

THE VIENNESE WINTER BALL

Balls around the world: How they compare

OTTAWA: 8TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIENNESE WINTER BALL

Date: Feb. 7
Time: 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Place: National Gallery of Canada

Cost: Dinner tickets, including wine and champagne, are \$350 each.
Expected attendance: 400-450

Bottles of champagne ordered: 100
Bottles of wine: 450

Opening ceremony: 13 couples of debutantes and cavaliers dance the polonaise.

Past notable guests: Jean and Aline Chrétien
Gift bag: Past gifts have included CDs, wine, embroidered handkerchiefs.



Proceeds go to: Thirteen Strings Junior Orchestra and Champions for Children Foundation.

Organized by: Viennese Winter Ball Committee

MONTREAL: 44TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIENNESE OPERA BALL

Date: Nov. 15, 2003
Time: 7 p.m. to 3 a.m.
Place: Montreal Marriott Château Champlain

Cost: Dinner ticket, not including wine, is \$200; \$100 for those under 30.
Expected attendance: 330

Bottles of champagne ordered: 80
Bottles of wine: Not available

Opening ceremony: 15 couples of debutantes and cavaliers dance the quadrille.

Past notable guests: Canada's first astronaut Marc Garneau, Principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University, Dr. Heather Munroe-Blum.

Gift bag: Past gifts include crystal brooch, chocolate truffles and Viennese coffee.

Proceeds go to: SOS Children's Villages, local German language schools and two scholarships for students of McGill University to study music in Austria.

Organized by: Austrian Society of Montreal

CALGARY: 37TH ANNIVERSARY OF A NIGHT IN VIENNA

Date: March 20
Time: 5 p.m. to 2 a.m.
Place: Westin Hotel Calgary

Cost: Dinner ticket, not including wine, is \$130.
Expected attendance: 300-400

Bottles of champagne ordered: 60
Bottles of wine: About 100

Opening ceremony: 13 couples of debutantes and cavaliers dance the polonaise.

Past notable guests: Alberta Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta Lois Hole, Maria Von Trapp

Gift bag: Past gifts include compact mirrors, Austrian cookbook, chocolate truffles.

Proceeds go to: Mozart musical scholarship.

Organized by: Austrian-Canadian Society of Calgary

EDMONTON: 29TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JOHANN STRAUSS BALL

Date: Feb. 14
Time: 6 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.
Place: Westin Hotel

Cost: \$175 — includes champagne and wine.
Expected attendance: 350

Bottles of champagne ordered: 120
Bottles of wine: 120

Opening ceremony: 16 couples of debutantes and cavaliers dance the polonaise.

Past notable guests: Alberta Lieutenant-Governor Lois Hole, President of the University of Alberta, Dr. Roderick Fraser.

Gift bag: Past gifts include crystal jewelry boxes, CDs featuring Strauss's music.

Proceeds go to: Music studies in Vienna or Salzburg for four students.

Organized by: Johann Strauss Foundation of Edmonton

NEW YORK CITY: 49TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIENNESE OPERA BALL

Date: Jan. 30
Time: 8 p.m. to 4 a.m.
Place: Waldorf Astoria Hotel

Cost: Dinner tickets, incl. wine and champagne, are \$500 and \$750 U.S. Junior tickets for those under 35 are \$300 U.S. Tables of 10 are \$7,500, \$10,000 and \$25,000.
Expected attendance: 500

Bottles of champagne ordered: 240 bottles
Bottles of wine: 600

Opening ceremony: Grand march of dignitaries and cadets from West Point Military Academy accompanied by a white horse and carriage with three solo dancers and eight couples. (Debutante season in N.Y. is in December.)

Notable guests this year: Nikki Hilton (shown at right), Miss Teen USA, Tami Farrell, Governor George Pataki.
Gift bag: Past gifts have included chocolates, candy, perfume, CDs and wine.



Proceeds go to: The New York Central Park Conservancy's restoration project of the Ramble.

