



In the Austrian city's year as the Capital of Music, **Stephen Pritchard** takes in Vienna's musical heritage from its world-renowned composers to its great organs



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In the Viennese apartment where Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed three piano concertos and his opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, hangs a small portrait of a pleasant-faced Englishman with abundant curly hair and a high wing collar. His name? Thomas Attwood, a composer familiar to singers and organists all over Britain today, who from 1785 spent more than a year learning music theory and composition at the feet of the master.

Next time you perform one of Attwood's anthems – *Teach Me, Lord, say, or Turn Thy Face from My Sins* – listen out for the influence of Mozart and try to imagine what it must have been like to be taught by a genius at the height of his powers who was writing extraordinary music at a frantic pace. He was also entertaining lavishly, for the years he spent in the apartment – 1784 to 1787 – were the most prosperous in Mozart's short, action-packed life.

This is just one little story of musical connections that anyone can stumble across on a visit to Vienna, which this year (2020) has given itself the title Capital of Music to coincide with the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth – not in Vienna, of course, but in Bonn. But the Viennese point out that Beethoven spent 35 years of his life in their city and died there, making him 'Viennese by choice'. They claim him – along with Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Mahler and Johann Strauss – as their own.

There will be many celebrations of Beethoven in the course of the year, not least an exhibition dedicated to him and the visual art of his time at the magnificent city art gallery, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, and performances of his chamber music in the Secession gallery, home to Gustav Klimt's beautifully enigmatic Beethoven Frieze. The Vienna State Opera is staging *Fidelio* (in the original Leonore version) and the famous Musikverein and Konzerthaus halls will be featuring his symphonies, but it is in the smaller venues, the churches and chapels, away from the pomp and grandeur of the major venues, that the musical visitor can find a different Vienna.

Not that the churches are short on grandeur. The Karlskirche and Peterskirche

◀ Stephansdom's Giant Organ awakens this Easter



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▲ (l) Meinrad Bolz: one of about 25 organists to play daily in Peterskirche at 3pm; (r) Vienna's Konzerthaus will hold celebratory performances of Beethoven's symphonies

are both a riot of baroque flummery, but avoid the endless tourist performances of Mozart's Requiem at the Karlskirche (and the bewigged and frocked-coated ticket sellers that haunt the streets) and seek out what Vienna does best: Haydn, Mozart and Schubert masses sung liturgically.

Regular sung masses are celebrated in the cool Gothic splendour of the Augustinerkirche, performed by the choir with soloists and orchestra. It's also possible to hear occasional choral masses and concerts at the Michaelerkirche and the church of St Anne, but perhaps the most

(Giant Organ) will have to wait until Easter this year, when it will finally be brought back to life after a 10-year restoration project. Austria's largest musical instrument, installed by Eberhard Friedrich Walcker in 1886, was lost in a fire in 1945.

A new giant was completed in 1960 by Johann M. Kauffmann but fell into disuse when another instrument was installed in the south aisle in 1991. In 2010 it was decided that Rieger of Vorarlberg would restore the Giant Organ and its 125 stops. In future a total of 180 stops will be playable from two consoles, combining the

own) he told me that he was one of about 25 organists who play in the church every day at 3pm.

'We began to do this about 12 years ago. The church needed to raise money for the organ [it has a defective electro-pneumatic system], and St Peter's wanted to give organists and students of sacred music a chance to rehearse or perform in public – rehearsal spaces are very limited here in Vienna. Travel companies appreciate these recitals and guide their groups into the church – that's why we have so many people. St Peter's is currently the only church that offers daily recitals, but there is hope that that will change later this year when the Giant Organ at the Stephansdom is restored.'

There are several connections between the three-manual, 34-rank Peterskirche organ and the Stephansdom. The Peterkirche instrument was built by Franz Josef Swoboda (1870-1934), who built eight other great organs in Vienna and worked for Walcker, builder of the Great Organ. Swoboda's Peterskircher organ was modernised by Johann Kauffmann, who rebuilt the Great Organ.

Bolz is rather partial to the set of bells that Swoboda installed in his instrument at the Peterskirche. He used them to startling effect in his improvisation – a flourish entirely in keeping with the flamboyant style that is the hallmark of a city that lives and breathes its musical heritage. ■

famous venue is the Hofburgkapelle, where from September to June members of the Vienna Boys' Choir sing Sunday Mass.

The choir was founded in 1498, when Emperor Maximilian I established the court orchestra, the Hofmusikkapelle. Today the Hofmusikkapelle is comprised of members of the Vienna Boys' Choir with singers from Vienna State Opera chorus and orchestra. The 100 boys range in age from 10 to 14 and perform in four separate concert choirs at more than 300 events a year, both at the Hofburgkapelle and the MuTh concert hall, which opened in Augarten park in 2012.

The Vienna skyline is dominated by the great patterned roof and soaring Gothic towers of the cathedral, the Stephansdom, but those hoping to hear the 'Riesenorgel'

pipework of both organs. All sorts of effort went into raising the million euros needed for the restoration, including the sale of tempting-looking 'Stephansdom-Brot', every loaf sold adding a humble euro to the fund.

A man who knows a lot about organs in Vienna is Meinrad Bolz, cantor and musical director at the magnificent Klosterneuburg Abbey, which stands on a hilltop on the outskirts of the city. I came across him when I slipped into the Peterskirche, right in the centre of the city, just before he began a recital. Arriving just before the start I was astonished to find the large church completely full. Talking to Bolz after he had played Bridge, Buxtehude and Gounod (and added a glorious improvisation of his

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