

**Oliver Rathkolb**

## From the Johann Strauss Concert in 1939 to the New Year's Concert in 1946

One thing needs to be made quite clear from the outset: the tradition of New Year's concerts given by the Vienna Philharmonic with works by Johann Strauss, broadcast on the radio and later on television, dates back to the National Socialist era. Such concerts were held on 31 December 1939 (a Johann Strauss Concert) and on 1 January 1941 (the Second Philharmonische Akademie). Both were jointly organized by the Vienna Philharmonic and the Reich Broadcasting Company, a cooperation that was to become the norm.

It is also obvious that concerts devoted to the works of the Strausses were already part of the repertoire of the Vienna Philharmonic, though they had not previously been given over the New Year period. A brief glance at the performance data bank in the Archive of the Vienna Philharmonic is enough to see that such concerts were already a firmly embedded tradition, promoted with particular vigour by the conductor Clemens Krauss. A check of the works performed at the "Johann Strauss Concert" and/or the New Year Philharmonische Akademie, on 31 December 1939 and 1 January 1941, respectively, yields the following previous performances under the conductor Clemens Krauss.<sup>1</sup> The result is highly significant, which is the reason why it is here reprinted in full:

Annen-Polka, op. 117:

26 June 1927 Frankfurt / Main

11 August 1929 Salzburg

3 August 1930 Bad Gastein

16 February 1931 Vienna

16 August 1931 Salzburg

Egyptischer Marsch, op. 335:

5 August 1932 Salzburg

Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald, Walzer, op. 325

11 August 1929 Salzburg

3 August 1930 Bad Gastein

4 December 1930 Brno

5 December 1930 Prague

16 August 1931 Salzburg

7 May 1933 Rome

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail from Silvia Kargl to Oliver Rathkolb, 5 February 2013.



Kaiser-Walzer, op. 437

5 August 1932 Salzburg

13 August 1933 Salzburg

Leichtes Blut, Polka schnell, op. 319

11 August 1929 Salzburg

10 August 1930 Salzburg

16 February 1931 Vienna

16 August 1931 Salzburg

13 August 1933 Salzburg

Morgenblätter, Walzer, op. 279

11 August 1929 Salzburg

11 November 1929 Vienna

3 August 1931 Salzburg

16 February 1931 Vienna

5 August 1932 Vienna

Overture Die Fledermaus

27 June 1927 Frankfurt am Main

11 August 1929 Salzburg

3 August 1930 Bad Gastein

10 August 1930 Salzburg

4 December 1930 Brno

5 December 1930 Prague

16 February 1931 Vienna

16 August 1931 Salzburg

5 August 1932 Salzburg

6 May 1933 Bologna

7 May 1933 Rome

13 August 1933 Salzburg

Perpetuum mobile, musikalischer Scherz, op. 257

27 June 1927 Frankfurt am Main

11 August 1929 Salzburg

3 August 1930 Bad Gastein

10 August 1930 Salzburg

4 December 1930 Brno



5 December 1930 Prague  
16 February 1931 Vienna  
16 August 1931 Salzburg  
5 August 1932 Salzburg  
7 May 1933 Rome

Pizzicato-Polka

10 August 1930 Salzburg  
16 February 1931 Vienna  
16 August 1931 Salzburg  
5 August 1932 Salzburg  
7 May 1933 Rome  
13 August 1933 Salzburg

Ritter Pasman. Csárdás, op. 441

5 August 1932 Salzburg  
13 August 1933 Salzburg

What is remarkable here is the clear rupture in the repertoire between 1934 and 1938. It is to be accounted for by reference to the conflict between Clemens Krauss and the Vienna Philharmonic and Krauss's exodus as opera director from Vienna to Berlin. He was the driving force behind the Strauss concerts before 1934 and after 1938.

In 2011, Fritz Trümpi<sup>2</sup> – and Clemens Hellsberg in 1992<sup>3</sup> – expressed their belief that the conductor Clemens Krauss was the driving force behind the Johann Strauss concerts from 1939–1941. Trümpi: "It is conceivable that the paternity of the idea lay with Clemens Krauss, who had been performing concerts consisting solely of works by Johann Strauss with the Vienna Philharmonic since 1929."<sup>4</sup> This was the case above all at the Salzburg Festival. Contracts and correspondence with the Reich Broadcasting Company have recently discovered in a file found in a basement room housing the Vienna Philharmonic archive of sheet music. These give substance both to this thesis and to two claims, for which only insufficient evidence had previously been identified: the initiative for the concerts and the negotiations came from Clemens Krauss and it was he who paved the way for the first talks with the Reich Broadcasting Company in Berlin.