Organized by: US-Austrian Chamber of Commerce

VIENNA: 34TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE IMPERIAL BALL

Date: Dec. 31, 2003
Time: 7:30 p.m. to 3:30 a.m.
Place: Hofburg Palace, residence of the Habsburg emperors until 1918

Cost: 460 euros (\$759) for dinner, incl. wine and champagne, 124 euros (\$205) after 10 p.m.
Attendance: 2,500

Bottles of champagne ordered: 1,000
Bottles of wine: 800

Opening ceremony: Imperial Guards perform the historic changing of the guards and guests are greeted by actors dressed up as the Imperial couple.

Past notable guests: Various dignitaries and movie stars — because there's no press allowed, the list of invitees is kept secret.

Gift bag: Past gifts include an inscribed note pads, perfume, champagne glasses.

Proceeds go to: Not a charitable event.

Organized by: Hofburg Congress Centre

VIENNA: 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUDOLFINA MASKED BALL

Date: Feb. 23.
Time: 8:30 p.m. to 5 a.m.
Place: Hofburg Palace, residence of the Habsburg emperors until 1918

Cost: Entry is 55 euros (\$91), buffet dinner and bar are extra.
Expected attendance: 3,500

Bottles of champagne ordered: 250 and 1,000 bottles of sparkling wine
Bottles of wine: 1,200

Opening ceremony: 20 couples of debutantes and cavaliers dance the polonaise.

Past notable guests: President of Austrian parliament Andreas Khol.

Gift bag: Past gifts include business card holders, champagne glasses and photo albums.

Proceeds go to: An organization of 'clown doctors' who visit children in hospitals.

Organized by: K.Ö.St.V Rudolfina student organization

VIENNA: 48TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPERA BALL

Date: Feb. 19
Time: 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.
Place: Vienna State Opera House

Cost: Entry is 215 euros (\$355), appetizers and bar are extra.
Expected attendance: 5,000

Bottles of champagne ordered: 3,500 bottles of sparkling wine.
Bottles of wine: not available

Opening ceremony: 160 couples of debutantes and cavaliers dance the polonaise.

Past notable guests: Sophia Loren, Grace Jones, Heather Locklear, Pamela Anderson with Kid Rock (shown).



Proceeds: Not a charitable event.

Organized by: Vienna Opera House

ALL FIGURES ARE APPROXIMATE



Young couples from 10 nations open Vienna's traditional Opera Ball in 2002.

It was only after the Russian czar danced it in 1815 that the "new" Imperial Waltz was accepted in European balls and courts.

But to the chagrin of some, such as the following *London Times* reporter in 1816, it remained "the indecent foreign dance," with "voluptuous intertwining of the limbs."

"So long as this obscene display was confined to prostitutes and adulteresses, we did not think it deserving of notice; but now that it is attempted to be forced on the respectable classes of society by the civil examples of their superiors, we feel it a duty to warn every parent against exposing his daughter to so fatal a contagion."

In 1837, it was given the royal stamp of approval when Johann Strauss Sr. composed and played a waltz at the coronation of Queen Victoria. After

At \$350 a head — by far the most expensive Viennese ball in Canada — Ottawa's event raises about \$60,000 for charity.

that, there was no stopping its popularity.

In 1919, American journalist H.L. Mencken wrote about its allure.

"There is something about a waltz that is irresistible. Try it on the fattest and sedatest or even on the thinnest and most acidulous of women, and she will be ready, in ten minutes, for a stealthy smack behind the door — nay, she will forthwith impart the embarrassing news that her husband misunderstands her and drinks too much and is going to Cleveland, O., on a business trip tomorrow."

The seductive power of the waltz, particularly when danced in the otherworldly setting of a ball, is unparalleled. It's true, just ask an Austrian.

"For one day you escape and you're a prince or princess and everything looks lovely and wonderful, and you twirl and you drink a bit and it looks like a fairy tale," says Otto Ditz, Austria's newest ambassador to Canada, who'll be attending his first Canadian ball tomorrow.

