

# Student Life in Vienna by Steven Haynes



**I**n Summer 2005 I took a break from my studies at the Royal College of Music to participate in a six month ERASMUS exchange with the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. During my sojourn I was asked by the RCM to write their first ever 'web-log', allowing students to gain an insight into the exchange programme and illustrating the enormous benefits of the scheme. From this material, I am delighted to provide Brass Herald readers with a musicological and somewhat amusing outlook on student life in Vienna.

The way in which the exchange was conceived was rather fortuitous. Several years ago I was principal trombone in the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain's 50th anniversary concert. The soloist was Ian Bousfield, Principal Trombone of the Vienna Philharmonic. I was lucky enough to have a lesson with him, after which he encouraged me to come and study in Vienna with him and his co-principal Dietmar Küblböck. Following an interview at College, I was selected for an ERASMUS exchange and, with the EU-grant plus the added bonus of a Julius Isserlis Fellowship from the Royal Philharmonic Society, I was ready and set to go.

Though my RCM tutors Lindsay Shilling and Byron Fulcher are terrific, we all agreed it would be stimulating for me to spend some months learning in a different environment. When we met, Ian Bousfield felt that, for my age, my technical knowledge outbalanced my musical ability. He thought it would be great for me to experience the Viennese teaching style which is much more about musical than technical goals.

I was obviously worried about the language issue, but I was able to take an intensive German course at the Goethe Institute - just round the corner from the RCM - before I went. Fortunately Dietmar speaks very good English, but in our lessons it was all about communicating musically. He's an amazing performer and therefore it's natural for him to demonstrate a lot on the instrument. This was ideal for me because I came to music via Yorkshire brass bands where you're literally given a trombone and expected to play; the way I learned in that setting was to listen to those around me. The other great thing about Dietmar is his orchestral connection, so straight after my first lesson I got to see him in the Vienna Philharmonic rehearsing Bruckner *Symphony no 7* with Boulez which was amazing.

Naturally, moving away from home was a little daunting. The RCM has a very special atmosphere and the camaraderie there is unique. Happily though, I discovered that there were to be two other English ERASMUS students in Vienna and one of them is an old friend from the National Youth Brass Band - a trumpeter from Birmingham Conservatoire called Chris Seddon. It's a small world!

I spent most of the summer travelling before I settled into the Viennese lifestyle. My first stop was New York, where I saw all the sights and managed to fit in seeing Chitty Chitty Bang Bang on Broadway and Destiny's Child at Madison Square Garden (along with 20,000 screaming fans!).

Following my time in New York, I flew to Detroit to write the article for Brass Herald issue 11 on the Brass Band of Battle Creek. I was privileged to be invited to sit in on the rehearsals and have a lesson from the Band's Principal Trombonist, Scott Hartman. They also allowed me to play in a memorial concert where I sat next to Wycliffe Gordon. What a wonderful week!

Before returning to Vienna I decided to travel around Europe, visiting Slovakia, Salzburg, Rome, Madrid and Barcelona. This was all excellent experience but the time had come to head back to Vienna and move into my home for the next few months - a gas tank!

No joke! 'Gasometer' is a complex containing four former gas tanks built in 1896, which were extensively renovated from 1999 to 2001. Gasometer is no longer a gas storage facility. Instead, it is now a super-modern site containing apartments, a student dormitory, offices and a large entertainment centre with a cinema and concert hall - oh, and a sauna too, which was highly advantageous when the temperature plummeted to a biting sub-15 degrees Celsius for almost a week!



The University of Music and Performing Arts (Hochschule) Vienna.

In my first week I saw Beethoven's piano, sampled the Heurige (new wine) in the Vienna Woods (lethal stuff!), got lost for two hours in a maze at Schönbrunn Palace (that's true!), went to see Hitler's Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden and spent ages trying to find the Musikverein (then realised that I'd been sat outside it drinking coffee the previous day without realising!). The Opera House and Karlskirche are both very beautiful and I happened to come across the Mnozil Tavern where I witnessed an array of merry musicians singing and playing

Austrian folk tunes - the environment which spawned the acclaimed Mnozil Brass!

The amount of classical music in Vienna is astounding. In shops, churches, in the street, day, night - it's everywhere! There are some very talented musicians performing every day in the streets and everyone there seems to be actively keen on classical music - it's a wonderful culture.

One difference I noticed immediately between the two conservatories was that there were no mirrors in any of the practice rooms I used; I was accustomed to observing embouchure and posture whilst practising. This was of great benefit to my musical development with less studying of technical aspects. Also, you had to pay for the practise rooms there, it was only one Euro per hour but still, it makes you work harder. I often thought: "has that practice session been worth three Euros?" (Maybe this is just a 'tight-fisted' Yorkshireman speaking?!) Students start practising very early over there too, from 7am! (I thought I was conscientious starting at 9am!)

I could not believe the coincidence of bumping into an old friend at the University; Elisabeth Engl is a pianist originally from Austria who studied at the RCM for a year. What a coincidence! To celebrate I took Elisabeth to an Irish bar in the City. After she devoured two pints of Guinness I said to her: "Crikey, you're drinking like a brass player." To which she retorted: "And you're drinking like a pianist!"

On a more serious note, I found that it is usual practice there to rehearse with a pianist on a weekly basis. Each professor at the University has an assigned salaried accompanist for their students to utilise, whether in a lesson, for an audition or for private rehearsal purposes. I thought this was a fantastic idea.

