

Johann Strauss II

Viennese Blood Waltz



This month **Bridget Mermikides** reckons we should look at a piece in three-quarter time. And where better to start than with The Waltz King himself, the venerable Johann Strauss II.

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: Drop D	✓ Playing in 3/4
TEMPO: 138 bpm	✓ Part separation
CD: TRACK 20-21	✓ Playing in 6ths and 3rds

THE AUSTRIAN COMPOSER wrote so many engaging and popular waltzes (as well as other dance forms) in the late 19th Century that he became known as The Waltz King. Growing up in a family of composers, Strauss had a hugely busy, occasionally very stressful and fabulously successful musical career. He was essentially the premiere pop songwriter of the day, contributing significantly to the huge popularity of the Viennese waltz. There is an unfussy elegance to his writing that seems accessible to all, which might explain why his music has been used in several films and TV shows every year since 1930, including *Titanic*, *Amélie* and most famously his *Blue Danube Waltz* in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

Here I've arranged his famous *Wiener Blut* which translated as *Viennese Spirit*, or *Viennese Blood*, and popularly known as the *Viennese Blood Waltz*. First performed by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in 1873, it is in the light 3/4 waltz feel popular at the time, and actually includes a number of themes, from which I've selected and arranged the famous *Waltz I* which has an extremely simple yet stunningly effective melody.

Originally written in C major (with a

middle section in the key of G major), I've transposed it up a tone to D (with a middle section in A) and used drop D tuning so a wider range of the guitar may be used.


Technically this arrangement requires the ability to play a bass and chordal accompaniment using fretting hand thumb and fingers. This should have a light waltz feel underneath the melody, which is occasionally voiced in 3rds and 6ths. The challenge is to keep an effortless lilting rhythm while

“I have ‘cheated’ by allowing the first bass note of each bar to sustain more than just one beat. This makes it easier but still retains the character.”

retaining the lyrical simplicity of the melody. Those of you who caught our recent *Classical Harmony* article (GT226) should recognise a wealth of diatonic harmony and secondary function chords in this work. I firmly believe that a theoretical understanding of the basic progression can really help memorisation.

This arrangement is a good example of playing in three parts: melody, bass notes and middle accompaniment notes. When playing a solo guitar arrangement we have the technical challenge of playing all parts where an orchestral player only ever has one part to cope with. If you follow the score along with my recording, you may notice that I have ‘cheated’ by allowing the first bass note of each bar to sustain longer than just the one

beat as written. This is deliberate; it makes it much easier to play without worrying about excessive bass note muting; the best thing about it is that it manages to retain the character of the music.

I do hope you enjoy playing this splendid piece. Why not practise it to *Strictly*... with the sound turned down of course? 



TECHNIQUE FOCUS

Use your nails

All professional classical guitarists pluck the strings using the fingernails. These need to be kept at the right length and shaped correctly so that they create a good plucking action and the best possible tone. Every serious player keeps a variety of nails files, buffers and a big favourite is very fine wet-or-dry sanding paper. This is used to smooth off the edges of the nails and keep them buffed to a fine polish! The better the nails, the better the tone - trust me!



TRACK RECORD To hear *Wiener Blut* alongside other Strauss waltzes including *Blue Danube*, you can't do better than Decca's classic – and now remastered – recording with the Vienna Philharmonic: *Johann Strauss Waltzes* (Decca 2000). To dig deeper into Strauss's orchestral catalogue then *Johann Strauss II: The Complete Orchestral Edition 52-CD collection* (Naxos 2011) should keep you busy.



Portrait Of Johann Strauss by August Eisenmenger in 1888

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 21

A good tip for clearly separating the accompaniment from the melody and also for emphasising the waltz character is to lightly staccato the second

beat underneath the melody wherever the melody has a sustained note (or notes). Listening to the track will hopefully make this clear.

$\text{♩} = 138$ approx

Chords: E \sharp m, F \sharp m, D, D/A, F \sharp , Bm/D, Bm/A, F \sharp , Bm/F \sharp , D, F \sharp m, A7/E, A7, F \sharp , G, A7/C \sharp , A7, B \sharp m, A7/C \sharp , A7, Bm, Em, Bm/A, A, D/A, A, G, A7, D, D/A, E \sharp m, F \sharp m, D, D/A, F \sharp , Bm/D

Bottom string detuned to D

1, 69, 8, 76, 12, 80, 16, 84

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 21

At the start, picking hand fingering is indicated to give a suggestion of how to organise the fingers. There are varying solutions of how to pluck this

but this is a sensible start. Where possible I use a rest stroke on the melody (free stroke thumb) – an example being the melody note G in bar 9.

Chords: Bm/A, F#, D, F#m, A7/E

Staff 1 (Treble): Melody line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Staff 2 (Bass): Bass line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Fingering: 20, 88

Chords: G, F#, A7/E, G, Gaug, A7

Staff 1 (Treble): Melody line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Staff 2 (Bass): Bass line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Fingering: 24, 92

Chords: G, Bm/A, A, Em, G/A, A/C#, A, D

Staff 1 (Treble): Melody line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Staff 2 (Bass): Bass line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Fingering: 28, 96

Chords: E9, A/E, E7, A, F#m/C#, A

Staff 1 (Treble): Melody line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Staff 2 (Bass): Bass line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Fingering: 33, 49

mp i a m p i a m

Chords: E/B, E, E7, F#m, D/F#, F#m

Staff 1 (Treble): Melody line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Staff 2 (Bass): Bass line with notes G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C#.

Fingering: 37, 53

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 21

If you listen to any orchestral recording of this you will hear that the tempo often changes quite dramatically from one section to the next. I have kept it at a fairly even tempo throughout – with a slight speeding up at bar 65

followed by a rit (ritardando or 'slow down') in bar 68 to ease you back to the main waltz theme. As a relatively simple piece to play, the key is in your expression, so concentrate of your feel and dynamics throughout.



Chords and notes shown in the tablature:

- Measures 41-56: E9, A/E, E7, A, F#m/C#, A
- Measures 45-60: B7/F#, F7, E, A
- Measures 61-68: A, D/A, A, E#m, F#m (D.S. al Fine, rit)

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