiens* to three and the number of orchestral musicians to thirty. By the late 1880s Viennese tastes had evolved to the point where critic Ludwig Speidel, for one, felt that Offenbach's operettas were too thinly orchestrated and used choruses too small to hold the interest of Viennese audiences.¹³

Viennese operetta has been characterized both by contemporary critics and by twentieth-century scholars as more sentimental and romantic than Parisian operetta, which was more ironic and satirical. Whereas Offenbach openly portrays caricatures of government ministers and parodies social mores, Strauss's criticisms are more subtly portrayed and secondary to the romantic story line. Speidel compared Parisian operetta to Viennese in 1888: "The idiotic Kings, feeble-minded Ministers, simpleton Generals, as they schemed in the Parisian operetta, almost all had a satiric look on their face. For [Henri] Meilhac and [Ludovic] Halévy nonsense was a weapon of the wit, while in the Viennese operetta, nonsense is really just nurtured for its own sake."¹⁴ This difference was due, in part, to their respective audiences: Offenbach's Parisian audience of the 1860s was eager to see the Second Empire parodied on stage with quick verbal wit, while Strauss's more ethnically diverse audience of the 1880s could appreciate physical humor and love stories much more immediately. Still, the generalization is flawed for two reasons. First, French operetta composers after Offenbach were also more sentimental and less satiric than he had been. Only because Offenbach and Strauss provide the two outstanding national examples of composers in their

genre are they often compared as though they were simultaneous phenomena. Second, Viennese operetta also incorporated parody at various points in its development. Strauss's *Indigo* is replete with parody and was accused of being too much like Offenbach for precisely that reason. Even if the libretti did not include political or social satire, performers often added parody themselves through gesture or delivery style.¹⁵

Unlike his Viennese colleagues, Offenbach strove to set whole scenes to music, not just isolated numbers; he complained to his librettist Ludovic Halévy that, without situations, the music becomes boring and absurd for the audience.¹⁶ Offenbach worked more closely with his librettists than the Viennese generally did, facilitating a musico-dramatic unity that Viennese operetta frequently lacks. For this trait, he was hailed by Hanslick, among others, as a dramatic composer. Although some Viennese operettas, especially those of the 1880s, include large scene complexes during which the action is furthered through arioso dialogue or melodrama, the genre more often revolves around discrete numbers (couplets, ensembles, finales) separated by spoken dialogue.

The Viennese operetta tradition also differed from Offenbach in its tolerance, even encouragement, of satirical Jewish figures. Offenbach's father was a cantor, and although Offenbach himself converted to Catholicism in 1844, the Jewish traditions and melodies of his childhood remained with him throughout his life. Despite his obvious delight in satire and caricature, he never included or allowed Jewish parodies in his works. Strauss and his colleagues did not shy away from Jewish caricatures and, in fact, were advised by anxious theater directors on several occasions to tone down or eliminate such caricatures from their works.¹⁷

Despite these differences, Viennese operetta would have been unthinkable without its French predecessor. More than any specific structural or musical influences, Viennese operetta owes its general tone to the French model. The idea of operetta – entertaining scenes linked together through simple melodies and dance numbers – came from France, and although the Viennese operetta was also influenced

by operatic and local theatrical forms, its deepest roots are found in Offenbach.

Links to spoken theater

At the beginning of their foray into operetta Viennese composers borrowed heavily from familiar theatrical forms. Although music is the defining element of operetta, the genre shares many features with spoken stage works performed in the *Vorstadt* theaters of its birth. Plays often included couplets (strophic songs) or choruses, as well as musical accompaniment, like dances, marches, or entr'acte music; when the musical portion of these spoken genres was particularly great, they were advertised as being “*mit Gesang*” (with song). Indeed, some early one-act operettas differed little from the common *Posse mit Gesang* or *Lebensbild mit Gesang*. Two leading authors of Viennese *Possen* and *Volksstücke* were Johann Nestroy and Ludwig Anzengruber. Although neither of these authors wrote operetta libretti himself, their works were performed frequently on the stages where operetta emerged. Along with operetta, their works contributed to establishing – as well as criticizing – a public Viennese identity.

