

6. Vienna: Music in the Air

A. Essence Distilled

1. Class title 1 (Vienna State Opera)

Vienna, and the **Vienna State Opera**; you know what you're in for. But supposing I omitted the title slide and you hadn't read the syllabus, what is it about this next little video that also screams "Vienna!"?

2. **Balanchine: Vienna Waltzes**, excerpt
3. — still from the above

Waltzes and ball gowns—the essence of Vienna, right? Maybe, but not distilled by the Viennese themselves. The music comes from *Der Rosenkavalier*, an opera by **Richard Strauss** (1864–1949), a German. The ballet is the work of Russian-born **George Balanchine** (1904–83), working in New York. I think that of all the cities we have visited so far, with the possible exception of New Orleans, the Viennese have been the most successful as distilling and exporting the essence of their own culture so as to make it instantly recognizable. They do it mostly through music, and with the sound track already playing in your mind, so to speak, it affects what you expect when you actually go there. The entire first hour today will be spent tracking down the Viennese musical essence, mainly in less highbrow musical genres.

4. **Staatsoper and Kunsthistorichesmuseum**
5. **Some musical premieres in Vienna**

I started with the *Staatsoper* because my own experiences of Vienna have hardly been lowbrow at all. I went there first as an assistant professor of **Art History**, and haunted the *Kunsthistorichesmuseum*. When I went back, I was already headed towards a career in **Opera**. And my work in Music History has put Vienna very much on my mental map as the site of seismic events in music for two centuries at least. But these are all things you must pay a fee to go indoors to see; I'll get back to some of them in the second hour. Right now, though, I want to focus on the sounds, scents, and tastes in the air, so to speak. And in doing so, I am shying away from my original subtitle, **A Musical Mecca**, towards another one, **Music in the Air**.

6. Title change video

So here is another video, an old one in black and white. What view of Vienna does it give, and how does the music contribute?

7. **Karas: Harry Lime Theme from The Third Man**
8. — still from the movie

What did you hear there? The stills came from the great 1949 movie by British director **Carol Reed** (1906–76), *The Third Man*, a thriller by **Graham Greene** set in Vienna after the Second World War. It was one of the first movies to be shot on location rather than on a sound stage, because Reed wanted that particular atmosphere of life among the ruins. And he wanted a sound track that would summon both the place and the time. Visiting a café in the city, he heard a Viennese zither player, **Anton Karas** (1906–85), invited him back to his hotel room, and recorded several hours of him improvising. The tune that Karas came up with, *The Harry Lime Theme*, stayed on the Top Twenty for weeks.

9. — stills from the two videos above

So my two videos showed two extremes of Vienna. One represents an idealization of the city; the other shows it in more or less its worst light. When *The Third Man* premiered in Vienna, the audiences were pretty much offended; why concentrate on ruins when they were working so hard to build a new city? *But they loved the music—why?* Because the **zither** was a traditional folk instrument, found frequently in Viennese cafés and the wine bars called **Heurigen**. Here is a very short close-up of one being played. It is a flat soundbox that lies on the table; the upper notes are pitched by moving the fingers on a fingerboard like a guitar, but the lower ones have preset pitches like a harp, and are plucked with the little fingers of the same hand.

10. Zither solo: "Aber dich gibt's nur einmal für mich"

Johann Strauss II (1825–99) used the zither in one of his most famous waltzes, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. Here is the beginning of a video by the **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra**, showing pictures of the Woods around Vienna; it omits the bit with the zither, though.

11. Strauss: *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (VPO, opening, with images)

I played that because I wanted you to see the pictures. But it starts three minutes into the actual piece as Strauss wrote it. And in that form, you don't need pictures. Apparently, Strauss went out into the countryside and wrote down the sounds he heard—a shepherd's pipe, distant hunting horns, a folk dance called *Ländler*, and of course the zither—and put them all together into a waltz that, for native Viennese, captured all their associations with weekends in the country. Though in a different medium, it is much the same as **Beethoven** had done half a century before with his *Pastoral Symphony*. I'm afraid the uniforms rather detract from the pastoral imagery, but you have to put up with what you can get!

12. Strauss: *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (Strauss Capelle Vienna, opening)

B. Contrasts

13. Section title B (Café Sperl)

The “Contrasts” in my title are basically musical ones, between the somewhat sentimental music that is characteristic of the Viennese quality of *Gemütlichkeit*, or laid-back comfort, characterized by the slow waltz, and the upbeat energy that occasionally bursts forth, characterized by the fast polka. You might say that the *gemütlich* quality is associated with the country, as in the introduction to *Tales of the Vienna Woods*, and the high energy to the city, but that was a video of a Viennese city institution, the café. Cafés are a characteristic feature of Viennese culture, a place where one could go for several hours, read the local papers, meet one’s friends, and take more cream than is good for you—the very essence of *Gemütlichkeit*, and totally urban.

