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# Mozart in Austria— A Preface

Even as a boy I was obsessed by Mozart and his operas. In summer, when lads of my age would for instance have enjoyed going to the swimming baths, I preferred snooping around the Salzburg Festival Hall. On one occasion in 1987, I managed to sneak into the Great Hall where a dress rehearsal of “Don Giovanni” was taking place and experienced Herbert von Karajan in a fit of rage. Not because of my attempt to eavesdrop on his performance, but due to a TV camera having given up the ghost during the rehearsal. The technicians asked for a short break so that it might be replaced. Karajan simply blew his top and must have taken something like a quarter of an hour to calm him down again. I promptly decided to take French leave so as not to risk a face-to-face encounter with the maestro, at least not on that particular day!

Working as a radio reporter for the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF during the 1997 Summer Festival, I found myself interviewing Silvia McNair. She was singing the part of Pamina in the Magic Flute and confessed that when strolling through the narrow lanes of Old Salzburg she always had a strange feeling that she might actually bump into Mozart himself. A bit far-fetched, I thought to myself, and typically American. A few days after the interview I attended a performance of the Magic Flute. McNair acted her role with

such passion and inspiration that it changed my opinion of her of trying to impress audiences with sentimental talk. It then became clear to me what it really meant to her to perform Mozart in Salzburg.

Mozart is not as omnipresent in Vienna as he is in his birthplace, Salzburg, notwithstanding the fact that he spent the last ten years of his life in Vienna and created several of his principal works there. While Salzburg hails Mozart as its only composer to rise to international stardom, in Vienna he shared the stage with other musical celebrities, notably Schubert, Beethoven and (Joseph) Haydn, the “King of Waltz” Johann Strauss as well as personalities active in the fields of science and visual art. From the angle of tourism, Mozart has seemingly never come to qualify for quite the same importance in the Austria’s capital city as he did in Salzburg, where the composer haunts almost every shop window and where Mozartean commemoration sites feature predominantly among the city’s tourist attractions. Retracing the composer’s footprints in Vienna adds to the excitement and enjoyment to be got out of this 64-page book.

*Bernhard Helminger*

*Photos on Page 2: “Don Giovanni” (Salzburg Festival 2014, top); “The Magic Flute” at the Vienna State Opera (since November 2013, bottom).*