



Rachel Schwabenbauer '19 and Natalie Delcorps '19 at the Musikverein. Photo courtesy Natalie Delcorps '19.

A Luther student abroad

A monthlong musical residency in Vienna helps students grow as musicians and as global citizens.

By Kari Jacobson '21

I entered the golden hall, graced by frescoes of muses gazing down from above, and could scarcely believe I was there. The flute trills and violin figures magnified by the unique acoustics of the historic hall overwhelmed my senses. I was about to hear the Vienna Symphony perform Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* and Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony* at the Musikverein in Vienna, Austria.

The Luther College Symphony Orchestra has maintained a 25-day residency in "The City of Music," every four years

since 1977, allowing students to immerse themselves in Viennese music and culture. During January Term 2019, we rehearsed repertoire and studied current and historical performances in an academic course. Throughout the term, our orchestra experienced world-class museums, concert halls, symphony concerts, operas, and ballets in Austria, Czechia, Germany, and Slovakia. At the end of a month of diligent practice, we performed at the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava, Slovakia; the Kultur Kongress Zentrum in Eisen-

stadt, Austria; and the Musikverein—home of the Vienna Philharmonic—in Vienna.

“If you will allow it, the Vienna residency can be a life-altering experience,” conductor Daniel Baldwin says. “For the last 20 years, the Vienna residency has meant an opportunity to continue my education. Every fourth January I get to live and work in one of the most beautiful, historic, musically and artistically rich, culturally and politically significant capitals of Europe. The educational value of travel cannot be overstated. I think Vienna makes me a better teacher and musician.”

Classical music is ingrained in Vienna’s cultural consciousness. A fellow subway rider may carry a violin case, or a plaque may indicate an apartment where Mozart lived or a pub where Beethoven ate. Nearly anyone can attend fine classical music concerts—and they do—because some tickets are reduced in price. While I was in Vienna, I saw several operas (*Tosca*, *Falstaff*, *La Traviata*, and *Götterdämmerung*) and the ballet *Sylvia* staged in the State Opera House, the Staatsoper.

I discovered that many virtuosic per-

formers have an educator’s heart as well; they embrace teaching and entrusting their national musical tradition to the next generation. Luther College Symphony Orchestra members spoke with world-renowned conductors and instrumentalists after performances. The way in which the city values music resonated with and inspired members of the orchestra, many of whom will become music educators, professionals, or amateurs.

Luther assistant professors of music Melanie Batoff and Philip Borter taught a course that guided students through cultural and musical differences by means of ethnographic study. At first we bemoaned our status as “silly Americans,” unable to shake the trappings of our American tourism and avoid unwanted attention. In one of the first class sessions, however, we discussed our initial struggles with adapting to the currency, grocery stores, public transportation, language, and etiquette. In groups, we explored various locations including the subway station, grocery store, and department store, took notes on common etiquette, and shared our observations with our classmates. Later, with this

heightened awareness, whenever we would bump into someone, we knew to excuse ourselves by saying, “Entschuldigung.” We would ride on the right side of escalators and walk on the left like the locals. Senior trombonist Elliot Douma says, “In Vienna, I learned about studying other cultures firsthand. The residency gave me skills to learn about other people and to adjust my own behaviors to fit in.”

As soon as we began to process cultural differences as a class, we became more open to following Baldwin’s recommendation that we adjust, adapt, and accept while in Vienna. Using the metaphor of a cultural iceberg, easily observable cultural traits that lie above the surface compose only a fraction of the whole; traits under the surface provide a deep understanding of culture. With this in mind, we dove beneath the surface aspects of Viennese culture, such as food and fashion traditions, and examined its deeper facets, such as the values and attitudes of our host culture.

On the tip of the cultural iceberg, food connected us to the culture of the land. We dined in the oldest restaurant in Europe, a monastery built into a mountain,

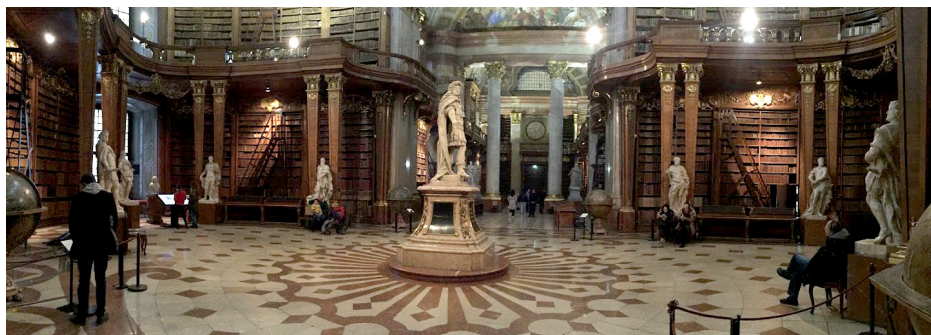


Author Kari Jacobson '21 at the Love Locks Bridge in Salzburg, Austria. Photo courtesy Kari Jacobson '21.