14. Heurigen in Grinzing

There is an equivalent in the country also, the *Heuriger* or local tavern, specializing in serving that year’s wines in a rustic setting. Anton Karas ploughed his royalties from *Harry Lime* into opening one, which became very popular. Here is a glimpse inside one, with a band playing the same kind of music as I added to the previous video, a Viennese specialty called *Schrammelmusik*, typically played by a group consisting of two violins, a squeeze accordion, and a double-necked guitar (essentially a zither you can hold). It is as *gemütlich* as you can get.

15. *Schrammelmusik* in a *Heuriger* setting

16. “Wien, Wien, nur du allein” covers

Other than Strauss waltzes, the *ne plus ultra* of the Viennese tendency to brand itself through music is surely this song, “Wien, Wien, nur du allein” (“Vienna, you alone”), with words and music by an otherwise little-remembered composer **Rudolf Sieczynski** (1879–1952). Here it is sung in a concert by German tenor **Jonas Kaufmann**, who was born in Germany but lives now in Salzburg, Austria. He was awarded honorary Austrian citizenship in 2021. Although not native Viennese, he takes great delight in singing in the Viennese dialect—perfectly, I am told.

17. Sieczynski: “Wien, Wien, nur du allein” (Jonas Kaufmann)

For the upbeat energy I promised, here is a Strauss work in quite a different mood, the *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*, in the version for choir and orchestra. I included it also because I wanted to get in at least *one* mention of the **Vienna Boys’ Choir**, very much part of the city’s heritage.

18. Strauss: *Tritsch Tratsch Polka*

C. Inside/Outside

19. Section title C

20. Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

The Strauss polka featured the **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra** playing indoors in their concert hall, the Golden Hall of the **Musikverein** in central Vienna. As these events require tickets, they fall outside what I promised to concentrate on in the first hour of this class. But the PBS trailer you saw (narrated, I think, by Rick Steves) is for the orchestra's annual Summer Concert, a free event held outdoors in the grounds of the **Schönbrunn Palace**, requiring no tickets and attracting huge crowds. Here is a sample of an actual concert. The orchestra is playing a Waltz, but not a Viennese one; it is by **Dmitri Shostakovich** (1906–75), and is a kind of comment on the Viennese tradition. How can you tell it is not Viennese? [My clip comes from a trailer, so apologies that it cuts off rather abruptly.]

21. Shostakovich: *Waltz #2*

22. — cover of the above

That was obviously by a later composer. But what, if anything, let you know it was not Viennese? The orchestration, of course—saxophones, for instance—the slightly sour tonality, the use of swooning strings in an almost parody fashion.

23. Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (repeat)

Part of the sense of music being in the air everywhere in Vienna is the pride that its people take in the **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra**, even people who would seldom go to an actual concert. So I will take the opportunity to go indoors once more to play a part of a documentary explaining why the orchestra is so extraordinary. I will put the whole thing on the website, but it is too long to play here complete. The opening four minutes or so go through various orchestral instruments and describe how the Viennese versions are built differently from those elsewhere. I'll pick it up where the video begins to talk about the orchestra as a whole.

24. The Unique Sound of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

25. Buskers in Vienna

Let's go outside again. A city with so much music has many music students. And many of them make an extra Euro or two by **busking**, or playing for tips in the street. Here are two ensembles. What interests me particularly is the degree to which they reference traditions of classical music—Mozart's *Little Night Music*, for instance—while treating it entirely in their own way.

26. Buskers in Vienna

27. — still from the video below

Finally, staying out of doors, here is a video classified as a "staged flashmob." Well, obviously not an actual flashmob, because the orchestra—from the **Vienna Volksoper**—is seated in normal formation

before the musical events kick off, albeit outdoors in the middle of the Museum Quarter. But everything after that keeps you guessing. For example, the conductor appears from nowhere, starts to conduct, and then freezes like a statue while the orchestra goes on playing. Or the way in which you make distinctions between people who are actually staged to do something, and those spontaneously joining in the fun—only to have a lot of your assumptions thrown into question. There is even a dog that keeps you guessing! The music is *Waltzertraum* (Waltz Dream) by **Oscar Straus** (1870–1954), no relation of the two-S Strausses. But I love the idea that a waltz in a dream should turn into such a delightful evocation of the city, surprising, surreal, and splendid all at the same time.