"It's the best place to meet wonderful girls," he recalls from his days of ball-hopping as a teenager.

"You go when you're young and you meet girls," he says explaining its enduring appeal to today's youth.

"After a tough week, the ball is a magical highlight ... You don't have that in everyday life — you go to a disco and it's totally different. (At a ball)

you have this elegance — even if it's just for an evening."

During Fasching, it's not unusual for early risers to spot flocks of teens huddled around hot dog vendors ravenously chowing down their *katerfrühstück*, or hangover breakfast, while still wearing gowns and coat-tails — a radical departure from their usual wild and racy club wear.

But like the rest of Vienna, they embrace Fasching wholeheartedly.

Balls have been an intrinsic part of the social fabric since the 19th century — not even the revolution of 1848 was capable of silencing the music. The gentry celebrated in gilded mansions or at the Imperial Palace, the bourgeoisie rented elegant establishments and the rest piled into inns or taverns.

By the turn of the 20th century, various professions and guilds were hosting their own ball. Today, there's hardly a group without one — for a while, the laundry maids' ball was reputed to be the liveliest.

Currently, one of the wildest parties is the Life Ball, also one of Europe's biggest AIDS charity events. Sexy fashion shows, go-go dancers, drag queens in S&M gear, partiers dressed up in elaborate costumes and others dressed down in little but body paint, has made this the most avant-garde ball of all.

In sharp contrast, one of the most expensive and opulent balls of the season is the Opernball, or Opera Ball, in the Vienna State Opera House, which attracts a jet-set crowd with its pomp and circumstance.

Its splendour, elegance and lavish opening ceremonies featuring ballerinas, debutantes and honoured dignitaries, gives the upper crust a chance to relive the days of the monarchy.

It's the crowning glory of the ball season and is so extravagant that it's broadcast live on television.

For the streetwise waltzer interested in something counterculture that's void of glitter or glamour, there's the Opernball, which is German for Victims' Ball. And no, it's not a coincidence that it sounds like Opernball.

Organized by a homeless magazine, it's an event that's free of charge and aimed at uniting the classes — a glaring contrast to the Opernball which critics say separates them.

The Kaiserball, or Imperial Ball, held on New Year's Eve, is the one that jump-starts Fasching and has become a staple for many Austrians ringing in the new year.

Because it's broadcast by radio, the ceremonial midnight waltz to the *Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss Jr. isn't restricted to the Hofburg Palace, the residence of the Habsburg emperors until 1918.

Throughout the country, families and friends dance around their living rooms as bejewelled couples twirl through the palace's Festival Hall.

As you may have guessed, it's in the tradition of Vienna's classical balls that Ottawa's own fledgling ball follows.

But if you ask Mr. Pirker, who readily admits that being one of the organizers makes him biased, he'll tell you the most recent addition to Canada's ball scene already surpasses some of Vienna's grandest.

"I don't even think Vienna has such a glamorous event, where you walk up at -30 C or -40 C with snow and you're walking along this beautiful walkway to the Grand Hall in the National Gallery."

Did he say glamorous or glacial? Either way, it's an "uplifting" experience that makes you "feel like royalty," he says.

"It's a fascination that you won't forget for a long time."

One group who won't likely ever forget the experience is the debutantes and cavaliers.

They've been practising for six weeks under the careful instruction of experts at the Fred Astaire Dance Studios for tomorrow night's eight-minute performance.

And when they step out on to the dance floor in the Great Hall, with its breathtaking views of Parliament Hill, their hearts will undoubtedly flutter under the glare of the lights and the gaze of the audience.

And as the orchestra begins there will surely be a crescendo of emotions. Weeks of muttering "heel, toe, toe," will hopefully dissolve into one seamless performance and amount to one incredibly surreal moment.

TOMORROW IN THE OBSERVER: HOW 26 OTTAWA TEENS PREPARED FOR THEIR BIG NIGHT AT THE BALL.