Nestroy's works, often set in the Viennese folk milieu, were notorious for their daring political or social critique. One of his most successful works, *Freiheit in Krähwinkel* [*Freedom in Krähwinkel*, July 1848], deals with the freedom of a citizenry against political and religious oppression, an especially apt topic at the time of its premiere. Nestroy's career was firmly established prior to the revolutionary events of 1848 and their aftermath, a time of censorship and absolutism, but he gained renown for adding gestural innuendo to dialogue so that, on the basis of the written text, the censors could not object, although the audience clearly understood the political figure being parodied or the criticism being made. Censorship continued, to varying degrees, until the end of the nineteenth century, and Nestroy's tradition of suggestive, improvisatory gestures persisted on the operetta stage.

Nestroy began his career as a singer in the Vienna Court Opera chorus, and although he ultimately found that his talents lay more in acting and writing than in music, he kept abreast of musical developments and trends.¹⁸ He created parodies of the most popular operas: *Tannhäuser* (subtitled “Comedy of the future with music of the past and current sets, in 3 acts”),¹⁹ *Lohengrin*, and *Martha* (“or the Maid-auction of Mischmond”).²⁰ His parody of *Tannhäuser* (1852), with music by Karl Binder, acquired a following long before Wagner’s work reached any Viennese stage (1857).²¹ From 1852 until 1860 he directed the Theater an der Wien, where he was engaged as actor and author from 1831 until the end of his life in 1862. His works, characterized by a tone similar to Offenbach’s, satirize the government and its employees and implicitly criticize contemporary society and its practices. Although Viennese operetta did not continue his parodic tone, the new genre adopted some of the stock characters found in his plays, such as the dandy, the wealthy businessman, the spunky maid, and the folk from the country. Similar character types may also be found in the works of Nestroy’s colleague Ludwig Anzengruber, whose treatment of them is, however, more respectful and sympathetic than satirical.

Anzengruber wrote his most successful and memorable works between 1870 and his death in 1889, thus coinciding with the early development of Viennese operetta. He was the last in the tradition of *Vorstadt* authors, a successor to Nestroy, Raimund, and O. F. Berg (founder of the weekly *Kikeriki*). Like the works of these authors, who lampooned many inanities of Viennese public life, his plays concern moral issues, especially the corruption and power of the Catholic church. During Anzengruber’s lifetime many distinctive qualities of the *Vorstadt* disappeared as those neighborhoods were subsumed into the growing metropolis of Vienna, and the atmosphere that had nourished the *Volk* authors was gradually supplanted by the city. Nevertheless, he continued many techniques typical of the *Vorstadt* theater, using asides and eavesdroppers, local dialects, and music and songs – especially entrance songs – to establish characterization. Along with his *Vorstadt* predecessors, his characters’

names revealed something of their personality; in *Der Pfarrer von Kirchfeld* [*The Priest of Kirchfeld*], Wurzelsepp (“Wurzel” means “root”) digs roots in the mountains for use by a pharmacist, and Hell (“bright”), the clear-sighted minister, argues against the villainous Duke Finsterberg (“dark mountain”). Although the *Volkstück* tradition waned, many of these traits continued in the guise of Viennese operetta.

Anzengruber was supported and encouraged by directors Maximilian Steiner and Marie Geistinger at the Theater an der Wien. There he enjoyed his first success with *Der Pfarrer von Kirchfeld* (1870), a story of religious intolerance (between Lutherans and Catholics) in which Geistinger established herself as a dramatic, as well as a musical, talent. Two of his favorite themes – the land-greedy farmer and illegitimate birth – appeared for the first time in his next work, *Der Meineidbauer* [*The Perjure Farmer*, 1871]. Further successes included *Der G’wissenswurm* [*The Worm of Conscience*, 1874] and his most controversial play, *Das vierte Gebot* [*The Fourth Commandment*, 1877], also works in which Geistinger created the female leading characters. Although he never wrote operetta libretti, his contributions to the Viennese *Volkstück* influenced those who did. His folk tone removes him from Johann Strauss’s more urbane style, but other leading operetta composers like Millöcker and Karl Zeller inherited Anzengruber’s success in portraying a rural milieu.

EXTRA-THEATRICAL INFLUENCES

Since the old days, Vienna claims three important elements of popular music that speak for the unique musical talent of the Austrians – elements without which any representation of Viennese musical life would certainly remain incomplete. They are military music, dance music, and finally, the folk singers.

Eduard Hanslick²²

Viennese operetta composers relied on a variety of musical sources for guidance and inspiration as they found their footing in the new genre. Along with Offenbach’s works and traditional dance music,

two particularly Viennese musical styles contributed to the development of the new genre, folksongs and *Schrammelmusik*. Although this music was originally intended for the enjoyment of the local population, the operettas of Strauss and his colleagues brought these styles to an international audience.

