

Celebrating Mozart



Hans Punz/Associated Press

Entrance to the St. Marxer Cemetery in Vienna, where Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is buried.

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For a city of such studied formality — where women still wear dresses, a man wouldn't be caught dead in public without a tie, and strollers routinely greet each other with handshakes — [Vienna](#) sure knows how to party. The winter social calendar features nearly 300 all-night balls, bars and restaurants routinely stay open until the small hours, and a popular local specialty is the "katerfrühstück," or hangover breakfast.

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reported from Salzburg on the celebration of Mozart's 250th birthday.



But nothing compares to the party Vienna threw last weekend to mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of its all-time favorite son, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. This marzipan metropolis astride the Danube played host to a nonstop round of celebrations, concerts, lectures, readings, film showings, museum openings and multimedia extravaganzas. The events marked the start of Vienna Mozart Year, a series of cultural happenings throughout 2006, many of them scheduled for the summer. Tourism officials expect the festivities will draw 300,000 visitors.

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Sometimes last weekend it seemed as if all of them had already arrived, braving sub-freezing winds as they surged up and down the Kärtnerstrasse, the city's main pedestrianized thoroughfare. Throughout the picturesque town center, municipal employees were handing out free yellow helium-filled balloons bearing the composer's visage. Free concerts and recitals were taking place back-to-back in a huge tented complex



Ronald Zak/Associated Press

A visitor at the Mozarthaus, a museum in the house at 5 Domgasse where Mozart spent several of his last years.

next to St. Stephen's Cathedral. At some 50 "Calling Mozart" kiosks around town you could dial a number on your mobile phone (at local calling rates) or rent a handset for 5 euros and hear what the musical genius had done on that very spot.

Mozart did much in Vienna, where he lived for the last 10 of his 35 years. But he was born in Salzburg, then as now a much smaller town 200 miles away, where an equally ambitious birthday program will dominate the 2006 cultural calendar. (For more details, go to www.mozart2006.at.)

Salzburg also offered a slate of musical events last weekend that matched Vienna's. Indeed, a visitor might assume that the two cities were locked in a fierce struggle for the ownership of Mozart's lucrative legacy. Viennese, however, seemed oblivious to the goings-on in what many consider a charming provincial outpost.

"I don't sense any particular rivalry," said Walter Auer, a young flautist on his way to perform at Vienna's newly refurbished Theater an der Wien. "They have their things, we have ours."

Mozart was somewhat more passionate on the subject. "You are well aware how I detest Salzburg," he wrote to a friend in 1778. The musician felt stifled in his job as concert master for Salzburg's archbishop and was thrilled when he got fired three years later for insubordination. He decamped to Vienna, setting himself up as an independent composer and teacher. "I assure you this is a magnificent place," he wrote to his father from his new home, "the best in the world for my profession."

In fact, Mozart had a dozen homes during his decade in Vienna, and last weekend marked the official reopening of the Mozarthaus, an 11,000-square-foot museum in the house at 5 Domgasse where he spent several of his last years. The city suspended the museum's regular 9-euro entry fee and, because the building can hold only 200 people at a time, kept it open round the clock to accommodate the crowds. (Toward midnight Saturday, I faced a half-hour wait.) Inside, there is an imaginative reconstruction of Mozart's spacious apartment, some period furniture, a bronze death mask, multimedia exhibits featuring his music, and the score of his Symphony No. 40, handwritten in brown ink.

Across town at the National Library, crowds were also gathering — during normal business hours — to see the score of the very last of Mozart's 626 known works, the famous "Requiem," which he wrote on his deathbed. It was a moving display, despite the accompanying black Lucite casket with blazing pink neon lettering. A more ambitious exhibit, "Mozart: The Enlightenment Experiment," will open March 17 at the Albertina Museum. Zaha Hadid, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect, designed the installation, which will trace Mozart's links to classicism, romanticism, the rococo and the

Enlightenment.

Some of the year's most imaginative Mozart confections are not so serious. On a stroll down the Kärtnerstrasse, you can buy Mozartkugeln, the pistachio-cream-filled chocolates [Austria](#) has been producing for decades. Also on sale are Mozart golf balls, coffee cups, snow globes, key chains, kitchen matches, paper napkins, sausage, yogurt, coffee, tea, wine, underwear and T-shirts — though the latter don't yet seem to be out-selling the ones of a road sign picturing a familiar marsupial and the legend, "No Kangaroos in Austria."

For most visitors drawn to Vienna this year, the real attraction will be the major local industry: music. A galaxy of international music stars, including [Seiji Ozawa](#), Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Simon Rattle and Thomas Hampson — will perform the composer's operas, from first ("Bastien und Bastienne") to last ("The Magic Flute"), as well as his symphonies and chamber music. In addition, Vienna Mozart Year has commissioned new jazz, theater, dance and multimedia works based on Mozartian themes. Many will be part of an avant-garde festival organized by the director Peter Sellars in November and December. Chick Corea's new Concerto No. 2 will be performed at the Vienna State Opera in July, and Thomas Pernes' "Magic Flute 06," a full-length opera featuring Mozart's beloved characters but with an entirely different story, will be offered in March. (More information of programs is at www.wienmozart2006.at.)

"The one thing we are determined to avoid" said Peter Marboe, artistic director of Mozart Year, is for "contemporary young, creative artists to feel that they have fewer chances than usual because Mozart is stealing the show."

But then, he always steals the show. In the first major musical event of Mozart Year, the Vienna State Opera staged the composer's "Idomeneo" at the Theater an der Wien last Friday, with the Brooklyn-born tenor Neil Shicoff in the lead. After struggling with one of the composer's more difficult arias, Mr. Shicoff was booed by purists in the second balcony. He nonetheless received respectable applause at the end of the opera, and then — unexpectedly — blew kisses in the direction of his detractors. Charmed by a gesture of such Mozartian effrontery, they cheered wildly.