

F.A.M.E. 2007-2008 - December/January  
Johann Strauss, Jr.  
1825-1899

### The Waltz

Waltz music had its beginnings in the German dance music Mozart composed. The actual dance evolved from German folk dances. These dances, in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, involved much jumping and twirling around. In the early 1800's, a Viennese dance bandleader, name Pamer, borrowed from these dances and wrote music in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, slowed the tempo and replaced the hops and leaps with a gliding step and the "Viennese Waltz" began. (The world waltz is derived from "waltzer" meaning revolving dance). The original waltzes were seven dances. The Viennese Waltz consisted of five dances with a slow introduction and a tail, or coda. Two of the musicians in Pamer's band were Johann Strauss Sr. and Josef Lanner who went on to form their own dance band and refined the waltz. Strauss Sr. went "solo", becoming famous throughout Europe, earning him the title of "The Father of the Waltz".

Vienna, Austria, in the early 1800's was known for its grand ballrooms, some of these dance halls would hold over 6,000 people. The waltz soon became the most popular dance in Vienna. The waltz was a bit scandalous in some areas, as dancers had to touch each other. The rapid twirling and gliding meant the partners must embrace one another to prevent separation. This was a drastic difference from the minuet, where only the fingertips touched. As a result, there were people, especially in northern Germany and England who opposed this dance. Articles were written denouncing the waltz as immoral and lewd. Things quickly changed in England in 1838 when Strauss Sr. played a waltz at Queen Victoria's coronation and Queen Victoria herself danced the waltz. Soon everyone was dancing the waltz. World War I brought an end to the dance halls in Vienna, but the waltz continued to evolve from dance music, to music composed for concerts, stage and the ballet. Richard Rodgers, of Rodgers & Hammerstein, used a waltz as the opening for "Carousel". (*track 1 – CD labeled "Carousel". Song is over seven minutes long, have students listen for several minutes and see if they can hear the beat*).

**DVD: There is a 7:57 minute Tom & Jerry cartoon, Johann Mouse (track 11). It features two waltzes, Emperior Waltz and Kaiser-Walzer.** This cartoon won an Academy Award in 1953 (short-subject - cartoon). The mouse lives in Johann Strauss' house and likes to dance the waltz.

*Optional activity:* Have the children dance the waltz. There are two posters which show the steps (one for a boy, the other for a girl). Have the children count the beats to the waltz 1, 2 3

### Johann Strauss, Jr.

Johann Strauss, Jr. (**yoh**-hahn strous), was born in Vienna, Austria to Anna and Johann Strauss in 1825. Johann Jr. showed that he had his father's talent for music, composing his first waltz at age six. Johann Sr. thought one musician in the family was enough, and was adamantly opposed to any of his children becoming musicians. He wanted Johann, instead, to be a banker. Johann Jr. did go to school to study accounting, but was expelled for misbehavior after two years. Private tutors didn't help, as all Johann Jr. wanted to do was study music.

Johann Sr. was away from the house often and Johann Jr.'s mother secretly arranged for Johann Jr. to study the violin. On one of his rare visits home, Johann Sr. caught his son practicing the violin and flew into a rage, destroying the instrument and punishing his son. (His mother intervened and later purchased a new violin for Johann Jr.).

When Johann Jr. was a teenager, his father left the family. His mother focused her efforts on grooming her son to become a composer and dance orchestra leader. At the age of 19, Johann applied for a permit to perform in public establishments. Many of the dance salons in Vienna were closed to Johann Jr. as these establishments had been warned by Johann Sr's business manager not to allow Johann Jr. to play.

Instead, Strauss Jr., and his 15-man orchestra played in a casino in a suburb of Vienna (Strauss Sr. refused to play at that establishment after they allowed his son to perform). The business manager of Johann Sr. was there with his followers, ready to disrupt the concert. When Strauss played a waltz, one of his original compositions, he won over the audience. Reportedly, the audience went wild during the concert, demanding an unheard of 19 encores. Strauss Jr. finished the concert with one of his father's most famous waltz, as a tribute and a bid for reconciliation with him (the reconciliation never occurred).

Strauss Jr. developed a large following and established his own dance orchestra, earning the nickname "The Waltz King". His father died in 1849 (from scarlet fever) and Johann Jr. combined the two orchestras. Strauss Jr. was a master at self-promotion. He made sure if there was an important social and cultural event in Vienna, that he would write a new piece of music to commemorate it. He toured with his own dance orchestra, and also had several orchestras that toured Europe under his name. It was common for him to perform nightly in the summer, each night at a different establishment, and some nights he would play at multiple events in an evening, going from one of his orchestras to another. Johann Jr. recruited his two brothers, (Josef and Eduard) to lead dance bands.

In 1862, Strauss married. His first wife had a sizable fortune and Strauss was able to reduce the amount of traveling and conducting and concentrate on composing music. Due to his popularity, he did continue to perform periodically. In 1872 he traveled to the United States where he conducted 20,000 performers in "monster concerts", with over 100,000 people in attendance. In 1877, his wife died suddenly and Strauss fled to Italy. Seven weeks later, he married an actress and unfortunately the marriage proved to be an error in judgment. Strauss became a citizen of Germany and a Lutheran in order to divorce his wife in 1887 and marry his third wife Adele (He was Catholic and the Church would not allow him to divorce). Strauss died in 1899 of pneumonia in the arms of his third wife, Adele.

Strauss was widely popular during his lifetime but was not considered a classical musician in his day. He was a dance orchestra leader and a composer of popular music. It was only later in his life that certain of his works were played in the Vienna State Opera. During his lifetime, he wrote over 400 waltzes but in addition wrote numerous polkas, marches, operettas, one opera and one ballet, which he was writing at the time of his death.

### **Blue Danube**

**The music today, *Blue Danube*, was written by our composer Johann Strauss, Jr. (Play track 1).**

*Note: The music is over nine minutes long. The first "dance" begins at 1:28 and will be the part most recognizable by students). Try to play at least the first three minutes, having students listen or count 1,2, 3 to the beat of the music.*

We also have two copies of a YouTube video. It shows scenes of Vienna, with dancers dancing to the music. It's a wonderful video. As it is YouTube, the quality isn't great. (link is: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0VUXLsBSjo>)

The Blue Danube was a flop when it was first introduced in 1867 as it had terrible lyrics. Later that year, Strauss reintroduced the waltz; this time without the lyrics, and it became a popular hit; so popular that the music publisher wore out printing plates faster than they could be replaced. Strauss was a prolific composer, and he wrote down the notes on anything and everything – supposedly the Blue Danube was originally sketched out on one of his shirts!