An outside view of the Hofburg Palace, where Luther students dressed to the nines and danced the famous Viennese waltz.

A hall of statues depicting figures from Austrian history sits at the center of the Austrian National Library. Photo by Kathryn Wyre '20.





Luther students attended the annual Officer's Ball at the Hofburg Palace, with nine separate ballrooms for dancing. Photo by Natalie Delcorps '19.



Luther students heard the Vienna Symphony perform at the Musikverein. Photo by Kari Jacobson '21.

the wine cellars of which were christened by Charlemagne in 800 A.D. Yet, the pursuit of sausages, wiener schnitzel, beef broth with pancake strips, apple strudel, Milka chocolate, Sacher torte, multivitamin juice, and fine espresso also led us from cat cafes (yes, they have cats you can pet) to bakeries to coffee houses, where we discovered community among ourselves and with the Viennese, beneath the surface.

Through this unique monthlong residency I experienced complete relaxation in European spa and sauna culture; the heady fragrance of incense wafting through a cold, Gothic cathedral; the intimacy of Gustav Klimt's *Der Kuss*; and the proud, measured trot of a Lipizzaner stallion at the Spanish Riding School. In the waterways of Austria and Czechia, I witnessed the waltzing current of Johann Strauss II's not-so-blue Blue Danube and the widening of Smetana's Moldau River below the Charles Bridge. At the Mauthausen Memorial and the Museum of Communism, I came to comprehend the dehumanizing complicity and oppression of fellow human beings, present across borders and generations. Our tour guide at Mauthausen told us that he and many Austrians today struggle to reconcile the image of their grandparents in the family album with the knowledge that they were Nazis.

First-year violinist Kira Dobberman

marveled at the variety of cultural artifacts that are important in Vienna, such as the buildings, the music, and the art. She says, "Vienna preserves the best of what they have, and I feel like that's something people can do in their own lives too. It's good to continue something that brings you joy, even if other people don't place as much value on it anymore. For instance, the dancing and ball season is still very important in Vienna."

At the annual Officer's Ball at the Hofburg Palace, LCSO members saw how the Viennese appreciate music through dance. As musicians, it was exhilarating for us to twirl to the rhythms and cadences of music in the Viennese waltz. After the first dance of the young officers in uniform and debutantes in floor-length, lily-white ball gowns, the announcement was made: "Alles tanzen!" and couples from all sides descended onto the dance floor for a lively Viennese waltz, accompanied by an orchestra in the balcony. There were nine separate ballrooms dedicated to dancing, each with its own genre of music. In one ballroom, a formally dressed Austrian officer sang along at the top of his lungs to "Africa" by Toto. ABBA classics provoked twirls, wrist flicks, and intricate footwork on the dance floor. By now the atmosphere buzzed with excitement, everyone chatting as they danced.

The ball exemplified the immersive ex-

perience of a residency. Dancing, we were no longer passive observers of a culture, but participants, welcomed for our "international flavor" with parting gift bags full of warm, sweet bread.

The residency's high point was our performance at the golden hall of the Musikverein. I grew up watching the Vienna New Year's Concert with the Vienna Philharmonic on television every year. To stand in that hall, not to mention to play on the stage where we attended performances by world-famous orchestras throughout the month, was intimidating yet exhilarating. The hall's wonderful acoustics and decor augmented a glorious and transcendent performance.

Having played together daily for a month, LCSO musicians—now constantly listening to and watching each other—had gained confidence and inspiration in our musical and social skills. In navigating four countries and their cities, we had developed autonomy and cultural awareness. The countless opportunities to explore sparked our imaginations and broadened the scope of our career possibilities. For instance, a former LCSO concertmaster now manages a Latvian opera singer we heard in Vienna. Most importantly, the residency heightened our desire to appreciate and create beautiful art around the world.