

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Die Fledermaus



Music by Johann Strauss II

German Libretto by
Karl Haffner and Richard Genée

Operetta in Three Acts

Setting: Vienna, Austria
Time: New Year's Eve 1899

Characters

Gabriel von Eisenstein (tenor/baritone)	Hermann Prey
Rosalinde, Eisenstein's wife (soprano).....	Kiri Te Kanawa
Adele, Rosalinde's maid (soprano).....	Hildegard Heichele
Ida, Adele's sister (soprano)	Ingrid Baier
Alfred, a voice teacher (tenor)	Dennis O'Neill
Dr. Falke, a notary (baritone).....	Benjamin Luxon
Dr. Blind, a lawyer (tenor).....	Paul Crook
Colonel Frank, a prison governor (baritone).....	Michael Langdon
Prince Orlofsky (mezzo-soprano <i>en travesti</i> ¹).....	Doris Soffel
Ivan (the prince's valet — speaking role).....	Richard Hazell
Frosch (a jailer — speaking role).....	Josef Meinrad

Conducted by Plácido Domingo

Première performance: Theater an der Wien in Vienna, Austria on April 5, 1874

¹*en travesti* — dressed as a member of the opposite sex for a theatrical role.

Act I

Eisenstein's apartment



Alfred, a voice teacher and Rosalinde's old flame, stands outside of the Eisenstein home serenading her, despite her marriage to Eisenstein. Meanwhile, Adele, Rosalinde's maid, has received a letter from her sister, Ida, inviting her to Prince Orlofsky's lavish New Year's Eve ball. She desperately wants to go so Adele pretends that the letter says that her aunt is very sick. She asks for a leave of absence, but Rosalinde refuses to let her go, saying that she is needed there.

Once Rosalinde is alone Alfred enters, declaring his undying love for her. Rosalinde is able to reject Alfred's advances until he begins to sing — then she is powerless to resist. When they hear someone coming Rosalinde sends Alfred away, agreeing to see him again later.

Eisenstein and his lawyer, Dr. Blind, arrive from attending a court trial. Eisenstein was found guilty of insulting a police officer and sentenced to spend eight days in jail — starting that very evening. He is angry at Dr. Blind for not winning the case and also adding three days to his sentence. He angrily commands Blind to leave.

Dr. Falke, Eisenstein's friend, enters and urges Eisenstein to delay going to jail until the next morning and instead join him at Prince Orlofsky's ball. Falke suggests that Eisenstein bring along his infamous pocket watch to charm the ladies.

As Eisenstein is changing into formal attire, Rosalinde enters the room. Falke then invites Rosalinde to the ball as well, telling her that if she comes in disguise she'll be able to observe her husband flirting with other women. At first Rosalinde refuses his request, but Falke makes a bet with her that Eisenstein will be dressed in formal attire, ready for the ball and not dressed for jail. Rosalinde agrees to the bet and is shocked when Eisenstein reappears in evening dress. She agrees to attend the ball in disguise. Eisenstein tells her he is going off to prison, and they bid a fond farewell. Angry at Eisenstein's deception, Rosalinde then tells Adele she can visit her sick aunt. Adele is delighted that she can now attend the ball and grabs one of Rosalinde's dresses to wear.

With the house all to herself, Rosalinde invites Alfred inside. Their rendezvous is interrupted by the prison governor, Frank, who has come to escort Eisenstein to jail. Rosalinde beseeches Alfred



to preserve her good name by posing as her husband. Alfred hesitantly gives in, so Frank carts Alfred off to jail.

Act II

The ballroom of Prince Orlofsky's villa

In the luxurious ballroom of Prince Orlofsky many guests have already arrived. It is known that the disgruntled prince will pay anyone to make him laugh, but no one has ever been successful at making him even crack a smile. Dr. Falke has agreed to throw this party as a way to cheer up the dour prince. When the prince arrives, he tells Falke that he highly doubts this evening will brighten his mood, but orders all the guests to do as they please.

Moments later Adele arrives, to the surprise of her sister Ida, a member of the cast that was hired to perform. Ida worries that Adele will not fit in with the aristocracy, so she instructs Adele to pretend to be a member of the play — a Russian actress by the name of Olga. Adele takes Ida's advice and changes her demeanor to fit her role.

Eisenstein arrives and, as per Falke's instructions, pretends to be a Frenchman, "Marquis Renard." He immediately recognizes Adele as his wife's maid but, with her new demeanor, she easily convinces him that he has mistaken her for somebody else.



Frank, also invited by Falke, arrives soon thereafter, pretending to be another Frenchman, "Chevalier Chagrin." Frank and Eisenstein become fast friends, unknowing of each other's true identities. Frank quickly becomes infatuated with Adele, and pretends to be a theatrical producer in order to impress her.

Rosalinde is the last to arrive. Disguised as a Hungarian countess, she spots Eisenstein flirting with Adele, her own maid who is wearing her own favorite dress. She sings an impassioned ode to her betrayed homeland. Then Falke introduces the disguised Rosalinde to Eisenstein, who immediately



starts flirting with her. During an amorous tête-à-tête Rosalinde succeeds in extracting the valuable watch from Eisenstein's pocket, something she can use in the future as evidence of his impropriety.

