

Salzburg honours Mozart with cake and tea towels

By David Rennie in Salzburg

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Music lovers from around the world descended on Salzburg yesterday to mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of its most famous son, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Faced by store fronts piled high with Mozart wine and chocolates, not to mention beer mugs, clocks, music boxes, bottle openers, dolls, hip flasks, snow domes, thimbles and tea towels bearing his image, many could only ask: where is the music?

Salzburg city fathers have organised a year-long series of concerts, including a major gala performance last night starring Riccardo Muti and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The anniversary also marked the formal reopening of the house where Mozart was born in the Austrian city's baroque old town.



A Mozart ostrich egg in a Salzburg gift shop

The local "Wunderkind" stunned the courts of Europe with his brilliance as a child pianist and then composed more than 600 works, many of them masterpieces. He died when he was 35.

But in the narrow cobbled streets of Salzburg yesterday the atmosphere had more to do with Mammon than the Muses.

Japanese and Chinese tour groups jostled with European and American visitors to snap up "Mozartkugeln" chocolate balls in violin-shaped boxes or flasks of "Mozart" eau de toilette.

A group of Dutch students, from a tourism training college in Groningen, proudly showed off plastic bags bulging with sweets, Mozart liqueurs and other souvenirs.

They had not heard a bar of the composer's music, they admitted. One, Ryan Swart, 19, complained: "It's too much Mozart. It's everywhere you look."

A rare oasis of calm was to be found in Mozartplatz as an appreciative crowd clustered round the sound of a clarinet duet. The source of the music turned out to be teenage music students, shyly playing beneath a statue of the composer, while the mother of one of them held the score.

"It's nice to find some music, that's what it's all about," said Christof Drisch, a university lecturer from Germany.

A pair of British music lovers, Alan and Stella Aspinall, also lingered in the freezing cold to listen to the teenagers, despite having secured tickets to the Muti gala that evening, one of three concerts they planned to attend.

Mr Aspinall, a retired engineer from Ripon, was not complaining about the commercial excess. "We haven't heard much music so far," he acknowledged. "But we do

the same with Shakespeare in Stratford, don't we?"

In homage to another legendary Austrian export, rich chocolate cake, local chefs planned to give away slices of a 308lb, four-layer cake in a central square, the Residenzplatz.

Everything was to halt at 8pm when the bells of churches where Mozart's music was played during his lifetime were due to mark the hour of his birth.

Less mention was made of the fact that Mozart left his hometown for Vienna in 1781, complaining he was stifled by its provincial atmosphere. Legend has it that he was sent on his way by a kick in the backside from a servant of his then patron, the city's archbishop.