28. *Waltzertraum in Museumsquartier*

29. Class title 2 (still from the above)

D. Through the Ages

30. Section title D (Vienna in 60 seconds)

31. Vienna fact sheet

That video compilation is not mine, but I replaced the generic music on the original clip by something at least genuinely Viennese: a piece called *Patrol* for trumpet and orchestra by **HK Gruber** (1943–). The point I hoped it would make is that Vienna is a vibrant city dating back centuries, with an architectural heritage that reflects that. Here is a fact sheet like the ones I showed for previous cities in this course.

32. The Danube in Vienna

One thing struck me immediately. Unlike other cities that are built on rivers, the Danube is scarcely a part of Vienna's image. In music, yes; everybody knows *The Beautiful Blue Danube* waltz. But none of the iconic postcard views of the city shows the kind of waterfront you get in Florence, Rome, or Paris. There are two reasons for this, I think. One is that the Danube was prone to flooding, and until they built not one but two replacement watercourses and sidelined the old one, the lower-lying ground could not be safely built upon. And the other, as you will see from the map, Vienna used to be a fortified city with walls like a castle, until they knocked them down in the late 19th century and built the great boulevards of the *Ring*, where the Opera, National Theater, and major museums are situated.

33. *Stephansdom and Peterskirche*

I called this section "Through the Ages." As you saw from that video, I would have a lot to choose from. The two sections that follow will look at the periods leading up to 1800 and away from 1900. But I want at least to tip my hat to two earlier eras: the 15th-century late Gothic of **Saint Stephen's Cathedral** and the early 18th-century baroque of **St Peter's Church**. I have the ubiquitous **Rick Steves** to take us into the first, and a minute or so of an organ recital to cover the latter.

- 34. Rick Steves on the *Stephansdom*
- 35. Organ recital in the *Peterskirche*
- 36. Vienna on a map of Europe

Here is Vienna on the map. Being situated in Lower Austria, at the other side of the Alps, it is significantly further East than any other cities in this course. And being so, it is the closest bastion against the invading forces of Islam.

37. Second Siege of Vienna, 1683

Vienna was in fact besieged by Ottoman forces twice, in 1529 and 1683. Both times, it managed to hold out and rout the invaders. But the contact left its mark on one surprising place, the Coffee House.

38. Viennese Coffee House, 18th century

Vienna's geographical position affected not only the coffee in the cafés, but also much of the food being served there. Here is **Rick Steves** one last time.

- 39. Rick Steves on Vienna food specialties
- 40. Boxing the compass

Instead of "Through the Ages," I might equally have called this section **Boxing the Compass**, because the point made by Steves, of Vienna at the center of a compass, processing input from all directions, is vitally important. I said I wasn't going to spend much time in art galleries, but indulge me a moment.

41. Paintings in the *Kunsthistorischesmuseum*

I felt I needed to show at least something of the wealth of art in the ***Kunsthistorischesmuseum***, so I took about half the illustrations in the Wikipedia article and made this slide. Do you notice anything about it? We have two Italian paintings, two from Flanders, and one each from Holland and Spain, but nothing from Austria itself! True, there is a separate gallery for Austrian art—we'll visit it in a while—but its treasures begin around 1900; there is nothing of significance in the Old Master period. I know of no other major gallery in a capital city where the collections hold so little from the country itself. In the visual arts at least, Vienna is like Washington, though even more so, a primarily **curatorial** city.

42. Map of the Holy Roman Empire

This is due to the fact that it was the seat of the Eastern branch **Habsburg Dynasty** (their cousins ruled Spain), who were at the same time the sovereigns of Austro-Hungary and **Holy Roman Emperors**. And both great collectors of art and lovers of music. So they harvested from a very wide area, not only in art but also in music. As we remember from *Amadeus*, when Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) arrived at the Vienna court, he found it staffed entirely by Italians. Never mind, let's stick with him for a while.

E. Three Mozart Operas

43. Section title E (Mozart overtures)

I hope that was somewhat self-explanatory. Three opera overtures by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–91), composed while he was in Vienna: *The Abduction from the Seraglio* in 1782, for the Court Theater, in German; *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1786 also for the Court Theater, but in Italian; and *The Magic Flute* in 1791, for a popular German-language theater elsewhere in the city. They represent the various points of the compass that I showed earlier. **Abduction**, which is about two Western women sold to a Turkish Harem, faces east; much of the music is based on the Turkish Janissary bands that would occasionally visit Vienna. **Figaro** is written in Italian and in Italian style, but based on a French play, and the Emperor's sister, Marie Antoinette, was now the French Queen. **The Magic Flute** is a **Singspiel**, or a popular opera with spoken dialogue; **Emanuel Schikaneder**, Mozart's librettist, was both the owner of the theater and its chief comedian. I'll show you three clips from the movie version of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*. You should know that the play is narrated by the Court Composer Antonio Salieri, Mozart's nemesis but also his most perceptive critic. By the time of the *Magic Flute* performance, Mozart is very ill; he will not have long to live.

