

# Information Pack

## Die Fledermaus

Comic Operetta in three acts by: Johann Strauss II  
Libretto by Carl Haffner and Richard Genée

Sung in a new English translation by Stephen Lawless and Daniel Dooner  
with additional material by Katy Brand

Based on the Vaudeville Le Réveillon by Henri Meilhac and Ludvic Halév



GLYNDEBOURNE

# I The Characters

## **Gabriel Von Eisenstein**

*Tenor*

Citizen of Vienna, married to Rosalinde. He has a prison sentence hanging over him as he has offended the tax collector. Played a trick on his good friend Dr Falke and doesn't know that he will soon pay the price.

## **Dr. Falke**

*Baritone*

Eisenstein's good friend. He is a generally nice chap but still feels really humiliated by the trick Eisenstein played on him – he ended up dressed as a bat for all the town to see. He is intent on seeking revenge.

## **Alfred**

*Tenor*

A singer. Still in love with Rosalinde and persists with his wooing of her by serenading her. He would do anything for her including go to prison!

## **Adele**

*Soprano*

The Eisensteins' Maid. Prepared to lie to get to a party. Has a sister called Ida who is a ballerina.

## **Rosalinde**

*Soprano*

Eisenstein's wife who is wooed by Alfred, her ex-lover. She has lots of time on her hands and is really rich. She is only concerned with wealth and appearance.

## **Dr. Blind**

*Tenor*

Eisenstein's Attorney. A constant disappointment to his rather difficult client Eisenstein.

## **Ida**

*Mezzo Soprano*

Adele's Sister. A ballerina who is extremely interested in people or situations that may further her performing career.

## **Prince Orlofsky**

*Mezzo Soprano*

A rich Russian. An unforgettable image of aristocratic degeneracy, cast by Strauss as a mezzo in drag, a device that gives the character an overtone of slippery sexuality.

## **Frank**

*Tenor*

The Jail Warden.

## **Frosh**

*Comedian*

The Jailer. He spends most of his time drunk. The comic role can be played by an actor who doesn't sing at all.

## 2 Overview

*Die Fledermaus* means: *The Flying Fox* but the opera is often referred to as *The revenge of the bat*.

Set in 1890's Vienna, this opera in three acts concerns mistaken identities, flirtations at a masked ball, elegant frivolities, confusions and schemes. It focuses on Gabriel von Eisenstein, his wife Rosalinde, and the people around them, and providing a hilarious vehicle for some of the most captivating music ever written.

Prince Orlofsky is throwing a party for all the young single men in town to meet a troupe of ballerinas. Dr Falke sees this as the perfect occasion to play an elaborate trick on his friend Eisenstein as revenge for his humiliating prank three years previously, when he dumped him drunk, dressed up as a bat, for all the town to see. He was a laughing stock for some time and has never forgiven his friend.

Alfred, a singer is still in love with his old flame Rosalinde, who is now the wife of Gabriel von Eisenstein. Rosalinde spends a lot of time trying to resist the flirtations of Alfred but finally agrees to have dinner with him.

Strauss describes the Austro-Hungarian empire in his opera, an analysis of which is cynical, but presented in a manner full of generosity and vivaciousness, and a satirical farce in its pace and melodies. No matter what deception or dishonesty is occurring, the music is all about fun and escapism, as shown by Adele's laughing aria "Mein Herr Marquis" (My Dear Marquis). It is an opera in which luscious music disguises a mordant critique of the audience at which it is aimed.