Composers and performers of folksongs exercised a powerful and unacknowledged influence on other contemporary forms of popular music. Often a theater's music director, whose job included providing music for plays and other entertainment, drew on folk music, either directly or indirectly, for inspiration. Although most popular music is ephemeral, existing only as long as its style is fashionable, some folksongs have gained lasting popularity: "Es gibt nur a Kaiserstadt, es gibt nur a Wien" [There's only one imperial city, there's only one Vienna], composed by Wenzel Müller, stayed in the popular repertoire for generations, and the "Fiakerlied" [Coachman's Song], composed by Gustav Pick and premiered by Alexander Girardi in 1885, has remained a public expression of nostalgia for over a century.

Folksongs, performed in local dialect, were usually strophic and often referred to topical events or places. Many offered a sentimental, nostalgic picture of Vienna and its environs, referring to the Vienna woods, the Danube, and the vineyards and wine bars (*Heuriger*) north of the city. The refrain was frequently a yodeling melodic pattern sung to text like "duliäh" or "hoda ruli uli."²³ The Act II chorus in *Die Fledermaus* ("Brüderlein und Schwesterlein") alludes to this style with its refrain of "duidu, la la la," and when Strauss uses "duliäh" as the refrain of *Indigo*'s most popular chorus, "Ja, so singt man in der Stadt wo ich geboren" [Yes, that's how they sing in the city where I was born], he explicitly imitates the folksong idiom. In this number he also follows tradition by referring to Vienna as the place of the characters' birth, for many folksongs emphasize that the singer or the singer's mother was born in Vienna with refrains such as "Muatterl war a Wienerin, drum hab' i Wien so gern" [Mama was a Viennese, that's why I like Vienna so much] and "Das ist mein Wien, mein liebes Wien, so lebt man dort wo ich

geboren bin" [That is my Vienna, my dear Vienna, that's how they live where I was born].

The folk singers' art was largely an oral tradition and was not subject to the censorial scrutiny that stage works routinely underwent. Folk singers frequently took advantage of this freedom to express social and political commentary, still thinly disguised by metaphor and allusion. Josephine Gallmeyer, a leading operetta performer and folk singer of her day, explained, "an opera singer sings such high German that you usually can't understand a word; a folk singer, however, sings just what she thinks, so you understand not only what she sings but also a whole lot more."²⁴ Gallmeyer and others transferred this well-developed art of innuendo and *double entendre* to the operetta stage.

Stage music composers originally borrowed from folk singers, but soon the exchange also worked in reverse. Songs from popular operettas were arranged and publicized by folk singers, much to theater directors' dismay, for the price of a theater ticket far exceeded the cost of an evening in an outdoor café listening to the latest operetta hits, and the singers thereby diminished the potential theater audience. Theater owners had every reason to be concerned about the detrimental effect of folk singers on their businesses: the number of folk-singer societies grew from thirty in 1876 to over seventy in 1890, and police reports showed evidence of more than 19,000 folk-singer productions in 1885 alone.²⁵ Some theater directors went so far as to press charges against folk singers who popularized songs from operettas to which their theaters owned exclusive performance rights.²⁶ Members of the folk singers' broad audience included not only local residents of the suburbs where they performed, but also aristocrats and wealthy business families who ventured out occasionally from their new mansions in the city to hear the novelties in *Volksmusik*. When many Viennese singers went to Berlin to participate in festivities at the newly opened *Wintergarten* in 1886, Viennese newspapers portrayed theater directors' joy and relief: "Hooray! We're losing our most dangerous competition!"²⁷

Folk singers sometimes worked in collaboration or alternation

with local instrumentalists, and one of Vienna's most successful instrumental groups was the Schrammel quartet. Brothers Johann and Josef Schrammel, along with Anton Strohmayr and Georg Dänzer, played two violins, a guitar, and a small clarinet (the "picksüße Hölzl"), creating the distinctive sound of *Schrammelmusik*. Founded in 1878, the ensemble began its career in the *Heuriger* of Nussdorf, a wine-growing suburb north of the city; their repertoire consisted of traditional dances, marches, and folksong arrangements, as well as their own original music. By the late 1880s the quartet had gained sufficient popularity and respect that they were invited to perform in the Viennese institutions of high culture, the Court Opera and the Musikverein. Strauss heard the Schrammel quartet for the first time in 1884 and offered this recommendation: "I hereby declare, with pleasure and confidence, that the ensemble's musical leadership, in execution and presentation, is of artistic significance in the true sense of the word. I highly recommend them to everyone with a sense for the faithful musical representation of Viennese humor and the poetic characteristics of the Viennese folk music genre."²⁸ These comments coincided with his early work on *Der Zigeunerbaron*, the general tone and instrumentation of which suggest that the Schrammels' music made a strong impression.²⁹