44. *Amadeus* movie: *Abduction* scene

45. *Amadeus* movie: *Figaro* scene

46. *Amadeus* movie: *Flute* scene

47. Scene from *Amadeus*, Mozart and Salieri

What Salieri has against the younger composer, in Shaffer's eyes, is not that his music is bad, but that divine sounds such as he could conjure up should not have been granted to such a godless punk, while being denied to the devout Salieri. So rather than merely palm you off with snippets, let me offer one complete piece by Mozart that does indeed almost touch the divine. It is his motet **Laudate Dominum** (Praise the Lord), sung here in a Vienna Philharmonic Concert by soprano **Valentina Naftonita**.

48. Mozart: *Laudate Dominum*

F. Way Beyond Beethoven

49. Secession Building, Vienna (1898)

A quick word about the next video. It is a frieze in the **Secession** Building by **Gustav Klimt** (1862–1918) originally made for a temporary exhibition in 1902 honoring **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770–1827), whose Choral Symphony—indeed all his symphonies—were premiered in Vienna. That, of course, is the music you will hear in the background: his setting of the *Ode to Joy* by **Friedrich Schiller**. Running from left to right, you will see various disembodied spirits and a Knight in the golden armor of Truth, do battle with the forces of evil and destruction (including STDs) to emerge with the choirs of angels in a heaven where two naked human figures join in what Schiller called “A kiss for the whole world.”

50. Section title F (Beethoven frieze)

51. — details of the above

Klimt’s fame as the highly decorative painter who uses gold leaf and jewel-like patches of bright color can blind one to how outspoken he could be. The gorilla in the middle of the detail on the left may seem almost comic, but there is nothing comic about the naked women and prostitutes surrounding it.

52. Klimt: *The Kiss* and *Danaë* (both 1907–08)

Schiller’s “Kiss for the whole world” became a painting on its own in 1908, *The Kiss*, which is in the **Belvedere Gallery of Austrian Art**. Set it beside another painting from around the same time: *Danaë*, who was visited by Jupiter in a shower of gold. What can you say about the eroticism of the two works? Is this increased or decreased by the decorative elements in each picture?

53. Egon Schiele: *Death and the Maiden* (1915, Belvedere Gallery, Vienna)

Yes, I am indoors in a museum where you pay for a ticket to get in. But the years around 1900 in Vienna that gave the world **Sigmund Freud** are just about as those leading up to 1800 that produced Mozart. Only it is not in the air like Johann Strauss is; you need to poke your nose into places to winkle it out. More than anywhere else in Europe, Vienna was the center for new experiments in art, music, and literature. Klimt and his colleagues formed the **Secession** to proclaim a radical break with artistic convention. **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874–1951) threw out conventional harmony to come up with his twelve-tone system. Several of Klimt’s paintings were condemned as pornographic. His protégée **Egon Schiele** (1890–1918) was actually jailed for his; his angular paintings of often-underage naked girls flaunted their sexuality. This one, which hangs in the next room to Klimt’s *Kiss*, is one of the few that I can show to mixed company. Called *Death and the Maiden*, it refers to the famous song by **Franz Schubert**, another composer from Vienna. The woman here is fully clothed, but it looks as though she and the monklike Death are embracing on a bed of human bodies or body parts. And this was 1915; there was plenty of death around—though Schiele would die at the end of the War, of Spanish Flu. A few years back, I made of video of several Schiele *Self Portraits*, accompanied by a piece by Schoenberg in the background. I think it would fit in here.

54. Schiele/Schoenberg montage

55. Kate Lindsay in *Orlando* (2019) by Olga Neuwirth

I had intended to end with the *Salome* of **Richard Strauss**, another work whose theme of sexual perversion was designed to shock. Google told me it premiered in Vienna, which would have been perfect, but it was wrong. So instead of that, I am going to jump forward to a very recent commission by the Vienna Opera, *Orlando*, adapted from the novel by **Virginia Woolf**. The Austrian composer **Olga Neuwirth** (1968–), made history as the first female composer ever to be performed at the Staatsoper. At the time of writing, I have only a sampler of some scenes from the opera, which features British mezzo-soprano **Kate Lindsay** as the young man from the time of Elizabeth I, who wakes up some years later and finds he has been changed into a woman. For the rest of the opera, which Neuwirth extends way beyond Woolf into the present day, he/she remains fluid in gender and fixed in time. I don't know that you need actually know more; my only point is that Vienna is not merely content to rest on the glories of the past, but is creating new art *now*.

56. Neuwirth: *Orlando*, sampler

57. Class title 3 (still from the above)