## 3 Synopsis

### Act I

In the living room of Eisenstein's home Alfred is serenading Rosalinde. He leaves promising to return later. Adele, the Eisensteins' maid receives a letter from her sister Ida telling her about Prince Orlofsky's party. She asks for the evening off pretending it's to visit a "sick aunt", Rosalinde refuses her request. Eisenstein and his lawyer, Blind, arrive from a session in court. Eisenstein has been sentenced to a fortnight in jail for a civil offense; he is clearly annoyed with his Lawyers incompetence. His friend Falke arrives to invite him to Prince Orlofsky's party, suggesting he bring along his repeater stop-watch, which charms all the ladies, so he can accumulate pleasant memories to sustain him during his confinement in jail. Rosalinde, unaware that Eisenstein is off to a party (although she does wonder why he is in full evening dress), joins Adele in a bittersweet farewell to Eisenstein before he goes to prison. She has a change of heart and sends Adele to her aunt – Adele is overjoyed and "borrows" one of Rosalinde's best ball gowns to go to the party in. Alfred returns but this time they are interrupted by the warden Frank, who mistakes Alfred for the Eisenstein whom he has come to arrest. Rosalinde persuades Alfred to save her name by posing as her husband, and Frank carts him off to jail. Dr Falke invites Rosalinde to the ball and persuades her to go as a Hungarian countess.

### ACT II

In an antechamber at the palace Dr Falke tells Prince Orlofsky, of the "Bat's revenge", his plan to get his own back on Eisenstein for the humiliation he caused him. Adele, dressed in one of Rosalinde's most elegant gowns, laughs off Eisenstein's suggestion that she resembles his wife's chambermaid. Rosalinde arrives disguised as a Hungarian countess; she is soon wooed by her own reeling husband, whose pocket watch she steals to hold as proof of his philandering. Rosalinde agrees to sing a song about her "native" land, after which the guests move on to a magnificent dining area to toast the joys of wine, good fellowship and love. Champagne flows, and the guests dance wildly until dawn. When the clock strikes six, Eisenstein staggers off to keep his appointment at the jail.

### ACT III

Moments later at the prison, Frosch, a drunken jailer, tries to keep order among the inmates, who are unable to sleep because of Alfred's singing. Frank arrives, still giddy with champagne, followed shortly by Adele and Ida, who, thinking him a theatrical agent, believes he might further her stage aspirations. Frank, hearing someone at the door, hides the girls in a cell and then admits Eisenstein, who has come to begin his sentence. The new prisoner is surprised to learn his cell is already occupied by a man who claims to be Eisenstein and who was found having dinner with Rosalinde; to obtain an explanation from the impostor, Eisenstein snatches a legal robe and wig from his astonished lawyer. No sooner is he disguised as Dr Blind, than Rosalinde hurries in to secure Alfred's release and press divorce charges against her errant husband, she explains to the lawyer that she was dining with Alfred as her husband was out of town, enraged, Eisenstein removes his disguise and accuses his wife of promiscuity, at which Rosalinde whips forth the watch she took from him at the ball. Eisenstein makes the connection with the Hungarian Countess he was chatting up at the ball. As others from the party arrive, Eisenstein learns that his friend Dr. Falke has been playing a prank and believes Rosalinda's rendezvous with Alfred was a part of the prank, and all is forgiven.

## 4 *Die Fledermaus* – an Operetta

*Die Fledermaus* (1847) is an operetta, literally a “little opera”, originally a play with overture, songs and dances. Like so many works now performed regularly and loved by audiences, it had a distinctly chilly reception, closing after only 16 performances in Vienna.

### Performing in *Die Fledermaus*

Strauss’ writing makes considerable demands on the performers, who must be alive to its many and extreme changes of pace: not generally a feature of his waltzes and polkas, these are the key to much of the hair-raising excitement of this incredibly entertaining music. With melodies so mouth-watering that one can only wonder what it would have taken to please those miserable Viennese, 150 years ago.

