

Mozart is mourned in his pauper's grave in Vienna, but let's not forget that the master of Italian baroque suffered the same fate

## Antonio Vivaldi's Bones

by Duncan J. D. Smith

One of the most recognisable pieces of classical music is the first concerto of Antonio Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* (*Le quattro stagioni*) for solo violin and orchestra, evoking the unfettered joys of spring. Popular and influential during his lifetime, Vivaldi ranks today among the most widely recorded of Baroque composers. It therefore seems strange that few people know he was buried in Vienna. Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert, of course. But Vivaldi?

### The Red Priest

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi was born in Venice on 4th March 1678. He was baptized immediately either because of ill health or the fact that Venice was shaken by an earthquake on the same day. Little Antonio inherited

two distinctive traits from his father, a talent for playing the violin – and red hair! Indeed, after being ordained in 1703, Vivaldi was referred to affectionately as *il Prete Rosso* or the Red Priest.

In his mid-twenties Vivaldi became *maestro di violino* in the *Ospedale della Pietà*, an orphanage in which boys learned a trade and girls were given a musical education. The most talented girls stayed on and became members of the renowned *Ospedale* orchestra and choir. Whilst playing the violin Vivaldi was often accompanied by the angelic voices of the orphan girls, and over the next thirty years he would compose many of his instrumental concertos and sacred choral works in this way.



Vivaldi's reputation as an international composer came in 1711, with the publication of his *L'Estro Armonico*, usually translated "Harmonic Inspiration." An instant success across Europe, these concertos have been hailed as the most significant instrumentals from the eighteenth century.

### Baroque Superstar

Alongside the success of his concertos, Vivaldi increasingly devoted his time to opera, the most popular entertainment in eighteenth century Venice, of which he ultimately penned around fifty. In 1718 he worked as *Maestro di Capella* in Mantua, where the surrounding countryside inspired the writing of his *Four Seasons*. He then toured Italy and accepted a personal invitation from Pope Benedict XIII to play in

Rome. By the time Vivaldi returned to Venice in 1725 he had become a Baroque superstar.

It was during his time in Mantua that Vivaldi became acquainted with an aspiring young soprano called Anna Giro, who joined his entourage and accompanied him on his tours. Inevitably rumors of a relationship surfaced, but Vivaldi vehemently denied any wrongdoing.

### Vienna Calling

Some have claimed that the rumors made life difficult for Vivaldi in his native Venice, forcing him to flee to Vienna in 1740. It seems more likely that he relocated to seek imperial patronage at the court of Emperor Charles VI. However, although Vivaldi had indeed been

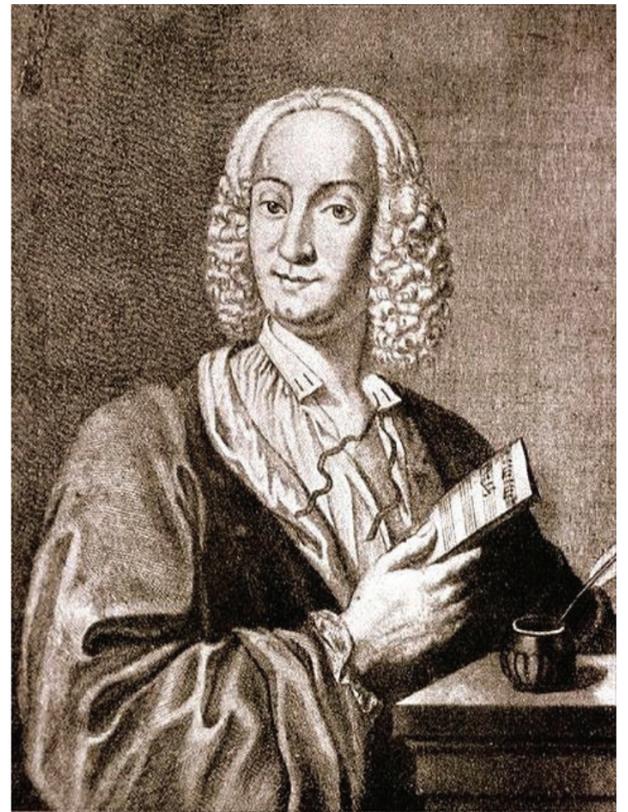
honored by the emperor during a visit to Trieste in 1728, there is no firm evidence that he contacted the monarch on arrival here.

Vivaldi occupied an apartment owned by the widow of a saddlemaker in a four-storey house above the Kärntnerter, one of eight gateways that pierced the Renaissance city wall. Now long demolished, the house stood on Philharmoniker Strasse, where the Hotel Sacher now stands. Also gone is the Kärntnerter Theatre that stood nearby. Vivaldi may have chosen this area so as to be near a theatre that could stage his operas.

### A Modest End

Times were changing though and the popularity of Vivaldi's work began to wane. Like other composers of his day he had no reliable income and was forced to sell his manuscripts at paltry prices. Worse was to come. The emperor died shortly after Vivaldi's arrival in Vienna dashing any hopes of currying royal favor. Not long afterwards on Jul. 28, 1741 Vivaldi himself died, a pauper in a rented apartment. The diagnosis was "internal fire", probably the asthmatic bronchitis from which he suffered all his life.

Vivaldi's funeral service was held in St. Stephen's Cathedral and was attended by six choristers, one of whom was the nine-year old Josef Haydn and included a *Kleingeläut*, or pauper's peal of bells. Vivaldi's remains were then placed in a simple grave in the *Armen-sünder-Gottesacker*, a cemetery for poor sinners located near the Baroque Karlskirche, outside the Kärntnerter gate, as all cemeteries inside the city wall had been closed on health grounds in 1530.