As midnight approaches, Dr. Falke entertains the guests with the story of how he earned the nickname of Dr. Fledermaus. He recounts that the previous winter his best friend Eisenstein had played a practical joke on him. After being highly intoxicated after attending a costume ball dressed as a bat, Eisenstein had abandoned him in the center of Vienna, exposing him to ridicule the next day.

In a rousing finale, the crowd toasts drink, love, and brotherhood until the stroke of midnight, when the new century begins. The guests dance throughout the night. Eisenstein reaches for his pocket watch, but finds that it has been stolen. Suspecting the countess, he follows her around for the remainder of the party in an attempt to get it back. As the clock is about to strike 6 a.m., Eisenstein, whose attempts to retrieve his watch from Rosalinde have failed, runs out of the ballroom and off to prison to serve out his sentence.

Act III

The prison offices of Governor Frank

In the prison Frank arrives, happy and still drunk from the party. Frosch, a jailer, tries to make sense of it all, but is tormented by the constant singing coming from cell 12, Alfred's cell.

Ida and Adele arrive, having followed Frank hoping that he will cast them in one of his theater productions. They are quickly sent off to cell 13.

Eisenstein arrives and tells the jailers that he is ready to serve out his sentence. Frank is surprised to find that Eisenstein's cell is already occupied by a man claiming to be him. He is told that the man was found in Rosalinde's home and escorted to his cell.

Dr. Blind enters, claiming that he was summoned by the man in cell 12 to handle a case of false arrest. Determined to get to the bottom of the matter, Eisenstein snatches Blind's cloak, eyeglasses and wig to disguise himself as the prisoner's lawyer.

Just then, Rosalinde rushes into the prison and confronts Dr. Blind (Eisenstein in disguise). She demands that Alfred be released and asks Blind to file divorce charges against her husband. When he seemingly rejects the idea, she becomes offended. Eisenstein then removes his disguise and accuses Rosalinde of infidelity. She counters his argument by producing his pocket watch. They realize that they both have acted foolishly and confess that they really do love each other.

Dr. Falke comes in, fully expecting to gloat over the success of his plan. Instead, he finds Rosalinde and Eisenstein in each other's arms, and Frank volunteering to support Adele's artistic career. Falke declares that the whole thing was an act of vengeance for the "Fledermaus" episode, expresses his failure and dejectedly walks away. Though Eisenstein blames the intoxicating effects of champagne for his act of infidelity, he is still compelled to serve out his full jail sentence.

The prince and a small group of guests arrive just in time to see the outcome of Dr. Falke's elaborate ruse. It is then that the prince finally bursts into laughter. All sing a final paean to the joys of champagne.



Johann Strauss II

Born: October 25, 1825 in Vienna, Austria; Died: June 3, 1899 in Vienna, Austria



Johann Baptist Strauss (also known as Johann Strauss II) was an Austrian composer of light music, particularly dance music and operettas. His father, Johann Strauss the Elder, was a self-taught musician who established a musical dynasty in Vienna, writing waltzes, gallops, polkas and quadrilles and publishing more than 250 works. Strauss the younger surpassed his father, composing over 500 waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and other types of dance music, as well as several operettas and a ballet.

When the elder Strauss died from scarlet fever in Vienna in 1849, the younger Strauss merged both their orchestras and engaged in further tours. Strauss Jr. eventually surpassed his father's fame with compositions such as *The Blue Danube*, helping establish him as "The Waltz King." He was largely responsible for the popularity of the waltz in Vienna during the 19th century.

In 1853, due to constant mental and physical demands, Strauss suffered a nervous breakdown. He took a seven-week vacation in the countryside in the summer of that year, on the advice of doctors. Johann's younger brother Josef was persuaded by his family to abandon his career as an engineer and take command of Johann's orchestra in the interim.

The wonderful waltzes and polkas kept appearing, with the most famous of all, *An der schönen, blauen Donau* (On the Beautiful Blue Danube) appearing in 1867, curiously enough to a muted response, many of the audience wondering whether this masterpiece had overstretched the genre for which it was written. *Blue Danube* and other favorites were played during an exhausting trip to America in 1872, and were phenomenally successful. On his return to Vienna, Johann began developing ideas for an operetta which eventually became *Der Carneval in Rom*. It premiered in Vienna in 1873; although it was not a sensation, it was sufficiently popular to encourage Strauss to continue in this vein.

Where Strauss differed from the rest of his family was the point at which he combined the Viennese dance tradition with the Parisian operetta forms that were largely devised and developed by Offenbach. Today it is widely agreed that *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron* are the greatest of all German-language operettas, and stand comparison with the best from the other opera genres of the time.

