

## **Franz Mailer – the architect of the Josef Strauss Complete Recorded Edition**

**Professor Franz Mailer (b. Vienna, 21 September 1920–d. Waidhofen an der Ybbs, 15 January 2010)**

If the late Professor Alfred Walter was the true 'Father' of Marco Polo's gargantuan 52-CD series, the J. Strauss Jr Complete Recorded Edition, then Franz Mailer was incontestably its principal architect. Throughout the years 1988 to 1996 not only did he assume personal responsibility for garnering from around the globe the extant printed and manuscript full scores and performing material, but he organised the creation of orchestral parts where none existed and, to assist the various conductors, wrote full orchestral scores for almost every composition, all meticulously prepared in his precise hand. Franz Mailer also wrote the German booklet texts for the entire series. He then repeated this arduous and time-consuming procedure for the contents of the 26-CD series, the Josef Strauss Complete Recorded Edition.

With typical self-effacement, Professor Mailer studiously avoided all attempts to label him a musicologist, choosing instead to describe himself as a cultural historian and feuilletonist.

In fact, Franz Mailer began his occupation as a music critic in 1947 and worked for several Austrian newspapers. He concluded his work in journalism in 1963 as department head on the *Neues Österreich* and became a freelance writer. 1951 saw the commencement of his long career as a freelance broadcaster for radio stations in Austria, and later also in the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland and the USA, writing and presenting individual programmes and series about Viennese music and especially 19th-century cultural life, including a 56-part radio biography of Johann Strauss Son. A further series, running to 149 editions, set itself the ambitious aim of giving a precise description of Vienna's cultural life, including its popular music. This led directly to the collection of material for a "Viennese Cultural Calendar" focusing on events day by day for each year during the period 1815–1914. It was in 1973 that Franz Mailer commenced the creation of his incomparable private archive of feuilletons, essentially an immense archive of newspaper extracts that bears out Lord Macaulay's assertion that "The only true history of a country is to be found in its newspapers." This unique resource was not only of benefit to its initiator; he generously and freely placed its treasures at the disposal of others, amongst them Professor Dr Max Schönherr, the Vienna Institute for Strauss Research (for its ongoing Strauss Elementar-Verzeichnis project) and the present writer.

Despite suffering persistent illness during the early 1980s, the decade saw Mailer fronting further radio biographies of Oscar Straus and Eduard Strauss, as well as series on Viennese popular singers and the literature of Viennese coffee houses. His unassailable reputation regarding all things 'Strauss' naturally led to his being brought in by the board of the Vienna Philharmonic to advise on the choice of programmes for that orchestra's renowned annual New Year's Concerts, initially for 1982 and 1983 and for which he additionally prepared the full orchestral scores and orchestral material from the original 19th-century arrangements. In his capacity as consultant, he was to remain a vital component of this annual festivity until ill-health forced his retirement after the 2008 concert. Besides acting as an advisor regarding the programme content of the New Year's Concerts, from 1973 to 2008 Franz Mailer also provided the programme texts for the printed programme booklets and the German-language scripts for the television and radio coverage.

Based on his collection of primary source material Franz Mailer also wrote several books, commencing with *Das kleine Johann Strauss Buch* in 1975. Two years later, with *Joseph Strauss: Genie wider Willen* (1977), he published the very first biography of Johann's supremely gifted younger brother. Numerous articles by Mailer on Strauss-related themes appeared in the Viennese periodical *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* during the 1970s (he also contributed to a special 1999 Johann Strauss II centenary issue) and his name was increasingly to be found as a contributor in printed programmes of Vienna's theatres and in musical dictionaries. In 1985 Franz's Oscar Straus biography, *Weltbürger der Musik*, appeared to wide acclaim. In 1999 and 2002, respectively, he published in book form the texts he had written to accompany Marco Polo's Complete Recorded Editions of the music of Johann Strauss Son and Josef Strauss. It was, however, the groundbreaking 10-volume series *Johann Strauss (Sohn): Leben und Werk in Briefen und Dokumenten* ('Johann Strauss Son: Life and Work in Letters and Documents') that cemented Professor Mailer's reputation as the world's leading authority in the field of contemporary Strauss research. Published between 1983 and 2007, and already a classic of Strauss literature, this unique and monumental reference work remains as much a testament to Mailer's remarkable powers of unearthing and methodically ordering vast quantities of material as it is to his profound knowledge and enduring love of his subject.

With the passing of Franz Mailer, the Strauss world has lost its most experienced and authoritative expert, as well as a good friend who was always willing to share his knowledge and offer guidance. Through his easy approachability at international Strauss gatherings, he inspired a generation of younger Strauss researchers in a way perhaps none of his predecessors or contemporaries had done.

Peter Kemp  
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