

BY JOSEPH SMITH

A Strauss Discovery

In the case of Johann Strauss Jr., the banal adjective "legendary" is justified, and not simply because of his staggering profusion of works, or his worldwide popular acclaim. (On Strauss's 1872 trip to the U.S., a Newfoundland dog had to be shorn to satisfy requests for a lock of his hair.) Here was a composer who, without venturing outside of dance music and operetta, had won the respect of the greatest musicians of his day.

Strauss was the only living composer to be lauded by both Brahms and Wagner, and their respective (rival) followers. Of course, Strauss's limited sphere of endeavor ensured that he was a threat to neither. Nevertheless, facts attest to their genuine respect for him. When the Vienna opera rejected Wagner's *Tristan* as unplayable, Wagner allowed Strauss and his orchestra to give a first performance in Vienna of excerpts from the opera. Brahms, two weeks before he became mortally bedridden, still could not resist attending Strauss's latest operetta.

In some cases, a composer will fascinate because life and art seem so congruous (Schumann, most notably). In other cases, it is the utter incongruity that fascinates. The music of the Strausses exudes bliss and warm sentiment. In life, the Strausses played roles in a fraught, tense, domestic drama.

It would be natural to assume that Johann Jr. was a protégé of his famous father. Johann Sr., as composer and conductor, was not content to be the acknowledged waltz king of Vienna—he toured with his orchestra extensively in both continental Europe and Great Britain. A driven workaholic, he died at the age of forty-five. Obviously, Johann Sr. didn't see much of his children—the necessity of making personal conducting appearances with his various orchestras dictated a nocturnal existence. But he expressed himself firmly on one point: he absolutely forbade his sons, Johann Jr., Josef, and Eduard, to pursue music professionally. Having pulled himself up from a rough milieu, he wanted his children to have "respectable" professions.

When, however, he abandoned his family to live with a mistress, his paternal influence was considerably weakened. It was bad enough that he left his musical and

sophisticated wife for a woman of no culture, and worse that he either couldn't or wouldn't provide enough financial support for his family of five children. But when he started a second family with his mistress, and had the temerity to name *their* first child Johann, the legal Mrs.

Strauss began plotting her revenge. She secretly fostered the musical talent of her Johann, providing him with a strong, well-rounded musical education. By the time Johann Jr. was nineteen, his mother felt he was ready to challenge his famous father. In 1844, despite a cabal organized by his father, the son managed to hire an orchestra and secure an engagement in the suburb of Hietzing. The fame of the father ensured that the debut of the young man would be a highly public event. Johann Jr. triumphed, providing a sweet vindication for his wronged mother. (Fortunately, mother and son had the good taste to replace the original title of one of the waltzes he composed for the occasion—it was to have been called "A Mother's Heart.")

The case of the second son, Josef, is truly bizarre. After years of overwork, Johann Jr.'s health had collapsed. He may have emulated his father as a composer, but didn't intend to follow his path to an early grave. During his convalescence, *someone*

had to take over the family business—*someone* had to lead the orchestra—*someone*, in fact, named Strauss! Therefore, despite Josef's piteous protests ("I'm not a musician! I'm too ugly to be a public figure!"), the family managed to pressure him into abandoning his successful career as an architectural engineer (among his accomplishments was the invention of a mechanical street-sweeper). He made his conducting debut in 1853. But he did not just manage to turn himself into a conductor—he turned himself into a composer as well. There is a tinge of melancholy in Josef's music that makes it particularly touching. Was this just an expression of his innate personality, or also of regret at the thwarting of his chosen career?

Because I had begun to think of the Strausses as characters in a fantastical story, coming upon a Johann Strauss Jr. manuscript gave me an uncanny sensation. I was looking for something else in a microfilm of the auto-

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Johann Strauss Jr.

Strauss *continued*

graph collection left by pianist Paul Wittgenstein (in the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center), and saw it by chance. This sixteen-bar strain is previously unpublished—or is it? Considering that Johann Jr. left more than one hundred sixty waltzes (each with a number of different strains), and completed sixteen published operettas, one can hardly be certain the tune doesn't appear somewhere in them. But tunes came easily to him—for instance, when he was involved in a card game and didn't want to leave the table, he would jot melodic ideas on his shirt cuffs. It is entirely possible that he dashed off the page and forgot about it. (The fact that it is signed suggests that it is a gift, but it is not inscribed to anyone.) And it is entirely possible that this is indeed its first publication.