Things to look out for when watching the opera:

Aria	<i>A solo song</i>
Duet	<i>A song for two characters</i>
Recitative	<i>Sung speech</i>
Chorus	<i>A vocal piece for many voices (with some common identity)</i>
Overture	<i>An introductory piece of music</i>

## 5 Johann Strauss II Life and Music

Johann Strauss II– the composer of *Die Fledermaus* – wrote many popular dance pieces in addition to waltzes and has become one of Vienna’s greatest exports. He also produced 17 operettas filled with his own special brand of music, by far the most beloved of these is *Die Fledermaus* or *The Revenge of the Bat*. The work remains a masterpiece among operettas as the Viennese waltz rhythms that are the trademark of Johann Strauss bring a quality of enchantment to the work.

- 1825 Born in Vienna, 25 October
- 1831 Writes first 36 bars of waltz music at age six
- 1841 Begins his studies at the Polytechnic School
- 1842 Begins musical study
- 1849 Upon death of his father, combines his dance orchestra with his father’s
- 1856 After an extended illness, begins a European tour with his orchestra
- 1867 Composes *The Blue Danube*
- 1872 Begins his American tour
- 1874 Composes *Die Fledermaus*
- 1899 Dies of pneumonia in Vienna, 3 June

## 6 A rough guide to Glyndebourne

### **What is the Glyndebourne Festival?**

The Glyndebourne Festival is a leading opera festival that takes place at Glyndebourne, a country house in the Sussex countryside. Glyndebourne Festival Opera is the name of the opera company which stages the operas. The Festival is famous for its beautiful setting and for the quality of its productions, particularly of operas by Mozart.

### **What's the story behind it?**

John Christie owned the manor house at Glyndebourne. He used to stage amateur opera productions in the Organ Room and one day his friends suggested that he ask Audrey Mildmay, a professional singer, to take part to add some polish. John and Audrey fell in love and were married in 1931. The couple continued to stage amateur opera productions and John had plans to build a tiny theatre. But Audrey had a better idea: 'If you're going to spend all that money John,' she said, 'for God's sake do the thing properly.' So the Christies built a 300 seat theatre with a proper orchestra pit and the most modern equipment, and the first Glyndebourne Festival took place in 1934. The first opera was *Le nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro)* by Mozart, and Audrey sang the part of the heroine, Susanna. Glyndebourne was beginning to become world famous for its superb performances and productions when war broke out in 1939. Nevertheless, by the time Audrey Mildmay died in 1953 Glyndebourne was one of the most important Arts organisations in Britain. John Christie died in 1962 and later in the 1960s the range of operas that were staged at Glyndebourne was increased. Many opera singers who later became world famous began their careers there. The original theatre was loved by Glyndebourne's visitors but by the early 1990s it was too small and out of date. Glyndebourne had become one of the most famous opera companies in the world and it needed a modern opera house that could fit bigger productions and seat more people. So a new opera house was built and opened in 1994.

### **What else does Glyndebourne do?**

Glyndebourne on Tour takes three productions to theatres all over the country. The productions open at Glyndebourne in October and are then on the road until December. They are important not only because they allow people who can't get to Glyndebourne to see popular productions at much cheaper prices, but also because the singers are often young artists at the beginning of their careers, who are looking for their big break. Apart from the Festival, Glyndebourne runs lots of education projects, which help all sorts of people to discover more about opera and maybe develop an interest in it. Most of Glyndebourne Education's projects are for young people, and the programme allows people to find out more about the operas that are being performed at the festival and on tour. The department even produces its own CDs; each one is an introduction to a different opera, with information and examples of music.

### **What is Glyndebourne like today?**

Today the new theatre sits next to the beautiful Tudor house, surrounded by the famous gardens. The theatre is very light and modern inside, with pale wooden panelling; There are three tiers of seats, each with its own large gallery outside. The atmosphere is very exciting; You feel as if you are in a special place, doing something that you wouldn't normally do. Even if you often go to the theatre, you probably won't have been to one in the middle of a beautiful garden. The gardens are carefully planted with trees and flowers to look their best during the summer, when the Festival takes place. They have smooth lawns, where people have picnics during the interval of the opera, and there is a lovely lake and views across meadows; Glyndebourne is probably the only opera house in the world which has sheep and cows as its neighbours. There is a sunken garden, a rose garden, a terrace and an orchard, and people who regularly come to Glyndebourne often have their favourite nook.

