

Why the name of the remarkable Siegfried Marcus has been all but erased from Austrian history

The Forgotten Inventor of the Motor Car

by Duncan J. D. Smith

There are memorials to Siegfried Marcus all over Vienna – at least six by my count. So it is surprising that the 19th century inventor of the internal combustion engine is not better known. This was the man who paved the way for the motorcar, and so, you could say, one of the architects of 20th century life. What happened? An age of technological progress

Siegfried Liepmann Marcus was born in 1831 in Mecklenburg in North Germany, where his father was a businessman and head of the local Jewish community. It was an age of rapid technological progress, and the young Marcus knew he wanted to be a part of it. As a teenager he studied at a technical school in Berlin, whilst also working for the engineering firm Siemens and Halske. They were busy erecting Europe's first long-distance telegraph line, and Marcus designed a telegraph relay system for them. It was the first of many important inventions.

Incredibly inventive

In 1852, Marcus moved to Vienna, where from 1856 until his death in 1898 he worked as a self-employed inventor. Wall plaques mark the former site of two of his workshops, at Mariahilferstrasse 107 and Mondscheingasse 4. So productive was he during this period that he logged 158 patents and applied for 38 imperial charters.

An enormously versatile man, Marcus's inventions included the incandescent spirit lamp, electromechanical triggers for naval mines (to protect the harbor of Trieste), the 'Artigraph' (used by lithographers and copper plate engravers to reverse their designs for printing) and a special whale-hunting knife used by the Austro-Hungarian North Pole Expedition of 1872. Empress

Elisabeth hired him to install an electric bell system in the Hofburg.

Holy Grail for inventors

The Holy Grail for inventors of the late nineteenth century was undoubtedly the quest for a powered vehicle to replace the horse. The answer came in the form of the internal combustion engine, in which energy generated within an enclosed cylinder through the burning of liquid fuel with air, was brought to bear on the pistons of reciprocating engines, providing drive and thus motion.

As early as the 1860s Siegfried Marcus had suggested the petroleum distillate Benzine – called gasoline in America and petrol in Britain – as a suitable fuel. His choice was prompted by the fact that Austria-Hungary had been exploiting oil wells in its eastern province of Galicia since the early 1800s, indeed it was there that the world's first oil refinery opened in 1858.

In 1870 Marcus attached a petroleum two-stroke engine to a conventional wooden handcart; pedestrians were amazed as it trundled along Mariahilferstrasse. Although the vehicle no longer exists, documents and photographs confirm the early date. It was the world's first mobile internal combustion engine. Marcus also invented the mechanism required to ignite the engine's mixture of liquid fuel and air. An 1883 patent taken out for his *Wiener Zünder* ignition



The grave of Austrian inventor Siegfried Marcus in Vienna's Central Cemetery

Photo: Duncan J.D. Smith

device makes mention of "carbureting air", thus giving rise to the modern word carburettor.

The legacy of Siegfried Marcus

Siegfried Marcus died in 1898 in his apartment at Lindengasse 4, and was buried in Hütteldorf cemetery. And for the next forty years Austrian school children were taught as a matter of course that Marcus was the inventor of the motorcar.

However, following Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938, most of Marcus's papers were destroyed by the Nazis, who were unable to accept that a Jew had made such an important discovery. As a result the legacy of Siegfried Marcus was all but expunged.

Fortunately, a second prototype vehicle dating from 1888 had been preserved in Vienna's Technical Museum, where it was hastily concealed in the cellar. Slightly younger than the earliest automobiles of Daimler and Benz, the

museum's staff were determined that history should not be re-written in their favour by the city's new occupiers.

On the fiftieth anniversary of Marcus's death in 1948, the inventor's remains were transferred to a new honorary tomb (*Ehrengrab*) in Simmering's Central Cemetery. A bust of Marcus that the Nazis had removed from Resselpark, in front of the Technical University, was returned to its plinth, and another was placed at the mechanic's institute at Gumpendorferstrasse 130. Even a street was named after Marcus in the Fourteenth District. And yet despite all this, the memory of the German Jewish inventor who made Vienna his second home is all but forgotten.