Schrammelmusik, like Strauss's works, appealed to all social levels, and just as Strauss was a sought-after entertainer for private balls, the Schrammel quartet likewise became a prestigious addition to private parties. Journalist Julius von der Als explained: "The Viennese *Heuriger* musicians today are no longer beggar musicians. They are welcome in salons and in the palaces of our aristocracy; no intimate party is complete anymore without inviting 'die Schrammeln.' Whoever cannot get the Schrammels must then make do with other musicians."³⁰ The Schrammel quartet had not existed as long as Strauss's orchestra and could not boast the same musical continuity between generations, but they evoked a similar sense of nostalgia in their listeners by performing traditional folksongs that had been in circulation for years. Indeed, one newspaper described them as "a 'living archive' for the sounding treasures of years gone by."³¹

The name Schrammel has continued its association with Viennese identity throughout the twentieth century. In 1922, Erwin W. Spahn lamented in “O Du arme Stadt der Lieder!” [O, you poor city of songs!] that he “recently went out to where the Schrammels once fiddled. Instead of the sweet Viennese songs, the new jazz blared.”³² The style was revived in the 1960s by members of the Vienna Philharmonic in a group known as the Philharmonia Schrammeln.³³ Subsequent musicians combined traditional tunes with more contemporary popular styles; in the late 1970s, Roland Neuwirth founded a popular music group called the “Extremerschrammeln,” which began to add rock and blues elements to the traditional folk-songs.³⁴ Neuwirth reorganized his group in the mid-1990s as the Herz.Ton.Schrammeln, an ensemble that toured the United States and Canada in 1999 playing traditional Viennese folk music along with their own new compositions. Although the original Schrammels were not well known internationally, *Schrammelmusik* fulfilled and continues to fulfill a twofold cultural role similar to that of Strauss’s music, a gateway for nostalgic recollection and a symbol of Viennese identity.

TRENDS IN VIENNESE OPERETTA: 1865–1900

The earliest Viennese operettas, composed in the late 1860s, closely followed Offenbach’s model: short, satirical works requiring a minimum of singers and orchestral forces. Translations of Offenbach’s works were quite popular in Vienna, and many composers hoped to share in his success by imitating his style; Suppé’s *Die schöne Galathee* [*The Beautiful Galatea*, 1865] was specifically modeled on Offenbach’s *Belle Hélène* [*Helen, or Taken from the Greek*, 1864] in style, theme, and scope. Another model for early operettas was the one-act comedies with which they shared an evening’s program. Suppé’s *Das Pensionat* [*The Boarding School*, 1860] and *Flotte Bursche* [*Carefree Guys*, 1863] clearly derived from the local comedies performed alongside them on the *Vorstadt* stage. As Viennese composers gained more experience and confidence, they gradually established traditions of their own.

The first full-length Viennese operettas were set in an exotic utopia (like the island of Makassar in *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber*, 1871), a fictional but realistic land (like the small principalities of Trocadero and Rikarak in *Prinz Methusalem*, 1877), or an actual foreign country (frequently Italy, as in *Carneval in Rom* of 1873 and *Boccaccio* of 1879). Austrian composers felt a special kinship with Italy – not only were they geographic neighbors, but much of northern Italy had belonged to the Habsburg empire until shortly before Viennese operetta emerged.³⁵ Turkey (*Fatinitza*, 1876) also served as a contrasting musical and social culture, but Asia never held the fascination for the Viennese that it did for Offenbach (*Ba-ta-clan*, 1855) or Gilbert and Sullivan (*The Mikado*, 1885). Although there was an Asian presence in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century (through visiting dignitaries and theatrical troupes), a Viennese operetta was not set in China until Franz Lehár's *Das Land des Lächelns* [*The Land of Smiles*, 1929].

