



# Entr'acte

The Opera  
Supers of  
Iowa City  
Newsletter

Volume VII, Number 2

April 1992

Editor: Arthur Canter, 30 Brookfield Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245

**NEXT MEETING:** Monday, May 4, 1992,  
7:00 p.m., Music Building Lounge (room 1028)

## Letter from the Editor

Have you bought your tickets for the opera yet? *Die Fledermaus* should be delightful, although it may well miss the presence on stage of a perennial Super or two. I am unlikely to be able to participate because of my forthcoming hip replacement, and Mel Sunshine is also unable to be in it because of previous commitments. The spring opera production without either of us will not seem like the real thing, but go ahead and attend and do honor us. Enjoy.

I have a confession. I have always wanted to do the role of Frosch, the non-singing comic jailer who bumbles his drunken way through the first part of the last act. This role has been attractive to comedians and in Vienna calls for humor and dialogue unique to the Viennese. Elsewhere, it has been handled with whatever style befits the comic and the plot of the opera. It allows for improvisation, as there is no music during the mime action and dialogue, depending upon the tolerance of the stage director and the conductor waiting for the cue to return to the music. For the spring show the audience will have the good fortune to see and hear Dan Coffey do the role of Frosch. It would have taken courage and risk (no box-office sales appeal) to have scheduled your editor in this role even if he were in physical condition to prepare and carry out the performance. What, you never considered me a comedian? You don't know me. Go to see and hear *Fledermaus* and think of me in it, anyway.

—Arthur Canter

## Meetings and Activities: January, February 1992

The meeting of January 21 was attended by 27 Supers, some new to the group. After introductions, music school calendars and copies of the newsletter were distributed. Beaumont Glass discussed the premiere of *Golem* to be featured on a double bill with *Signor Deluso* on February 15 at Mabie Theatre. Supers agreed to provide the ushers, ticket-takers, and a coat-room checker. A reception was planned by the Supers for the cast and Music School faculty following the performance. The spring opera and summer opera productions were also discussed. A report on the progress being made on the School of Music's Archival Display was given by Mona Shaw. The Green Room (Clapp Hall) renovation project was discussed by the group. Howard Wenger will coordinate the workings of a committee on the project. Anyone interested in assisting may call Howard at 354-8551.

The reception held on February 15 (see above) was a great success. Thanks are extended to all Supers who provided food, set-up and served and helped clean-up afterwards. The volunteer ushers, ticket-takers, coat-check girl, etc. performed with professional aplomb. About 65 people attended the reception.

The meeting of February 17 was attended by 22 Supers. David Nelson spoke of the Music School Archival Display project. Mona Shaw passed around about a dozen pictures reprinted from old glass plates and photos of people, places, and events of the Music School up to 1925. These will be matted and framed, to be hung in Clapp Hall, as the first part of the historical display.

(Continued on next page.)

Professor Glass reported that the recent opera class performance for the Supers was so well received that another has been tentatively set for May 4. Everyone is invited to attend and have the opportunity to meet with the students afterwards.

A progress report was given on the Green Room renovation project. The remainder of the meeting was taken up with ideas and discussion of promotion of *Die Fledermaus*. Assistance in scenery painting will be needed. Supers volunteering services may call Mary Wall or Margaret Wenk. The Supers potluck supper will be held on the Saturday, April 25, between opera performances at the home of Marlene Stanford. Anna Stranieri will be calling Supers for provisions for the Strike Party. The meeting adjourned, as usual, for refreshments and socializing.

## Notes about *Fledermaus*, Strauss and Other Observations

Richard Traubner in his book, *Operetta, A Theatrical History*, rightfully claims that Viennese operetta of the "Golden Age" reached its finest hour with Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) and its best moment with *Die Fledermaus*. Strauss, known as the Waltz King, captured the audiences in his day with the sensuousness of his music. The waltz "*Brüderlein und Schwesterlein*" from *Fledermaus* is given as an example of what made him as sexually attractive as Elvis Presley was to become years later. However, no cult arose to perpetuate his memory and report sightings of Strauss after his death.

*Die Fledermaus* is based on *Le Réveillon*, a three-act comedy by Meilhac and Halévy, the

pair who were Offenbach's favorite writers. The libretto for the Strauss work follows the original French play in many respects. Major changes involve the names of the characters and locale. There was a great deal of dancing in *Le Réveillon* and even a drunken jailer scene in its last act. However, as Traubner points out, Meilhac and Halévy borrowed from the farce by Roderich Benedix, *Das Gefängnis* (The Prison), produced in Berlin in the 1840s and later in 1851 in Vienna. The original French comedy was translated and adapted to Viennese tastes by Karl Haffner, the "house-writer" for the Carltheater but it didn't come out right. The play wound up at the Theater an der Wien where it was suggested that it would make a good libretto for Strauss. Richard Genée was asked to prepare a new version from the French play, at 100 Gulden per act. Much of the text and all the lyrics were written by Genée. The only contribution to the libretto by Haffner turned out to be the character's names, but Genée generously shared his billing on the credits. In the end Strauss had a brilliant libretto with great opportunity to put in non-sung dance music as well as arias. He wrote a series of national dances for the second act. These were listed in the original program of the premiere performance on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1874, as *Spanisch, Schottisch, Russisch, Polka, and Ungarisch*. They are seldom performed today having been generally replaced with more popular Strauss waltzes. Too bad, for the gala scene in the second act could provide the University of Iowa dance unit some rather exciting choices other than a traditional waltz. With the usual negative remarks by the Vienna critic, Eduard Hanslick, the original series of *Fledermaus* performances during 1874 only totaled 68. While not a failure, the operetta was still no outstanding success. It did much better in Berlin later that summer. There were performances in New York in November 1874. The first performance in England was in 1876 with little success as with a rather bastardized version in Paris the following year. The first Parisian production was legally constrained from

