

## World celebrates Mozart's 250th birthday

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SALZBURG, Austria (AP-CP) — Some bad news for those who think this year of mostly Mozart is too much Mozart: On Friday, you can run, but you can't hide.

Certainly not in Salzburg, the cobble-stoned and turreted city of his birth as it pulls out all stops to celebrate its favourite son's 250th birthday Friday. Or in Vienna, where dozens of events musical and other are planned.

But it isn't only Austria that is seized with Mozart madness.

Symphony orchestras and opera houses worldwide are going through final rehearsals while radio program directors line up their Mozart CDs. Piano students are polishing pieces for Mozart marathons and puppeteers are preparing for jubilee performances as hundreds of cities across five continents prepare to pay their respects to the musical genius.

For many, Mozart central on Friday will be Salzburg, the city of his birth and first musical successes. Among them will be European leaders and foreign ministers gathering for The Sound of Europe — a debate about the future of the European Union — under Austria's EU presidency.

Always a trove for Mozart souvenirs, Salzburg has outdone itself this year. Store shelves are stocked with Mozart beer and wine, Mozart baby bottles, Mozart milkshakes, Mozart knickers and Mozart jigsaw puzzles — along with the usual T-shirts, calendars, coffee mugs and marzipan-and-nougat filled Mozart Balls.

But on Friday, the music's the thing. Among the most interesting Salzburg offerings: Nikolaus Harnoncourt and the Vienna Philharmonic play Mozart's *Piano Concert No. 18*, before Riccardo Muti takes to the podium and leads the orchestra — and renowned signers — through their paces in a collage of his works.

Vienna, which claims Mozart in his later years, is staging a new production of his *Idomeneo* in one of the city's three opera houses and reviving *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberfloete*) in another.

Both are offering either musical or culinary tours built around Mozart's works, his favourite restaurants, his friends and enemies, and his approach to art and love.

But Mozart will rule elsewhere as well.

He'll be the focus of a 12-hour Swedish documentary, his works will be performed by orchestras or opera houses in Moscow, Washington, Prague, London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Caracas, Quito, Havana, Mexico City, Taipei, Budapest and scores of other cities worldwide.

In Toronto, on Thursday afternoon, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra was to perform Mozart's first and last symphonies, while TSO principals were to play his rustic *Bassoon Concerto and the Adagio for English Horn* at Roy Thomson Hall.

At the centre on Thursday night and Friday night, the TSO along with musical and theatrical friends, including TSO music director Peter Oundjian,

actor Colm Feore and several soloists were to take a literary and musical journey through Mozart's life, as portrayed in his letters and the vocal music they inspired.

Even Nashville, more famous for Martina McBride than Mozart, will tip its hat to Amadeus, with the city's symphony orchestra performing the maestro's *Piano Concerto No. 21*.

And there are hundreds of other offerings.

Many classical radio outlets in the United States and elsewhere are reprogramming for the day to play only Mozart. Hundreds of marionettes will take to the stage in excerpts of his operas in the German city of Augsburg, where his father was born.

Vienna has set up 50 bright red Calling Mozart booths to allow visitors to listen to his works and information about his life and times. It will formally reopen the restored house where he wrote the *Marriage of Figaro*.

Salzburg visitors are advised to watch the calories — bakers there put the icing Thursday on a gargantuan birthday cake — two metres high and weighing in at 140 kilograms.

Too much hoopla? Consider this. Mozart wrote his first symphonies before turning 10 and his first well-known opera at age 12. He was instrumental in changing opera into the form we know and enjoy today.

He was prolific like few others, creating nearly two dozen operas and other stage works and hundreds of solo and orchestral pieces before his death at 35. Other greats like Beethoven and Wagner publicly recognized their debt to their wiggid predecessor.

There is some comfort, however, for those who feel Mozart mania is getting out of control — he had his detractors.

Some history books depict his tenure in Salzburg ending ingloriously in 1781 with a kick in the bottom from a servant of Mozart's patron, the city's imperious archbishop, after Mozart refused to follow orders on how to compose.

But for Mezzo-soprano Angelika Kirschschrager, Mozart is "a gift from God" and "the light I orient my life around." Others describe him in more down-to-earth terms (and his letters certainly reveal an exuberant personality and scatological sense of humour) as they explain why he can reach out even to those normally immune to classical music

"Mozart as a person was prone to please people, and it's certainly an aspect of his music," says classic expert Joseph Horowitz who served as a consultant for the New Jersey Symphony for its Mozart jubilee preparations.

"It's something you can't apply to other composers such as Beethoven or Wagner."