

CLOSE UP WITH THE ORCHESTRA



David Sussman

TWELVE HALLS OF EUROPE

On our recent tour of Europe, the CPO performed in 12 different venues, across 12 cities, in the space of 14 days. It was thrilling, tiring and exhilarating to work with our Music Director Hans Graf for so many performances in so many different settings. We were closely followed and reviewed everywhere we went, and audiences were very warm and receptive – usually demanding three encores from us. Here are some notes on the halls in which we performed – in chronological order.

Linz, Austria-BRUCKNERHAUS (1560 seats)

This performance was the first of the tour and took place on a Sunday morning at 11:00AM – an unusual hour, especially when battling jet lag! This was a loud hall with a somewhat muffled sound quality, but still quite decent. The hall was very wide with lots of wood, a modern decor and high risers. When the audience doors to the auditorium were opened, the view from the stage was of the beautiful Danube River (although not really so blue). This hall had the best backstage facilities of any of the places we visited and we each had our own secured locker, finished in dark wood to match the hall. The two-thirds full audience clapped forever it seemed to us (we eventually got used to up to a dozen curtain calls throughout Europe).

Vienna, Austria-MUSIKVEREIN (1600 seats)

For me – and many of the musicians – this was the highlight of the tour and my favourite hall for sound. Despite almost no backstage area and crowded stage conditions, the glorious sound quality this hall produced was a treat. It wasn't exactly shabby visually either – very ornate and golden! I gave a detailed account of our time there in the last issue of *Prelude*.



Inside the Musikverein

Villach, Austria-CONGRESS-CENTER (1062 seats)

I guess after the Musikverein, anything is a letdown, but this hall was one of my least favourites. It was a cramped, red, modern all-purpose building. The high fly space above the stage (for lifting sets) took away reverberation and made this hall very dry-sounding. At the start of the concert, when the orchestra entered together (European style), some messages got crossed and the second violins and violas ended up entering somewhat later than the rest. The audience was completely sold-out and (as elsewhere) demanded encores.

Innsbruck, Austria-CONGRESS (1473 seats)

This hall was asymmetrical. Usually, for predictable acoustics, halls are the same on both sides. Not so in Innsbruck. This made it hard to centre the conductor's podium. A beautiful contemporary textile hanging was mounted at the back of the dark wood stage. The backstage facilities here had not been cleaned or restocked in recent memory and proved to be the most unappealing of the tour. Despite that, the sold-out crowd got four encores, including Bill Hopson playing the Alphorn (which was our regular encore for the Swiss concerts).

Rosenheim, Germany-KULTUR-UND KONGRESSZENTRUM (948 seats)

This was one of our run-out concerts while we were based in Innsbruck. We bussed in at supper time and back out immediately after the concert. This was a nice hall, with a decent backstage and pleasant acoustics. The audience members (the hall was three-quarters full) were as enthusiastic as their Austrian counterparts.

Montreux, Switzerland-AUDITORIUM STRAVINSKY (1780 seats)

We travelled all day on trains from Innsbruck to Montreux including two clockwork train connections where the entire orchestra had to transfer trains and platforms, with only two minutes to do so. We did it by following a person with a yellow umbrella and no one got left behind. After all that travel we had to perform a concert. This was a big concert hall with lots of dark wood and large acoustic reflectors above the stage. The sound was bright and loud. Although the hall itself was built symmetrically, the seating was not. There was a balcony only on the left side of the hall. We stayed in a luxurious hotel overnight (my personal favourite) and zipped out early the next morning, wishing we could stay longer enjoying the beautiful lake, palm trees and moderate temperature.

Biel, Switzerland-CENTRE CTS (1500 seats)

Biel's concert hall had just closed for renovations and this venue was being used in its place. This was basically a warehouse in an industrial area. The stage was finished only shortly before we performed and we were the first orchestra to present a concert there. Surprisingly, the acoustics were quite good and the orchestra played a fine concert.

St. Gallen, Switzerland-TONHALLE (915 seats)

This was another run-out concert where we bussed in and out. This intimate hall was a beautiful blend of old and new. Old slabs of stone served as steps and modern chandeliers graced an elegant, arched,



Tonhalle. St. Gallen

old hall. We played well and the audience recognized the terrific performance.

Zurich, Switzerland- TONHALLE (1455 seats)

This was a deservedly famous hall. It was stunningly ornate with a shoebox shape and beautiful acoustics. What a treat to play there! The freight elevator broke down, so wardrobe and instrument cases lined the lobby. The Canadian Ambassador to Switzerland graciously hosted a reception for us following the concert (do you know how much food musicians can consume after a concert?).



Tonhalle, Zurich

Basel, Switzerland-CASINO (1500 seats)

This run-out concert had us going to another beautiful and elegant rectangular hall with an organ at the back and very good sound. This hall was very pink. The concert was top-notch and we performed our encores as usual.

Geneva, Switzerland- VICTORIA HALL (1690 seats)

Another great hall! This one was stunning but the stage was narrow, so we ended up going up on many risers. The percussion players were at the very top. For dressing rooms, we had makeshift sectioned-off areas. This was one of my favourite halls for sound.

