

SCHUBERT'S Wedding Waltz

BY JOSEPH SMITH

The renowned Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick (writing on the occasion of Anselm Hüttenbrenner's finally releasing Schubert's manuscript of the "Unfinished" Symphony for its premiere) divided the surviving friends of the deceased Schubert into two classes: the grasshoppers and the squirrels. According to Hanslick, the grasshoppers allowed Schubert's manuscripts to be scattered to the winds—sold to "American collectors and cheesemongers." (In fact, of course, being bought by an American collector is not necessarily a route to oblivion—just visit, for instance, the J. P. Morgan Library in New York!) The squirrels, on the other hand, kept their Schubert manuscripts locked in a trunk, taking the keys to bed with them. In the case of the "Kupelwieser" Waltz, we must identify a new category of friends: the elephants—who neither scattered nor hoarded, but who remembered.

On September 17, 1826, two of Schubert's beloved friends, Leopold Kupelwieser and Johanna von Lutz, were married. Schubert provided the music for dancing. The bride so loved one particular waltz tune, which Schubert is said to have improvised on the spot, that it stayed with her for life. She used to play and sing it around the house, and her three sons picked it up. Eventually, *their* children learned the tune. One of these grandchildren, Frau Maria Mautner-Markhof, became a friend of Richard Strauss and played the waltz for him in 1943, at which point he wrote it down. On his manuscript, he identifies it as "preserved by tradition by the Kupelwieser family, written down by Richard Strauss." Universal Edition first published the waltz in 1970 in a beautiful edition that includes a facsimile of Strauss's manuscript.

The idea of Schubert's fleeting inspiration being miraculously preserved for more than a century and by such unlikely means enhances an already charming waltz. But the story leaves many nagging questions unanswered. The statement that it was "written down" by Strauss suggests that he simply took dictation from Frau Mautner-Markhof. I think a quick glance at bar 32 makes it abundantly clear that at least some of the harmonies are by Strauss. Did Mautner-Markhof play it with harmonies that Strauss then elaborated—or changed, or did she just play a melodic line? In Maurice J. E. Brown's critical biography of Schubert—the earliest source for the story that I have found—Brown quotes the melody in G major and describes Strauss as "arranging" it for piano, transposing it to G-flat major. (Not that the "difficult" key of G-flat major would be an improbable choice for a Schubert waltz: there is even an example in A-flat minor—seven flats.) Presumably, Brown learned from a source other than Strauss's manuscript that the original key was G. Since, however, this otherwise splendid book (*Schubert: A Critical Biography*, Macmillan, 1958, republished by Da

Capo Press, 1977) lacks footnotes, and since Brown died in 1975, this information may be permanently lost.

The liner notes for a recording of the piece says that it contains a "quotation from *Der Rosenkavalier*." I presume that the writer is referring to the melodic line beginning in bar 29, which is similar to Strauss's "silver rose" motif from *Der Rosenkavalier*. But how could this be a quotation, when it is part of the original Schubert melody rather than some subsidiary voice that could have been added by Strauss? Or, to consider it the other way around, how could Strauss, composing *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1909-10, quote a Schubert melody he didn't hear until 1943? Of course, the fact that Strauss chooses to put his Schubert setting in G-flat points up the similarity, since the "silver rose" motif is strongly associated with G-flat's enharmonic key—F-sharp major. Strauss probably relished this fortuitous resemblance. Nevertheless, the presence of a quotation that could *not* be a quotation simply proves the insignificance of melodic similarities involving a few notes.

Does the story of the *Kupelwieser Waltz* prejudice us toward the piece—are we attracted by the extrinsic anecdotal information, rather than the intrinsic value of the melody itself? Because of this issue, I was particularly interested in a reader letter. Mr. Walter G. Lee of Boise, Idaho, heard the piece on an EMI recording by pianist Joerg Demus entitled *Famous Piano Pieces by the Great Masters*. (Can you, by the way, think of a more inapt designation for this piece than "famous?") Armed with only the limited information in the liner notes—title, key, Deutsch catalog appendix number—he searched all over for the waltz and finally asked if I could help him locate it. In other words, Mr. Lee fell in love with it knowing *nothing* of its touching history, nothing of the strange collaboration of two composers separated by generations.

Those who love the *Kupelwieser Waltz* should indulge themselves in reading through Schubert's published waltzes. Many, many of these exhibit in miniature the melodic refinement, harmonic sophistication, and pianistic inventiveness we admire in his most serious and imposing works. ■

The first half of the Kupelwieser Waltz appears on the next page. The complete Waltz, along with a facsimile of Strauss' manuscript, is published by Universal Edition (UE14930) and available for \$6.95 from your local music store or from European American Music, 15800 NW 48th Avenue, Miami, FL 33014.