approximating *Le Réveillon* by its authors Meilhac and Halévy. Subsequent productions gave rise to many successes making *Die Fledermaus* popular everywhere, especially as a money-maker. It is not unusual for an opera company to include *Die Fledermaus* in its repertory to help make up deficits in a particular season. Thus from time to time there have been prominent "revivals" of *Fledermaus*. One of the most widely acclaimed was Max Reinhardt's, for the Deutsche Theater in Berlin, in 1928. This used a musical adaptation of the score by Erich Wolfgang Korngold (the same Korngold who later fled to America and composed film music). Cary Grant, then using his given name, Archie Leach, appeared in the role of Eisenstein (called "Max Grünwald") in a Schubert production on Broadway during the early 1930s when he was a singing actor. In 1950, Rudolf Bing produced a popular version at the Metropolitan Opera with a libretto by Howard Dietz and staging by Garson Kanin. Jack Gilford, the Broadway comedian, did the role of Frosch after Danny Kaye had passed it up. Earlier, during the World War II years, the operetta had a great run on Broadway as *Rosalinda*, a Max Reinhardt production. This same production moved to London around 1944 where it was billed as *Gay Rosalinda*, a title that could be confusing these days what with the changes in meaning. During that period, a poor GI on pass to London did not have a chance to get a ticket, the musical being such a sell-out. I know, having tried for three days to get one.

In Paris, one can see *La Chauve-Souris* in the Strauss scoring. *Pipistrello* (among its other titles) may be occasionally seen in Italy. One engaging custom for lavish productions of *Fledermaus* is to have special guest artists, sing, dance, or do comedy routines during the so-called gala scene in Act II. There are recordings and at least one videotape with such gala sequences.

There probably have been amusing "disasters" in performances of *Die Fledermaus*, as

with many an opera although the comedic nature of the work may allow covering up many slips and boffs. But the following not so amusing event, described by Hugh Vickers in his *Even Greater Operatic Disasters*, could not have been easily assimilated into the script. In a performance by the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Cologne, during the Christmas season of 1962, there was to be piano recital during the gala sequence. Prince Orlovsky's guests (and the high society West German audience) were to be treated by a special pianist. The action of the opera was stopped to allow stage-hands, suitably dressed as flunkeys, to move in the piano on its wheels. Either they pushed too hard, or the wheeled undercarriage had been oiled too well to avoid squeaking, but whatever the cause, they lost control of the piano on a steeply raked stage. It gathered up speed and fell into the orchestra pit. Luckily, the musicians saw it coming and scrambled for safety. The only damage was two flattened tubas and one dead Bechstein Grand. Vickers failed to report on the aftermath of the "malevolence" of that particular inanimate object.



## Strike Party

If you haven't already, you will likely be called to contribute food for workers striking the opera set. Food contributions should be brought to the Hancher stage door, 12:30-1:45 p.m., Sunday, April 26. If you have questions, call Anna Stranieri, 351-7950.

# MEMO

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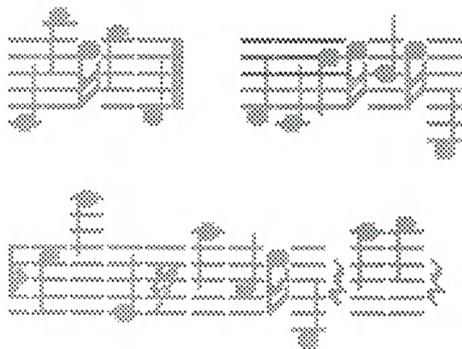
IMPORTANT NUMBERS

## Next Meeting:

Monday May 4, 1992,  
7:00 p.m., Music Lounge.  
Questions? Call Miriam  
Canter, 338-1217.

ARTHUR CANTER (newsletter) 338-1217  
MIRIAM CANTER (hospitality) 338-1217  
LINDA BEHRENDT (publicity) 336-5342  
MARY WALL (scenery) 338-2618  
MARLENE STANFORD (costumes)  
354-0600  
DAVID NELSON (School of Music director)  
335-1601  
BEAUMONT GLASS, Opera Theater director,  
335-1669  
MONA SHAW, P.R. coordinator, 335-1667  
MARGARET WENK, opera designer, 335-2899  
DWIGHT SUMP, opera production manager,  
335-1153

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