One of the aspects I loved about the exchange was that it was entirely your time to do whatever you pleased. Whether that was going out, practicing hard, meeting new people or learning new pieces. It's like a 'time out' to concentrate on what you

want to concentrate on. I personally wanted my time in Vienna to be centred on preparing for the various solo recitals, auditions and competitions which I had whilst I was out there. So my typical week would work something like this: I had two trombone lessons per week and also a German language class, with the rest of the day being devoted to personal practise. Usually evenings would involve going to a concert or an opera and then heading out to a typically Viennese tavern, with weekends kept free for a brief trip away somewhere of interest. It was a most productive lifestyle and one which I feel will be difficult to recreate in the future! Many of the concerts I went to whilst away were superb with several which were rather memorable: A concert in the Wiener Waltzer featuring plenty of Strauss waltzes and polkas and Mozart, naturally. This was an excellent concert and the Viennese style was clearly evident. The way in which they play a Strauss Waltz is quite unique, with a gap between the second and third beats that you could drive a bus through! It's great to hear them being played in this style, just how the composer wanted them to sound and with lots of life and energy. There were dancers too and the music was very beautifully phrased; a wonderful insight into Vienna's musical heritage.

I was delighted to be in Vienna to see two Berg operas - *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* - both notoriously difficult for trombone. I was incredibly impressed with both of my teachers' performances. I was even more impressed after learning that it was the first time Ian had played *Wozzeck* with the orchestra and the first time that Dietmar had played *Lulu* in five years! However, that's not all; that day Dietmar had a rehearsal for *Lohengrin* then he taught me and another pupil before dashing off to rehearse Bruckner 9 in the afternoon. Then he admitted that he'd better have a quick look at *Lulu* before the show since it had been a while since he had seen it! I asked him what it was like to have such a hard day: "viel spass", he replied: "lots of fun"! This is not an unusual day for the members of the Vienna Philharmonic and when they wear their other hat as members of the Vienna State Opera Orchestra, many of the operas are 'in rep' and are not rehearsed!

For my lesson that day at Dietmar's house, I prepared the Albrechtsberger Alto Trombone *Concerto*. After hearing me play for a while he wanted to demonstrate how I could improve on what I had just played. His instrument was at work so he disappeared momentarily and returned with a mouthpiece, some masking tape and an old box. After wrapping masking tape around the shank of the mouthpiece, so it would fit in a different instrument, he opened the box and produced an antiquated Vienna Philharmonic Sackbut! He then proceeded to demonstrate on this relic of a trombone, making the most incredible sound - what's that phrase about workmen and tools?!

It's interesting to observe the different system they have for teaching over there. My experience in London is that you have a lesson every week, in a room in college for an hour. Although this is often similar over there too, each professor has their own class. Lessons are usually in their classroom and if no one is teaching, the classroom is free for you to practise. In a typical lesson with Dietmar, several of his class would sit in and watch my lesson. Having an audience for a lesson is a little daunting at first, but watching someone else's lesson is a great way to pick up 'nuggets' of information. Sometimes, if Dietmar had some free time he would do a group warm up or technique lesson where everyone plays an exercise in turn. This again is a great way of learning as you can copy from one another and there is always an element of competition to sound the best!

Each class then has a 'class-evening' where the students put on a concert. I played in three of these whilst I was there. It was good to hear all the other students perform and there are some very talented players there. Notably an 18 year old who performed the Grondahl *Concerto* and made me want to leave the instrument in the case!

Towards the end of my time in Vienna, I experienced the highlight of my time there. I went to see a Philharmoniker rehearsal in the Musikverein. During the break I went to the gents and realised that I was standing at the urinal alongside Pierre Boulez! What a claim to fame!

In my final week away, I saw a fabulous production of *Don Giovanni*, performed the Mozart Coronation Mass with the Hofmusikkapelle Orchestra and the Vienna Boys Choir and saw a very amusing English translation on an office door which read 'Office closed due to staff shortness'. I assume this meant that there were people off ill and not that they'd all shrunk the night before!

I would summarise my time in Vienna as probably the most beneficial experience of my life, both from a musical perspective and also on a personal level. There are several factors which contributed significantly to this but still, I honestly feel that everything about the trip was perfect. There isn't an aspect that I can think of which could have gone any better (except the excess baggage charges!). Ian's musical influence was invaluable to me during my stay and I also greatly valued Dietmar's input; he is a phenomenal performer and his teaching has been extremely inspiring, giving me an insight into the Austrian heritage, whilst not detracting from my previous British influences.

Vienna is a beautiful city where it is difficult not to gain from the cultural diversity it has to offer. The support given to me by the Royal Philharmonic Society was so valuable in providing me with the opportunity to see opera performances, listen to concerts and visit museums; totally immersing myself in the Viennese culture.

I hope this insight has been of benefit and I will conclude by saying that if anyone is undecided about venturing on an exchange my advice would be to do it!

Steven's diary can be found at [www.stevenhaynes.blogspot.com](http://www.stevenhaynes.blogspot.com)

## WISEMAN CASES<sup>London</sup>

7 GENOA ROAD, LONDON, SE20 8ES, ENGLAND

Telephone/Fax: 0208 778 0752

E-mail: [hwiseman@aol.com](mailto:hwiseman@aol.com)

[www.wisemancases.com](http://www.wisemancases.com)

### Featuring:

Single/Double Trumpet Case (instruments suspended) & mutes  
Flugel and Trumpet triple Case (instruments suspended) & mutes  
Quadruple Trumpet/Flugel/Cornet Case and mutes

### Soon to include:

Single Cornet Case (instrument suspended) & mutes  
Single Flugelhorn Case (instrument suspended) & mutes  
Tenorhorn Case (instrument suspended) & mutes  
Euphonium Case (instrument suspended) & mutes  
Trombone case (instrument suspended) & mutes