Bordeaux, France- PALAIS DES SPORTS

The name tells all. This hall was like a mini-Saddledome, complete with hard plastic seats and a very high ceiling. It was special to finish the tour with Graf in the home of his 'other' orchestra, and to meet the musicians there. We played our hearts out. After finishing in Bordeaux, I felt fortunate to come home to the Jack Singer Concert Hall in Calgary.

David Sussman, The Calgary Philharmonic's Assistant Principal Oboe, contributes to each issue of Prelude, writing from a musician's viewpoint.



Calgary Girls Choir
SOME GIRLS ARE BORN TO SING
Elaine Quilichini
FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Join this outstanding award winning choir.

We are a Kodály based choral program. No experience necessary.

Call 686-7444 for registration, information and auditions.

- Prima** 4 - 5 years
- Bella** 6 - 7 years
- Viva** 8 - 10 years
- Allegra** 11 - 14 years
- Ragazze** 15 years and up
- Brava** Touring and recording ensemble



CLOSE UP WITH THE ORCHESTRA



David Sussman

David Sussman, the Calgary Philharmonic's Assistant Principal Oboe, contributes to each issue of *Prelude*, writing from a musician's viewpoint.

PLAYING VIENNA – A MUSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

It is November 6, the fifth day of our European Tour, and we are in Vienna preparing for our second concert of the Tour.

Our first concert was in Linz, yesterday morning. We travelled nine hours on a plane, and over seven hours on a bus, until we arrived in Linz. We played respectably well, but not as well as we know we can do. The first concert we all felt a little jittery.

Today, however, is Vienna, possibly the most important venue of our tour itinerary. Vienna has an unrivaled musical history and tradition, and the Musikverein where we perform – the home of the Vienna Philharmonic – is where Mahler conducted. It is considered one of the best halls in the world and the invitation to perform here is a prestigious one.

We are on the Jeunesse Series, which showcases young emerging talent: in this case, it is the young violinist Hanna Weinmeister performing the Berg *Violin Concerto*. We have the luxury of a one and a half hour rehearsal at the Musikverein prior to our concert.

We arrive at the hall to find most of the surrounding area under construction because of modifications to the underground train. We climb several stairways and get our first look at the hall.

It is stunning. So much gold and ornate design! It is roughly the size and shape of our own Jack Singer Concert Hall (though not quite as high or wide). The 16 columns down each side turn out to

be 16 semi-clad golden ladies. The entire ceiling has intricate gold work and paintings, and enormous chandeliers provide lighting. We take pictures like crazy until we are informed photos are not allowed.

The stage is tiered with built-in risers, musicians in the back rows have to look quite far down to see the conductor. The seating is very tight and crowded. I find it almost impossible to imagine all the players required for a Mahler *Symphony* could ever fit on this stage (but, they must have!). The effect is that it feels very cozy. I feel supported by my colleagues, am very close to the conductor, and I can certainly hear everything around me very well. The funny old wooden music stands look charming, but not so sturdy.

We start to rehearse. The programme in Vienna is different from Linz. We are playing the Berg *Violin Concerto* and the Schumann *Third Symphony* for the first time on tour tonight, and the bulk of the rehearsal involves the Berg with the violin soloist.

We are delighted with the sound in the hall. It is simply gorgeous. Beautiful sound seems to emerge effortlessly from our instruments. In some cases, we must readjust the balance or lighten the attack of notes. This hall (like Linz) feels hot and humid (one player's tux shirt has already been stricken with mildew!).

We break for supper. For me, it is a short break, because I want to get back in time to warm up on stage before the concert. For the last half-hour before the concert, we must clear the stage. European audiences are used to having an orchestra all come onstage together (to applause), sit down, tune and play. North American orchestras are used to warming up on stage up until concert time. This is a hard adjustment for us. People are warming up in every corner of the backstage area.

Then it is time to go on. And we all go, together. We file in, sit down, and tune. It is interesting that in the Musikverein

the audience stays lit up too and we see many audience members v clearly. Maestro Graf comes on and begin. The opening piece, *Symph Minute* by Jose Evangelista, starts v well and is over before I realize it. T audience applauds but we cannot tel they are pleased or not. Next is the B *Violin Concerto*. This is an esoteric wor understated but also lyrical, an ultimately a very moving elegy. T soloist, Hanna Weinmeister, plays wi elegance and soul. The orchestra doe very well accompanying her. Gra masterfully leads us through the trick sections with his wonderful smile. I pla a small solo and hear a beautiful sound in the hall (is that me??). The acoustic of the hall are working their magic. The audience definitely likes the performance.

After intermission, we get to see if the audience likes only the soloist, or us too. We launch into the Schumann *Third Symphony*, a work we know very well, and we do what we do best – follow Graf unerringly and play with commitment. The result is a terrific performance. At the end, we all know we have played a great concert. But we do not know what the audience thinks. Three encores and over 10 ovations later, we know that the audience approves. We are jubilant and proud of ourselves, individually and collectively. This has been a night we will all remember for a long time. We don't want to lose the warm glow of the moment and the golden aura of the Musikverein. "Can we sleep here?" asks one musician, only partly joking.