# 7 A rough guide to opera

## Opera is...

A dramatic art which uses music, singing, words and drama, movement, dance, set design, lighting and costume to tell a story! The emotional content is in the music as much as the words and drama, telling stories of love and hate, death and power. Opera doesn't try to reflect real life like a TV drama (it couldn't with all that singing!) but steps into the realms of deep human experience. In the overpowering combination of singing, music and visual spectacle it can evoke a strong response from an audience.

## History...

Opera was invented in Italy in the 1600's and has been popular ever since. The cost of opera (tickets can be pricey) is probably where it gets its 'elitist' image but although the first operas were for the aristocracy it quickly became the entertainment of the masses. For centuries it was where people went to socialise, hear their favourite singers and chat to their friends. Only in the late 19th Century were audiences first expected to watch the performance in silence. Opera has become very expensive to put on as it involves a huge number of performers (soloists, chorus, orchestra, dancers, actors), highly skilled staff behind the scenes, making costumes, creating the set and running the show, who put together and rehearse each opera.

## Singers

Obviously singers weren't able to use microphones when opera was invented, and so opera singers have always had to develop large voices to fill the auditorium. At the same time they try to create the 'perfect' vocal sound which also has emotion and dramatic character. It takes years of training to crack this! Singers and the roles they play are classified by their vocal ranges.

## The different voices are:

*Soprano* Highest female voice, often plays the heroine, dies a lot

*Mezzo Soprano* Not quite as high as a soprano

*Contralto* Low pitched female voice, often more mature characters or mothers

*Countertenor* Really high male voice, falsetto, like Justin Timberlake/Pharrell

Williams, they were once the superstars of opera

*Tenor* High male voice, from the 19th Century became the hero character when Countertenors went out of fashion

*Baritone* Bit lower than a Tenor

*Bass* Right at the bottom. Often plays comic characters or those with dubious moral fibre

**The Chorus** A body of singers who sing and act to make the crowd scenes more plausible

**Songs and dialogue** Traditional opera consists of different modes of singing:

**Recitative** (known as recit.) which drives the plot and passages of dialogue through speech-like singing

**Arias** Songs where the plot pauses for a character to reflect on their emotional state

**Choruses** Rousing group numbers sung by the chorus

**Ensembles** Where a number of soloists sing together. They are really useful dramatic tool and a great way to end an Act, where each character can reflect on a situation from their perspective at the same time.

## The Orchestra

Instruments have changed since the early operas of the 1600's, and the number of instruments in a standard opera orchestra has grown. By the time of Wagner (late 19th Century) the orchestra was enormous and singers had to develop bigger voices in order to be heard. The orchestra is normally in the pit half under the stage, which helps stop them drowning out the singers.

**The librettist** writes the libretto (the script)

**The Composer** writes the music

These two really need to have a good understanding of theatre and how to tell a story.

It's more than just writing music or words. It's a hard job and what we now know as 'the repertoire' is the best of the bunch from the last 400 years. Till around the 19th Century composers would churn out operas really quickly (in as little as 3 weeks sometimes), and the local opera house would always be performing a new piece. It's actually a lot closer to how the popular music industry works today.

## Opera – then and now

Opera has always reflected the time it was created in, and has often contained political and social messages. Many of them caused uproar and scandal and were closely censored by governments. When an opera is put on stage today it needs to be brought to life by modern artists, the key people are:

**The director** (who creates a concept for the production)

**The conductor** (who decides how to interpret the music, and makes sure everyone sings together during the show!)

**The designer** (who works with the director to infuse the ideas of the production into the stage design)

Even though some operas are hundreds of years old they can still be exciting and audiences can look at these works with a fresh eye.