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<sup>2</sup> Fritz Trümpi, *Politierte Orchester. Die Wiener Philharmoniker und das Berliner Philharmonische Orchester*, Wien 2011, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> Clemens Hellsberg, *Demokratie der Könige*, Zürich 1992, p. 570.

<sup>4</sup> Trümpi, *Politierte Orchester*, p. 257.



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The unique position that the New Year's Concert may claim today as a global "music brand" was still a thing of the distant future during WWII. Clemens Krauss – and Wilhelm Jerger after him – were primarily interested in a special cycle of a total of "four Philharmonische Akademien", as is evident from the contract dated 2 November 1940:<sup>5</sup> "Four Philharmonische Akademien in the Great Hall of the Musikverein in Vienna, performed for the pan-German Broadcasting Company – 13 December, 1 January (Johann Strauss Concert), 25 January and 15 March 1941 – conducted by "Professor Clemens Krauss."

The entertainment effect of "waltz music", which detracted from the increasingly dispiriting effects of WWII, made it of course perfectly suited to be one of the many jigsaw pieces needed to bolster Nazi propaganda and, above all, to instantiate the Nazi broadcasting policy, which Berlin saw encompassing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as much as Franz Léhar and Johann Strauss. The review below of the first Johann Strauss Concert illustrates this reception very clearly.

## **Walzerfeligkeit von Johann Strauß Silvesterkonzert der Philharmoniker**

**Wiener Walzerfeligkeit! Sie gab dem scheidenden Jahr den fröhlichsten Abschied, den man sich nur denken kann. Die Wiener Philharmoniker, von Clemens Krauß geführt, musizierten am Silvester Sonntag ausschließlich Werke unseres Walzerkönigs, mit dem Erfolg, daß die Begeisterung der Wiener keine Grenzen kannte. Wiederholungen wurden mit zähem Beifall erzwungen und schließlich nach der brillant gespielten Fledermaus-Ouvertüre noch die Wiener Walzerhymne als krönenden Abschluß draufgegeben. Walzerfeligkeit von Johann Strauß! Da lag auf allen Gesichtern der Zuhörer das glückliche Lächeln der musikalischen Erregung hinreißenden Dreivierteltakts.**

**W. Bertl.**

*Neuigkeits-Welt-Blatt, 3 January 1940, p. 7*

On top of this, Trümpi has described in detail in his analysis of the Philharmonic repertoire the resistance put up by the orchestra against this specific form of "Unterhaltungsmusik" – "easy listening" – even though the Johann Strauss pieces provide a challenge to any orchestra.

<sup>5</sup> Archive of the Vienna Philharmonic, Depot Staatsoper, Rundfunk file.

These concerts were by no means professions of allegiance to Austria – even though several contemporary witnesses, such as the late historian Fritz Fellner<sup>6</sup> and, most recently, former Ambassador Wolfgang Schallenberg have testified that they seemed that way to certain individual concertgoers, particularly towards the end of the war. The programme booklet for the first four broadcasts in this series from Vienna extols both the intended reach of the broadcasts and Strauss's contribution to "German music". Much ideology was pinned to the music that over time evolved into the waltz, which was performed in "pubs on the outskirts of the city" and, as the Nazis claimed, had been an integral part of the "self-expression of the East Bavarian people standing guard in exposed advance posts at the border."

