

Author's note: This is an extract from my holiday journal, kept on a river cruise in 2011.

## Vienna

The coach ride took us along the Ringstrasse, a horse shoe shaped boulevard, where many of the key buildings are. We passed the splendid Opera House and the City Hall where the New Year's Day Concert takes place. We saw the Coffee Shop where Sigmund Freud took his daily coffee and newspaper break. We saw statues of Mozart and Beethoven – both of whom lived in Vienna and knew each other.

We walked through a mixture of very old and opulent buildings and expensive shops. Gucci, Armani, and Cartier – they are all here. We saw the Winter Palace of the Emperor Franz Josef with its library built to house 90,000 books. Nearby are the stables where the Lipizzaner horses live – away on their summer break at the moment. Most of the architecture is 19<sup>th</sup> century, built by Franz Josef, but many of these elegant structures sit on the foundations of much older buildings.

St. Stephan's cathedral is impressive with an incredibly intricate spire and roof of coloured tiles. The tiles have a design which I thought might be the coat of arms of the Hapsburgs, the dynasty which ruled its empire – Austria, Bohemia, Hungary etc. for 700+ years. We went inside the cathedral but were unable to go very far because there was a mass underway. There was some beautiful stained glass behind the high altar, and a number of huge brass chandeliers, reminiscent of those we saw in the cathedral in Amsterdam.

Later after dinner a short coach ride brought us to the Augsburg Palace. This was originally a family home – very grand and imposing. We walked up a wide carpeted stone staircase, past a stone fountain with 2 carved lions and into an oval shaped room set out with rows of gilt chairs.

We were entertained by a small orchestra of flute, clarinet, timpani, violin, cello, double base and piano. The leader played a Stradivarius made in 1726. It had a beautiful tone and was probably worth a fortune. We also heard a gloriously rich sounding soprano and a baritone, whose voice was good, but not as strong. The company was completed by a male and female ballet duo. They were good, but didn't really have enough room. The stage wasn't very big and we were in the front row! We were right opposite the pianist who was talented indeed. All the musicians were young, possibly students.

The first half of the programme was all Mozart and much of it I recognised. We had pieces from the Eine Kleine Nachtmusik and a beautiful slow piece, which made a fine contrast. The singers did solos and duets from The Marriage of Figaro and The Magic Flute I think and wore 18<sup>th</sup> century costume.

The second half was mainly Strauss, but I didn't know all of it. The dancers danced to the Thunder and Lightning Polka.

The acoustics in the room were excellent. No-one appeared to be using a microphone. The audience loved it and responded with increasing enthusiasm. I loved it from start to finish. The musicians were so skilled and played with passion. The singers and dancers too were wonderfully talented. It brought tears to my eyes when I thought how Dad would have enjoyed it and how he gave me my love of music.

Jan Rees

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