Duncan J. D. Smith is the author of *Only in Vienna* (Christian Brandstätter Verlag) www.duncanjdsmith.com



The Gate Crasher Chow Down at Yamm!



By David Warren

"Wow. That's such a beautiful Lexus! The 200S I believe? My father knows the dealer..." Confided my friend Alfons with satisfaction. He took a swig of Ottakringer.

The group, at a momentary loss for words, was standing on the Veranda of Yamm!, Vienna's new vegetarian eatery.

"I am ready for another beer," Alfons said, adding helpfully, "You know it's taxed at a lower rate than any other drink... I try and get the better of the taxman!" This was getting to be hard work.

It looked like an unusually poor showing, even by our increasingly desultory standards. I thought about slipping out... Too late, they had seen me.

"Servus mein Freund. Wie geht's?" Alfons said in my direction, before moving away to start talking cars with someone else.

I decided to look around.

The place was the old Mr Lee's, right across from the University of Vienna's main building. Students in particular had loved to hop across the Ring and tuck in to its fat laden, chemically enhanced version of oriental cuisine. It wasn't my style. Aside from the dripping food, I had always found the décor off-putting. Mr Lee's customers were inevitably subsumed by its cavernous dining area, the mass of grey anonymity and acres of empty walls safely burying conversation, with bland furniture more suited to a corporate lobby or airport departure gate than an oriental restaurant.

But Yamm! wasn't doing so badly, I thought, as I stood in the midst of the enormous opening night crowd. By attaching a heavy wood bar – with buckets of wine racks – to the back of the restaurant, the architects had broken up the space's former monotony. They had played with the lights too – little pod-bulbs throwing out gentle glows of pastel shades, differing according to section, cleverly disrupted the room's daunting sameness. The hideous old furniture had also been upgraded to a slightly less bland grey, wood and green colour scheme; the green, of course, for any vegetarian venue.

"Ah, hello!" This was my old friend James, an impeccable Englishman, standing stiff in blazer and starched shirt, primed to unleash a bon mot, a

nugget of attention grabbing tact or, as a last resort, simply his ravishing smile. "I'm here with my girl."

I looked around searchingly, before a roundish, 40 something woman beside James held out her hand. "I'm Inga," she said. She beamed, revealing lashings of teeth.

James stood there, rearranging the handkerchief stuffed into his breast pocket. I was meant to say something. "How on earth can you be described as a girl?"

But, under the influence of my friend's well-tailored jacket and his shooting cuffs, diplomacy got the better of me. I asked how long they had known each other.

"Three months," he said with an attempt at pride, leaving his handkerchief and putting his hands together in front of his waist. "She's really tamed my wild ways," he added with a sickening smirk. His "ways" referred to three or four long-term relationships. In each one, he had paid for all manner of unnecessary treats, dinners, holidays, tasteful clothes even, while remaining steadfastly faithful and enduring weekends of unimaginable monotony with the partners' parents. Any ordinary circle of meaty blokes would term such a serial monogamist a dupe, in England though, James was lauded a "gentleman"; as we were at Cambridge, I had grown sick of girls telling me what a catch the guy was and now, whenever he entered a new relationship, I would long for his beau to run off with an untamed mechanic, a strong thighed brickie, a promiscuous barman. Often they did.

"And we get on so well, even though I'm Swedish," added Inga, somewhat mysteriously.

"Her discursive English is very good," explained James. "In fact as Churchill might say," here he turned to Inga, "we are two cultures united by a common language." He twinkled at his wit.

I smiled.

"Ah, here is Wolfgang." I knew what was coming; like all good entertainers, he knew to leave on a high.

James, beaming, put his hand on the new man's shoulder, guided him in a kind of figure of eight to the position where he himself had stood, while, by placing his other hand in the small of my back, pro-

pelled me to a position opposite... and promptly disappeared into the crowd. A most intricate and a gymnastic manoeuvre, I mused; it was almost a joy to be the victim of commonplace party ditching, when it was carried out with such aplomb.