It cannot be denied that music associated with the Strausses was harnessed to the Nazi ideology, despite Johann Strauss's partly Jewish descent – an inconvenient truth that Joseph Goebbels sought to conceal by falsifying the baptismal register in Vienna. The evidence for this is an entry in his diary that reveals the absurdity of his anti-Semitic racism: "Some smart alec has found out that Joh. Strauss is one-eighth Jewish. This must not be made public. First, there is as yet no definitive proof and, second, I do not want to see the German cultural legacy being gradually undermined. Otherwise all we will have left of our history at the end of the day is Widukind, Heinrich der Löwe and Rosenberg. That is not really very much. Mussolini sets about the whole matter much more circumspectly. He arrogates all Roman history for himself, starting from the first stirrings of antiquity. Compared with him we are mere upstarts. I am doing everything in my power to counter this. This is also the will of the Führer."<sup>7</sup>

The Johann Strauss Concert is part of the Nazi regime's propaganda-by-entertainment strategy. All programme items were subjected to a detailed analysis to determine their possible psychological and political effects. Even if an analysis of the minutes of the weekly meetings dealing with the "Radio Programme 1940-1941"<sup>8</sup> under the supervision of Hans Hinkel, a key Nazi functionary in the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda and the Reich Chamber of Culture, has proved negative with regard to specific debates on the Johann Strauss Concert, there are at least general references to the concert cycle of the Vienna Philharmonic. No evidence has been found in this source of actual outside political interference in the programming of the Johann Strauss Concerts. The term "Viennese music" [Wiener Musik] is used for comparable programmes with works by Johann Strauss, such as that performed in August 1940.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Fritz Fellner to the author, 2011, and letter to the Editor from Ambassador Wolfgang Schallenberg to *Der Standard*, January 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Goebbels, Joseph: Diary entry of 5 June 1938, in: *Nationalsozialismus, Holocaust, Widerstand und Exil 1933-1945*. Online-Datenbank. De Gruyter. 10 March 2013. <http://db.saur.de/DGO/basicFullCitationView.jsf?documentId=TJG-3954>. Cf. also [http://www.musikverein.at/monatszeitung/show\\_artikel.php?artikel\\_id=1197](http://www.musikverein.at/monatszeitung/show_artikel.php?artikel_id=1197) (retrieved on 10 March 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin, R55/695, Abteilung Rundfunk, Protokolle wöchentlicher Sitzungen über das *Rundfunkprogramm*, [Minutes of the weekly meetings to discuss the radio programme] vol. I, Oct. 1941 to May 1942 and R55/696, Abteilung Rundfunk, vol. II June 1942 to August 1943.

<sup>9</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 78, 2340, Pictures 1190-1193.

In 1946 the former Johann Strauss Concert was already credited with a long “tradition”, and Professor Josef Krips, the conductor of the Philharmonic Concert of 1 January 1946, which was now dubbed “New Year’s Concert” for the first time, noted succinctly: “I began 1946 with the first New Year’s Concert in the time of peace.”<sup>10</sup> Krips, who had been branded a half-Jew and banned from conducting in the Nazi era, obviously had no problem with the continuation of a series of concerts whose latest performance on 1 January 1945 took place in an apocalyptic atmosphere – as is vividly suggested by its austere programme sheet. In 1946, the print media, such as the Social Democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in an article by one Dr. Ruff,<sup>11</sup> saw the New Year’s Concert as a Strauss Concert and “as a hopeful musical salute to the New Year, which was welcomed with enthusiastic applause by the audience.” In 1947, the New Year’s Concert, which was of course still a long way away from the globally syndicated phenomenon we know today, had already morphed into “a fixture we have grown fond of” in the ÖVP daily, *Das Kleine Volksblatt*.<sup>12</sup>

It was only in recent years that a critical reflection on the part played in National Socialism by the functionalization of light music in general and of the Johann Strauss Concerts in particular has been attempted. Claims like the one advanced by journalist and senior editor Jacob Heilbrunn on 1 March 2013 in *National Interest* that “the New Year’s Concert was originally devised to celebrate the 1938 union with the Third Reich, a fact that the orchestra apparently disguises on its website”<sup>13</sup>, may be devoid of any documented basis in the sources but they do highlight how important it is to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible when analyzing the Johann Strauss Concerts 1939–1945 and to augment such analysis with a study of what went before and what came after this period.

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<sup>10</sup> Josef Krips, *Ohne Liebe kann man keine Musik machen. Erinnerungen*, edited and documented by Harrietta Krips, Vienna 1994, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 3 January 1946, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Das Kleine Volksblatt*, 8 January 1947

<sup>13</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/jacob-heilbrunn/nazism-the-vienna-philharmonic-8174>