

Simon's Blog I – Zurich – Innsbruck

So here we are on the road for the how manyeth time I don't care to remember, couldn't remember if I tried, I'm not sure I want to remember! For the very first time in the history of the Toblerone Philharmonic, we are on our way to Innsbruck.

As usual with Paavo, here it's been a pretty hectic week to precede, with not one but two Tchaikovsky symphonies back to back, the second and the fifth. Both were recorded which involved a very long «patching» session, but we had a long weekend free for our good behaviour. I took the Duchess (my longish suffering so-called better half, you understand ...) up Hoch-Ybrig on Saturday for a good breath of Innerschwiizer frische Luft, at least as much for my lungs as the pleasantness of her company. Yes folks, we're off on tour and Stylesy is down with the lurgy once again ... Inflamed bronchea, and coughing fits ... In fact a lot of us are hit, Seth Quistad is in much worse condition than I, and between us like a sandwich of bacteria, Marco has a stomach bug ... Billy Boy, he of cast iron constitution, spends much of his time avoiding all contact with us!

I know Innsbruck quite well, having spent a number of summers here drawing among other things, naked people, at the «Art-Didacta», art being pretty much my favourite pastime, when not holding a tuba. So, when I saw Innsbruck on the schedule I, for once, got my act together, and organised to come a day early and visit a couple of favourite restaurants in the Altstadt of the fair city on the Inn. Bill, knowing as ever when there's the probability of a decent meal or two in the mix, has elected to join me, and after Tuesday morning's refresher rehearsal, we form a sort of advance party. So it's that after a moderately liquid lunch we get the 14.40 Railjet out of HB, and off we go. I sleep most of the way – 2 beers at lunch is, I hasten to emphasise, very much the exception, rather than the rule. However, the knock out drops do their job and by Sargans I'm well away. We arrive pretty much on time at Innsbruck just after 6, it being a mere 3 1/2 hours, and ready to hit the town ... The Marriott hotel is an easy 5 minutes walk away, and we are soon checked in and in our rooms. At 19.00 we meet and head off towards the old town located around the famous «Goldenes Dachl» and the Hof. I know it usually full of tourists during the summer months and so I somewhat surprised at the emptiness of the streets, they, in my experience, always being bustling. We stretch our legs a bit and I show Bill some corners I know, which I hasten to add in my defence, are not just the Altstadt «Beisl»!!



If you ever visit Innsbruck then make a point of going to «Die Wilderin» on Seilergasse 5. This is my favourite restaurant in Innsbruck, run by the delightful Claudia Kogler and her brother Michi. Every time I visit Innsbruck, I spend at least one evening there, and I have yet to be disappointed. Everything on the menu is sourced locally, be it the gin with which we started our evening, the wonderful red wine which Claudia recommended or the cheese platter with which we finished our evening, more than 2 hours later. The cuisine while being definitely Austria is far removed from usual Schnitzel and Knödel fare, normally associated with this part of the world.



We started with roast beef, carpaccio thin sliced, and lightly smoky in taste, we could have without being forced easily have eaten this twice.

Claudia's suggestion for red wine, from the cellars of Familie Ziniel in the Burgenland, Zeta, is a classy assemblage of Zweigelt, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, served relatively cool and carrying notes of light citrus and herbs – it was the perfect accompaniment to both starter and main course.

We both, being blood brothers, stick together and plump for Duroc Schweindel, which is a sort of alpine pork nuggets, served with a potato salad, which is raised to the level of high art.



We don't do sweet, Bill and I. End of. Never ever. Don't touch the stuff. So a local cheese platter and a pear Schnapps it was, and the perfect end to a perfect evening.



The duchess commented that it looked very romantic, so I instruct Claudia that, should we be seen holding hands, she should blow out the candles, and turn all the lights up bright!

We are back at the hotel at a civilised hour and the night's rest is grand. Wednesday, I sleep late and come down only at about 9.30, Bill sleeps much longer. There're a lot of people, ladies especially wearing armless padded jackets with AUS on the front and Australia on the back. No mistaking where they're from ... Being ever the nosy parker, I have to know who they are and what they are doing here ... Apparently, they're a skating team in Innsbruck for a World Championship, presumably and are performing that very day, before heading off to Zagreb, Budapest and Vienna. The young lady, with whom I chat for half an hour or so, is very concerned that she needs to get rid of her black nail varnish, as «We've been told the Russian judges don't like it, and will mark us down». Apparently, for the Russian judges, it is not classical enough



I spend the morning walking around streets, which is pleasant enough, it's a lovely fresh day, the mountains towering above and around the city, and find and buy a new LP pressing, on 180g vinyl of Billy Holiday «Lady sings the blues», which is quite possibly my most musical deed of the day.