Operettas of the mid to late 1870s, while still hewing close to French models, were more urban and focused on Vienna. Strauss initiated this trend with the popular *Die Fledermaus* (1874), set in a “spa near a large city,” obviously Vienna. Millöcker's *Abenteuer in Wien* [Adventure in Vienna] of 1873 and *Die Frau von Brestl* of 1874 both capitalized on local interest. Nostalgia for Biedermeier Vienna also played a large role in operettas and revues during these years, as the popularity of Millöcker's *Erinnerungen an bessere Zeiten* [Memories of Better Times] of 1874 attested.

Viennese operetta of this decade invariably included a leading woman or a female ensemble dressed in men's clothing. Whether a male character was played by a female actress (Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*; Boccaccio and Prince Methusalem in their eponymous works) or a female character disguised herself as a man during the course of the operetta (Fantasca in *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber*) or a male character, played by a woman, disguised herself again as a woman (Vladimir in *Fatinitza*), the decade offered ample opportunity for cross-dressing. Choruses of female “soldiers” were popular for their close-fitting uniforms and the opportunity to march in formation. In the days of tight corsets and long, full skirts, many audi-

ence members enjoyed the rare voyeuristic opportunity to see women's legs unveiled. In these respects, Viennese operetta differs from the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, a conscious decision on the Englishmen's part. Gilbert explained:

We resolved that our plots, however ridiculous, should be coherent, that our dialogue should be void of offence; on artistic principles, no man should play a woman's part and no woman a man's. Finally, we agreed that no lady of the company should be required to wear a dress that she could not wear with absolute propriety at a private fancy ball; and I believe I may say that we proved our case.³⁶

During the course of the 1870s, Austrian composers and librettists gradually weaned themselves from the French predecessors that had served them well at the start. A review of Suppé's *Boccaccio*, premiered in 1879, commended the work: "It is gratifying that the French imports of recent years have been superseded by a Viennese work, that local composers offer their French colleagues ever more dangerous competition."³⁷ Librettist Richard Genée recalled that the Offenbach style of burlesque was no longer appropriate by the end of the 1870s, "and as I then set out to create independent libretti, my efforts were directed toward eliminating the parodic element and the French frivolity from the operetta in order to create a German operetta that, in its essence, would come close to comic opera."³⁸ Many operetta composers added operatic elements to the existing framework of operetta in hopes of just such an "improvement." A journalist described the typical operetta of 1880:

Cute songs, ensembles in the style of grand opera, and *Posse* couplets follow each other without embarrassment; one composes according to demand and available resources. Singers who could appear at the opera and comics who have not a tone in their throat must work together, and thus arises that mixed genre that we in Vienna now call operetta.³⁹

Hanslick, too, decried the accretion of grand opera elements in operetta, claiming that operetta composers who try to compose in the style of grand opera do it badly, only proving thereby that they do not know how to compose an operetta.⁴⁰

In their efforts to compose in a more serious style, authors in the 1880s rid the genre of the pants roles that had been popular the decade before. Audiences no longer expected the satire and burlesque of earlier days, but rather characters with whom they hoped to identify: virile heroes and demure women. Any hint of androgyny was not suitable for a new nationalist climate in which secure identity and unmistakable differences between the sexes were sought.⁴¹ Female characters themselves also differed in this decade from their predecessors. By the 1880s the earlier typical female character (dominant, witty, influential, energetic) was almost completely pushed into the background. The self-sufficient, scheming Rosalinde and Adele of *Die Fledermaus* (1874) give way to the sweet, obedient Saffi of *Der Zigeunerbaron* (1885).

The leading male role in *Der Zigeunerbaron* is also typical for the time, a strong hero successful in battle. The 1880s witnessed a new emphasis on military might and Austro-German nationalism. A growing national awareness and pride can be seen in reviews of Strauss's *Der lustige Krieg* [*The Merry War*, 1881]:

Johann Strauss, our characteristic, artistic representative, who is more qualified than anyone to illustrate the lively Viennese life in music, has set an Italian history to music this time. The composer went from the Portuguese land of *Spitzentuch* [*der Königin*] to the Italian of *Der lustige Krieg* – we would, however, like to find him next on his own ground as composer of a comic opera that uses modern material and takes place in Austria.⁴²

Strauss gradually complied, beginning with the final act of *Der Zigeunerbaron* four years later. Other operettas of this decade emphasizing German heroism and military strength are Millöcker's *Der Feldprediger* [*The Army Chaplain*] of 1884 (which takes place in a small Prussian town on the Russian border during the Napoleonic invasions) and *Die sieben Schwaben* [*The Seven Swabians*] of 1887 (which takes place in Stuttgart during a sixteenth-century war between a local duke and the Swabian league of knights).