To me, even apart from the information stored on them, manuscripts possess a peculiar magic. A manuscript is not itself living, but it is close: a record of a living hand moving the pen across the page. ■

See Strauss's music on page 9.

Letters *continued*

We were excited to read in your Fall 2004 edition the concern about the key of B, and our appetite was further whetted while reading the article. Through all this, even before seeing the guideword "Paderewski," we were hoping *Cracovienne Fantastique* by that composer would be the selection in B that you chose to print. Please at least mention this dedication to the great city of Krakow, Poland, in a future publication.

Robert Eckerman
Davenport, Iowa

Joseph Smith responds: Cracovienne Fantastique could never appear as a "Rare Find"—it has many too many notes! However, interested readers can find it in the Polish Music Editions volume of Paderewski, or the Dover volume of Polish Piano Music. For readers unfamiliar with the term, a *Kracoviak* (French: *Cracovienne*) is a dance in 2/4 meter, not unlike a polka (which may be Polish in origin). There are examples by Chopin (for piano and orchestra) and Szymanowski, as well as Paderewski. The best-known example is not specifically designat-

ed as such: the finale of Chopin's first concerto.

In measure 27 of the *Melody in B Major* by Paderewski, on the third beat, the top note in the right hand is a C sharp. This creates a strong dissonance with the C double-sharp in the same chord. It seems inconsistent with the rest of the piece, and with the melody line, and I wonder if it could be a mistake? I would like to work up this piece for recital. Can you advise me?

Thank you for this great magazine; I had waffled about renewing my subscription and when I read through the music in this issue, it convinced me that you are truly making music available which I would otherwise not see.

Rosie Bosco
Via e-mail

Joseph Smith replies: I am very happy to hear that you are playing this piece, and very unhappy that I did not catch the typo. The sharp is indeed wrong—the note should be C double-sharp.

Send your comments and inquiries to: Letters, Piano Today, 2 Depot Plaza, Bedford Hills, New York 10507.

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DOLCE

JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.

First system of musical notation for 'DOLCE'. It consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a dotted quarter note A4, and an eighth note B4. This is followed by a quarter note G4, a dotted quarter note F#4, and an eighth note E4. The next measure has a quarter note D4, a dotted quarter note C#4, and an eighth note B3. The final measure has a quarter note A3, a dotted quarter note G3, and an eighth note F#3. Fingerings are indicated as 1, 4, 3, 2, 2, 5, 1. The piano accompaniment in the bass clef consists of a steady eighth-note bass line with chords. The dynamic marking *p* is present.

Second system of musical notation for 'DOLCE'. It consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a dotted quarter note A4, and an eighth note B4. This is followed by a quarter note G4, a dotted quarter note F#4, and an eighth note E4. The next measure has a quarter note D4, a dotted quarter note C#4, and an eighth note B3. The final measure has a quarter note A3, a dotted quarter note G3, and an eighth note F#3. Fingerings are indicated as 4, 3, 2, 1, 5, 2, 3. The dynamic marking *mf* is present.

Third system of musical notation for 'DOLCE'. It consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a dotted quarter note A4, and an eighth note B4. This is followed by a quarter note G4, a dotted quarter note F#4, and an eighth note E4. The next measure has a quarter note D4, a dotted quarter note C#4, and an eighth note B3. The final measure has a quarter note A3, a dotted quarter note G3, and an eighth note F#3. Fingerings are indicated as 1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 5. The piano accompaniment in the bass clef consists of a steady eighth-note bass line with chords.

Fourth system of musical notation for 'DOLCE'. It consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a dotted quarter note A4, and an eighth note B4. This is followed by a quarter note G4, a dotted quarter note F#4, and an eighth note E4. The next measure has a quarter note D4, a dotted quarter note C#4, and an eighth note B3. The final measure has a quarter note A3, a dotted quarter note G3, and an eighth note F#3. Fingerings are indicated as 1, 4, 3, 1, 4, 3, 2. The piano accompaniment in the bass clef consists of a steady eighth-note bass line with chords. The dynamic marking *p* is present.