An engraving of the world-renowned musician, Antonio Vivaldi, said to be in the process of composing. Courtesy of the Albertina

In 1789 this cemetery too was abandoned, by order of Emperor Joseph II, who decreed that new cemeteries be opened *outside* the Linienwall (today's Gürtel). Vivaldi's remains were never retrieved or relocated. Later still, between 1815 and 1818, Vienna's Technical University (*Technisches Universität*) was built on the former site of the cemetery, where today a simple stone marks the spot. Erected to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Vivaldi's birth, it is there to let us know that the great composer still lies buried somewhere far below.

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A typical Scene of Vienna on the other side of the world – an Austrian Würstelstand in the heart of Singapore

## Last Sausage Before the Equator

by Sarah Rabl

An afternoon stroll in balmy Singapore, sunshine tickling our cheeks, feet aching and hunger gnawing at our stomachs. Time for a 4 o'clock *Jause*. What does one eat in this exotic of Pacific probity? Don't want junk food. But something smells yummy and we follow our noses... when low and behold there stands before us the only true Viennese fast food: the *Würstelstand*. The smell of freshly baked whole grain bread, the sound of grilling *Frankfurter*, *Käsekreiner* and *Bratwürstl* on the shining silverfish grill in front of us – the sausages seemed to be waiting to jump directly into our mouths. But maybe it was the sight of *Kremser Senf* that tipped the scale, the perfect complement to Austria's secret national dish. This *Würstelstand* seemed absurdly, but wonderfully, out of place.

At the corner of Pagoda and Sago Streets, in the middle of hundreds of shining Chinese red lanterns, among the Asian, Indian Taiwanese and Korean restaurants and numerous little stands hung with *Krimskrams*, we stumble over the red hawker stall of Erich Sollbock, an Austrian emigrant and passionate *Würstelmann*.

We are in the heart of the old city of Singapore, over 9,717,158 kilometers away from my favorite vendor on the Hohermarkt in Vienna's 1st District. Here is the "last *Würstelstand* before the equator."

Staring in disbelief, (who would sell Austrian sausages in Singapore?) we soon hear a



A heart-warming Austrian-style Würstelstand in Chinatown, Singapore

Photo: Sarah Rabl

strangely familiar accent of a foreigner's English. For sure this is a fellow countryman. My friend Julia is absolutely delighted by the sight of the multigrain *Bauernbrot* on offer at the small stall; after two seemingly endless weeks of at least two rice meals a day, she is grinning like a "warmer *Wecken*" (like a warm long loaf of bread) at promise of the taste of it.

Erich Sollbock, in Singapore for the past 14 years, opened his *Würstelstand* on Nov. 1 2004. "That was six years, four months, 18 days, 5 hours, 35 minutes *und a boar zerquetschte*," Erich calculates with lightening speed, placing his chef's cap on his head "just for the photo." "Other cooks here in China Town just wear shirts. I wear my uniform!" he says with pride.

Munching our *Eitrigel*, the colloquial Viennese *Würstelstand* expression for a *Käsekreiner*,

a sausage with veins of melted cheese in it, we enjoy the multicultural flair of Chinatown and the chat with Erich. Three tourists from the German Ruhrgebiet come our way, smiling brightly at Erich, stating that they last visited him three years ago. Erich seems delighted. But as he puffs patiently on a cigarette, he warns that he will only sell them sausages when he is done talking to us. The tourists are fine with that and amazingly so are the Asian customers. This white man selling his sausages has a different conception of time, a 15 minute waiting time for "a *Eitrigel und a Krokodil*" (a sausage and a pickle) is easy to accept considering the unique taste of his sausages, directly imported from a German butcher.

Oddly, Erich did not seem to be all surprised to be visited by two Austrians.

"Before the economic crisis I had 10 Aus-

trian customers per day, after the economic crisis it is between 25 and 30 Austrians a day!" We stare with mouths wide open as he points to a map of Austria, with plenty of red marks on it. "Check if your village has already been marked. If yes, somebody from your area has already visited me." We both check instantly and quickly figure that we will be the first ones from our areas. Our chests swell with pride. Right next to the map, the entire wall is plastered with business cards from visitors. I hand him one from *The Vienna Review* and he gently places it right next to the map, "so that people can see it."

But he has no longing to return: This Austrian who last visited his home country in 1996 doesn't seem to miss anything he left behind. "Was soll mir denn abgeben? What should I be missing?" placing three different kinds of *Senf* in front of us and with a huge smile and heart warming laughter, we soon understand that what he has right here is all he needs. And if he ever wanted to, he adds, he could always go home.

His success is unique. Based on the principle that "Respekt und Toleranz" are needed for a business in Asia, 80% of Erich's customers are Singaporeans. Two little Indian children are already on their third round of sausages and pickles, happily munching them down, even before Erich can say "Happy working, happy eating, happy wonderful!" We guess that's "guten Appetit" in *Singlish*!

After leaving Austria in 1983 to work on cruise ships, he discovered his love for the Asian continent, where he has been living since 1989. The German tourists, finally holding their snacks in their hands, are off in search of a cold refreshment. "Ich weigere mich Wasser zu verkaufen, und der Nachbar will keine Würstl verkaufen!" I refuse to sell water since my neighbor refuses to sell sausages." A role for everyone.

Our tummies satisfied, it is almost time to say farewell. Waving good-bye, Erich hums the modified lyrics of an Austrian hit "Steirerman san very good, very good a ohne huat" Styrians are very good, very good even without their hat! With a fat grin on my face for this tribute to Styrians, we leave Erich's Austrian sausage stall behind and head off into the hectic din of Singapore's China Town. Julia and I are soon to head to Dubai for our connection flight back to where the *Würstelstand* is in fact at home.