The 1880s saw an emphasis not only on German military might

but also on German cultural heritage. The Court Opera promoted a renaissance of German romantic opera, a genre that provided a new model for operetta composers and librettists. The centennial of Carl Maria von Weber's birth brought *Der Freischütz*, *Oberon*, and *Euryanthe* to the Court Opera in 1886. Works by Heinrich Marschner also enjoyed renewed popularity; *Hans Heiling* was frequently performed in the 1880s, while Court Opera director Wilhelm Jahn recovered *Der Vampyr* from the archives, reviving it with great success in 1884. Operetta composers emulated some of the salient musical characteristics of these works; but in addition to horn choruses on- and off-stage and numbers for male chorus (hunting songs, drinking songs, patriotic songs, and the like), the dramatic *Vorspiel* that formally characterized many German romantic operas also became a favorite narrative device for operetta authors.⁴³

Wagner's operas, always popular with the Viennese public if not Viennese critics, became commonplace on the Court Opera stage from the 1860s on. All of his works (except *Parsifal*) had been performed there by 1879, a year that saw performances of the *Ring* cycle in its entirety, and these operas remained in the Opera's repertoire thereafter.⁴⁴ Newspapers complained openly that Alfred Zamara's operetta *Der Doppelgänger* (1887) was too "Wagnerian," yet it filled the house nightly at the Theater an der Wien.⁴⁵ Strauss's *Simplicius* (1888) and Adolf Müller's *Der Hofnarr* (1886) and *Der Liebeschhof* (1888) further exemplify contemporary operetta composers' fascination with Wagner and the German renaissance.

After the popularity in the 1880s of German myth, legend, and history, it became fashionable once again in the 1890s to write stage works alluding to current events. Like the *Zeitopern* of a later generation, these works attempted to be modern, witty, and satirical. America became a popular setting for the modern entrepreneurial spirit, characterized by works like *Der Millionenonkel* [The Millionaire Uncle, 1892], *Ein Böhme in Amerika* [A Bohemian in America, 1890], *Der arme Jonathan* [Poor Jonathan, 1890], *Das Goldland* [Gold Country, 1893], *Ein Wiener in Amerika* [A Viennese in America, 1893], and *Der American Biograph* [The American Biographer, 1897]. Strauss, too,

participated in the modern trend with *Fürstin Ninetta* [Countess Ninetta, 1893], his first operetta following the brief tenure of his only opera, *Ritter Pásmán* (1892). *Ninetta*'s libretto, by journalist Julius Bauer, was highly contemporary and alluded to recent political events; one newspaper dismissed it as a "politisches Witzblatt" (a political humorous newspaper),⁴⁶ but sculptor Victor Tilgner congratulated Strauss on the work and noted that the public was surprised at how much they enjoyed it. They thought they had "outgrown" that kind of music, yet the theater took in 1400 fl. on a night during carnival.⁴⁷

Historical, serious topics became passé in the 1890s for several reasons: influential new performers rose to prominence; a series of new theater openings changed the general face of theater life; an Offenbach revival, as well as performances inspired by the death of Suppé in 1895, encouraged renewal of these works; and new names in libretto composition came into play.⁴⁸ The librettist of the 1890s was often trained as a journalist rather than as a novelist, playwright, or poet. Among the journalist-librettists were Hugo Wittmann, Julius Bauer, Ignaz Schnitzer (editor of the *Neue Pester Zeitung*), Ludwig Held, Theodor Herzl, Max Kalbeck, Gustav Davis (editor of the *Kronenzeitung*), and Bernhard Buchbinder.⁴⁹ These men hoped to modernize operetta and present works relevant to contemporary events and fashions.

An opposite trend was simultaneously in evidence, also a reaction against the perceived excesses of Wagnerism – composers returned to a rustic, folk style exemplified by works such as Strauss's *Waldmeister* [Woodruff, 1896], Zeller's *Der Vogelhändler* [*The Tyrolean*, 1891], and Ziehrer's *Die Landstreicher* [*The Tramps*, 1899]. These works, set in the countryside around Vienna or in Austria's alpine provinces, used authentic folksongs and imitations of that style. Despite its initial appeal, this music was not rich enough to nurture the operetta through the turn of the century, for after a few lean years operetta composers returned to an urban setting in the first decade of the twentieth century.