We meet for lunch and head to another favourite eating establishment, the Gasthaus Anich, conveniently located 5 minutes from our hotel. This is definitely schnitzel territory and we avail ourselves of the same, it occupying the entire plate. Innsbruck is a

fairly provincial sort of a place even if it was considered grand enough to host the winter Olympics, the «Schanze» of which still dominates the town, so restaurants just don't stay open after 2 and don't open again before 6 generally speaking. As we eat, our colleagues are on a similar Railjet timed, conveniently, to arrive at 14.17, so I know there will be hungry and disappointed mouths when they arrive. Of course, we don't let a little matter like their hunger concern us and the schnitzel is delicious.

«Billy 2 Schnitzels»

Back to the hotel I do a Reiki session. Yes friends, I have 2 maybe 3 years, if I extend, before my pension, then you'll have to read the utterings of someone else – if they can be bothered to perform the task! So Reiki, a Japanese meditational technique, and that is a very loose way of describing it, has under the influence of Philippe Litzler, our Principal Trumpet who is also a Reiki Master, become a passion of mine, which I am learning intermittently in London. I do a good 45 minute session of it in my room and then sleep another hour before heading in good time to «Congress Innsbruck» to warm up and practice. When I arrive I have the stage pretty much to myself, but not for long. In dribs and drabs my colleagues start to arrive, and soon the stage is a cacophony of tooting and scratching of all sorts and shades. The days are long gone when I could put a good 2 hours of practice under my belt before the arrival of my colleagues ... We have a 45 minute rehearsal, devoted largely to the Bartók – deceptively tricky little piece that it is, a sort of mini Concerto for Orchestra with splashes of «Miraculous Mandarin» thrown in. The acoustic, well what can I say, it's an acoustic of sorts I suppose, but very very dry. I feel especially in the Tchaikovsky very lonely. Paavo has changed the seating plan of the orchestra the violins sitting left and right which I like, a lot. However, the basses and cello's have also been removed and now sit next to the 1st violins, which is for me something of a double-edged sword as they say ... On the one hand, I don't mind it at all, as I feel my voice has become slightly more soloist, but at the same time when say, at the beginning of the 4th movement I am playing the bass line with the basses, who are now seated 20-30 metres away, and I'm at the end of a long row of trumpets and trombones, who at that moment are doing nothing at all, it's a very lonely situation. Everything sounds behind, the 1st's and the horns for instance, and for too much of the time when I am playing I can't hear a thing. People tell me it's all fine but it doesn't make life any more comfortable, you see the tuba is plonked next to the trombones as a sort of geographical convenience. The people with whom I have most to do musically, if not otherwise, are the basses. As I said it's a definite double-edged sword. The Bartók is a marvellous kaleidoscope of colour and features especially the woodwinds, with shed loads of tunes to play. The bassoons are worthy of special mention and the clarinets, the bass clarinet of Diego Baroni sounding especially raunchy. Haika Lübcke on piccolo seems to have had a very busy couple of weeks, the Tchaikovsky 2nd that we played last week being something of a piccolo concerto, and the Bartók is full of cheeky riffs for her, she sounds great, just great – she is, so she tells me, playing the piccolo of her predecessor Ugo Storni, who, with another ex-flautist, Janek Rosset, was at one of last week's concerts I wish I'd seen them! I like those moments, when an instrument sort of stays in and with the band, even though its player has «moved on».



Prior to the start of the concert, Gallus Burkard, he of the double bass, decides that my shoes are not of a suitable standard to go on stage with, and to be honest he's not wrong. What, of course, a player of a stringed instrument can never probably, because it's so far removed from their lives, counter-nance, is the amount of condensation and oil that dribble out of a brass instrument. You will see me during a longish piece like Tchaikovsky 5 pulling out slides and emptying their contents on the floor and on my shoes, and occasionally on to other players should I be both in a hurry and of not particularly good aim ... And so it's with me. I meant to bring my shoe polish with me, honest I did, unfortunately, it resides still in my «Schrank» in Maag. So kind chap that he is, he actually polishes my shoes for me, to the amazement of all gathered around ...

We get to the end and discretely I collect food and beer orders from the boys.

I have nothing to play in the encore (which doesn't necessarily mean that I don't play you understand ...) and for once I'm seated right in front of the door to my side of the stage, which opens outwards, so when Paavo comes on baton in hand for the encore, with a push of my butt I am off stage, conveniently next to my travel case and for once I'm first changed and packed to head straight to the «Fischerhäusl» there to order before the witching hour of 23.00. Bill lives up to his nickname and reputation of «Billy 2 Schnitzels» this time of the veal variety, instead of pork which we had at lunch, as do Marco and Seth. I go light taking a salad, much to the disbelief of my mates, with a couple of Knödel things to keep things Tyrolean. We are joined by a local trombonist, Craig Hansford who is Principal Trombonist of the «Tiroler Symphonieorchester Innsbruck», and a very nice chap he turns out to be, especially when he insists, and believe me we really did try to insist otherwise, in paying the bill. What more can be said? By midnight I'm packed up ready to go tomorrow – alarm at 7.30 and on to Vienna!!