Seconds later and far less adroitly, I too escaped Wolfgang and Inga: Time to get to the grub. The buffet was hidden by a huge crowd, holding enormous plates like badges of pride, intently scrummaging to the front, jostling each other out of the way.

"You idiots! It's vegetarian," I felt like shouting, but I hadn't the heart. These people, with their brown creased skin and wide eyed long ago having lost interest in nutrient breakdowns, good and bad cholesterol, carbs and protein.

What quantities of food! Tonight, even I was shocked: It would have taken four of my mitts to cover these supersized portions. And of what? The offerings looked appetising, but not especially healthy: for every lentil curry there were plenty of walnut nuggets and cheese balls, enough saturateds for a week in one sitting, and they just couldn't get enough.

Around the buffet, guests were at tables, munching with full concentration, lost in contemplation of the oceans of organics ahead of them. On and on they went, eating, chomping, and then back for more.

Dispiriting.

I returned to my group. Alfons had fastened on to a girlfriend of mine, telling her of a past romance. "We got on very well. She was such a nice girl, always coming out to dinner..." She loved computer games too" he added with relish, before continuing.

"But, you know, we decided it would be best to remain friends" The plural subject here was, of course, a fantasy. I knew the sorry details of the affair. The girl had gone out without him it is true, but only to be invited to expensive restaurants and, perhaps after losing interest in the charms of Grand Theft Auto 3, she had eventually stopped taking his calls. For Alfons, this meant they were now "friends."

"Hey. It's Christine Sturmer!" My banker friend Martin had materialised from nowhere in a Trachten jacket, and was grinning, star struck.

"Who?" I asked. Playing dumb can be fun.

He was incredulous. "You don't know?! She is one of our most famous singers." By "our" I assumed he meant Austria's. "Really, really, well-known," he blustered, his face reddening. I smiled.

On the makeshift stage, the diva, un-made up

in black vest and jeans strolled to the microphone (admirably open, I thought, about Yamm! not being one of her premier venues). Screwing up her face as the enormous temporary speakers screeched into life, she began to wail. Martin, was spellbound, gazing at the starlet as though in a trance.

The rest of the crowd, aside from perhaps speaking a bit more loudly, or rotating a little so as to shield their plates from the assault of audio waves, continued on oblivious, absorbed in their food and general catching up.

Next up was the guy from the millionaire show, presented by a proud master of ceremonies. Again, the food fetishists determinedly ignored the entertainment: the dazzling TV star re-position himself centre stage, vying for attention... but in vain. Nobody seemed to be listening to his immaculately delivered one-liners.

Standing tall and radiantly tan, curly locks meticulously pushed back over his forehead, he was a celebrity dispossessed -- no longer the omniscient games master moulding destinies offhand, he had been returned to the miserable trials of reality. His 10 minutes at Yamm! must have seemed an eternity.

Martin interrupted my thoughts. "Look at her!" I turned: It was true. Next to us, in the most glorious snakeskin leggings was a beautiful blonde. Before I knew what was happening, Martin was on the case.

"Can I introduce you to my friend? He is a real Englishman!"

She turned in my direction, catching me, unfortunately, in the process of straightening my back, fixing a smile and tensing my biceps. "I, er am," I said.

Smiling sweetly, she replied, "Really?" before turning and walking away.

I attempted a knowing smirk: "Sod it. Not that good anyway," I told Martin.

Disheartened I returned to my group, thinking what to do. "Hang on. Hadn't I brought a girlfriend here?" I had! And, what is more, I could see her standing, unsteady on all the free booze and, listening to Alfons, very bored. From his smirk and extravagant gesturing, I guessed he was telling the story of his father's Porsche. The girl yawned tipsily.

The possibility of a rescue mission suddenly hit me.

"Isn't it great being here with all our friends" said Samuel.

Eyeing the girl happily, I agreed. "You are too right Sam, our friends are perfect, just perfect."