

## Johann Strauss Ensemble

Playing the music of not only its namesake, his predecessors and his contemporaries, but also that of modern composers, the Johann Strauss Ensemble has become one of Austria's leading chamber orchestras.

The Johann Strauss Ensemble was founded in 1985 by members of the Bruckner Orchester Linz, and the group has been working continuously on refining their sound and style and adding innovative new pieces to their standard repertoire ever since. The orchestra owes much of its professional development to Russell McGregor, who has been working with the Ensemble since 2004. Continuing the tradition of Strauss concerts held in the 19th century, he often conducts the instrumentalists from his position of lead violinist.

The Johann Strauss Ensemble's identity stems from the fact that its members have known each other for many years and are close friends. They share a passion for what they do, and working in the sizeable orchestra affords the individual musicians within it an unparalleled opportunity to showcase their special talents. The orchestra's base in Linz also plays a key role in defining its character, as this enables the group to combine the musical style of Upper Austria with the music of Vienna. The result is a unique connection to the time in which Bad Ischl and the Salzkammergut were among the most popular holiday destinations of the Viennese bourgeoisie.

The intensive exchanging of ideas between musicians, composers, painters and writers throughout this region lent the art created during this period esprit and congeniality – and it is precisely this liveliness of mind and spirit that the Johann Strauss Ensemble brings into the present day. From the very beginning, the orchestra has sought to develop its repertoire in a way that combines the numerous musical works of the Strauss family with new compositions. The group attaches particular importance to not allowing themselves to be consumed by the commercialism that is often associated with Viennese music. The Ensemble is constantly inviting the best composers of our time to write new pieces specifically for them. Such opera include arrangements by Roland Neuwirth and Guido Mancusi and pieces by Werner Steinmetz and Manfred Kammerhofer, who have been permanent members of the Ensemble since its foundation.

In addition to the oeuvre of Johann Strauss and the newly commissioned works mentioned above, the orchestra's repertoire includes scores of symphonies by other composers from various different eras,

countries and aesthetic persuasions. A notable example of this is the cycle "Auf Flügeln des Gesanges" ("On Wings of Song"), which was created in 2014 and is being presented in four concerts per season in the orchestra hall of the music theatre of the Volksgarten in Linz. Working in this way also enables the Ensemble to expand its repertoire by adding classical chamber orchestra literature and arrangements from the 20th century (such as those by Schreker, Stravinsky, Copland, Krenek, and many more).

Russell McGregor conducts his concerts in a uniquely casual and entertaining manner through their suspenseful sections, taking his audience on a rollercoaster journey. Each and every concert also features literary readings, the passages for which are usually taken from Austrian literature, which have so far been performed by renowned guest readers such as Erwin Steinhauer, Barbara Wussow, Heinz Marecek and Friedrich von Thun.

On top of holding regular concerts throughout Austria and almost every single country in Europe, the Johann Strauss Ensemble has undertaken lengthy tours around the Netherlands, Belgium, Romania, China and Australia. They have been invited to international festivals such as "Printemps des Arts de Monte Carlo", "Salzkammergut Festival", "KlangBogen Wien", "Wiener Festwochen", "Festival der Begegnung", "Budapest Spring Festival", "Shanghai Festival" and "La Folle Journée".

The Ensemble's commitment to humanitarian causes means that they stage many of their annual concerts in collaboration with various charities or as part of charity events, such as "NACHBAR IN NOT" (a humanitarian aid organisation), "CF KINDER" (a charity for children with cystic fibrosis), "PIA" (which provides help to victims of sexual abuse), "MOTHER OF PEACE" (a charity for orphaned children) and "ZIMBABWE-HILFE!" (which sends aid relief to people in Zimbabwe).

The Ensemble has released eight CDs to date: "Johann Strauss Ensemble" (1994), "Wiener Blut" and "DU DONAU, DU" (2000), "An der schönen blauen Donau" (2004), "Zu Gast im Brucknerhaus" (2010), "From Vienna with Love" (2011), "Ostwärts" (2013) and most recently "Aus den Bergen" (2015) and "Reisebuch aus den Österreichischen Alpen" by Ernst Krenek (2017)

In June 2018 Josef Herzer takes over the management of the Johann Strauss Ensemble!