By early 1899 Strauss was preparing for the premiere of his ballet *Aschenbrödel* (Cinderella). Sadly, he was not to live to complete the full score, or see it performed. In May 1899 he fell prey to a chill which quickly developed into pleura-pneumonia. The years of punishing hard work had destroyed his powers of resistance and he died on June 3, 1899 at the age of 73. He was laid to rest in the Zentralfriedhof (Vienna Central Cemetery), near the tombs of Brahms, Beethoven and Schubert.

***Die Fledermaus* (The Bat)**

Die Fledermaus is a Viennese operetta composed by Johann Strauss II to a German libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée. It both defines and transcends that genre, centering on a magnificent masked ball given by a Russian prince, which brings together all the main characters in various disguises. The three-act journey from boudoir to ballroom to jail provides ample opportunities for farce and humor, but also for genuine human emotion and a surprisingly realistic view of urban life.

The original source for *Die Fledermaus* was *Das Gefängnis* (The Prison), a farce by German playwright Julius Roderich Benedix (1811-1873). Another source was the French vaudeville play *Le réveillon*, by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, which was first translated by Karl Haffner into a non-musical play to be produced in Vienna. However, the peculiarly French custom of the réveillon (a New Year's Eve dinner party) caused problems which were solved by the decision to adapt the play as a libretto for Johann Strauss, with the réveillon replaced by a Viennese ball. At this point Haffner's translation was handed over for adaptation to Richard Genée, who subsequently claimed not only that he had made a fresh translation from scratch but that he had never even met Haffner.

It was the director of Vienna's Carl-Theater, Franz Jauner, who suggested to librettist Richard Genée that he produce an operetta book of the successful French play *Le Reveillon*, written by Offenbach's librettists Henri Meilhac and Fromental Halévy. On seeing Genée's work, Strauss was immediately convinced that it was a suitable vehicle for his talents, and in the fall of 1873 set to work on the music. It soon took shape as *Die Fledermaus*.

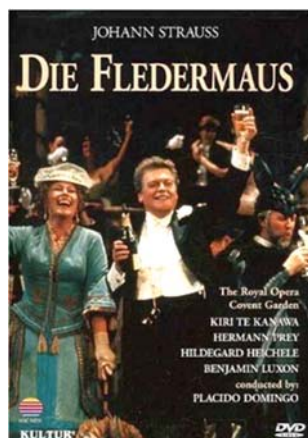
The operetta premiered on April 5, 1874 at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, was a roaring success, and has been part of the regular repertoire ever since. By the end of the decade *Die Fledermaus* had been performed in countries as far apart as America and Australia, and was Strauss's most successful operetta of all, in time even eclipsing Offenbach's popular *Orphée*.

The first London performance in German did not take place until 1895. According to the archivist of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, "Twenty years after its production as a lyric opera in Vienna, composer and conductor Gustav Mahler raised the artistic status of Strauss's work by producing it at the Hamburg Opera House. All the leading opera houses in Europe, notably Vienna and Munich, have brightened their regular repertoire by including it for occasional performance."

Note: The role of Eisenstein was originally written for a tenor, but is nowadays frequently sung by a baritone. The role of Orlofsky is a trouser role, and is usually performed by a mezzo-soprano.

Die Fledermaus: The Video

Starring Kiri Te Kanawa and Hermann Prey; conducted by Plácido Domingo



Most opera houses ring in the New Year with Strauss' most popular operetta, the festiveness of which is appropriate for the occasion. *Die Fledermaus* is a delightful Viennese operetta of lechery, love, revenge and romance, of beautiful wives, juicy maids, amorous husbands, clever friends, a mysterious count and a drunken jailer, of white tie and tails, beautiful gowns, a gold watch and lots of champagne. Most of all, it is a light-hearted and mischievous story featuring some of Strauss' most romantic and bubbling music.

An exceptional cast, led by Kiri Te Kanawa and Hermann Prey as the couple whose marriage survives the comic indiscretions of three long acts. Plácido Domingo leads the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House with panache. The singers are not only in great voice but seem to take great delight in playing the characters. All of them, especially Herman Prey and Benjamin Luxon, appear to be having the times of their lives. Their good spirits are as infectious as the music they sing — a winning combination.

What makes this particular production at London's Royal Opera House so effective is that it's not only superbly sung and extravagantly staged, but it's delightfully funny. The dialogue is spoken in a mixture of German, French, English and Italian in an amusing play on the characters' nationalities and also on the nationalities of the singers.

Covent Garden pulls out all the stops in this production by adding over 30 minutes of its own very amusing touches.

- In Act II surprise “guests” are added to the score: (1) Hinge and Bracket, two funny female impersonators in the guise of two elderly eccentric spinsters, sing “Two Little Maids from School are We” from Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado*. (2) Celebrated French crooner Charles Aznavour sings the song “She,” which he wrote with Herbert Kretzmer. (3) Merle Park and Wayne Eagling dance to Strauss' *Voices of Spring*, choreographed by Sir Frederick Ashton.
- In Act III Joseph Meinraad, who plays the non-singing drunken jailer, Frosch, has several comic moments bantering with conductor, Plácido Domingo.