

Mozarthaus Vienna Special Exhibition



Mozarthaus Vienna
mit WIEN MUSEUM MOZARTWOHNUNG

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In the labyrinth of colours and sounds

Reflections on Mozart and Goethe with a picture cycle by Bernd Fasching

24 January 2013 – 12 January 2014

The most extensive special exhibition to date at Mozarthaus Vienna, a member of the Wien Holding group, deals with the investigations of science by Mozart and Goethe. Both were interested in the variety of nature, astronomy and the technical accomplishments of the time and they were fascinated by the connection between light, colours and sounds. The presentation looks at this connection on the basis of documents, letters, portrayals of nature and books from their estates, some of which have never been seen in Vienna before. It is accompanied by new, modern pictures and a sculpture by the Viennese painter and sculptor Bernd Fasching, who will attempt in this way to find a new approach to the image of Mozart.

Goethe's thoughts on music and his admiration of Mozart

Goethe was one of Mozart's greatest admirers. As director of the Hoftheater in Weimar he organised 282 opera evenings with works by Mozart including 49 performances of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, 20 of *The Marriage of Figaro*, 68 of *Don Giovanni* and 82 of *The Magic Flute*. In the fragment of his theory of sound he developed a view of music that is still valid today, claiming that it should first be enjoyed with the senses and then judged from intellectual, aesthetic, social and scientific standpoints. Sounds were at the centre of Goethe's thinking, and Mozart's music seems to have fitted his theories to a large extent. No other poet has had so many works put to music as Goethe. For him music was the oldest art form from which all others were derived and "to which they should all return" as a sign of its merit. One demonstration of the power of music according to Goethe was the fact that good "old music" in fact never gets old. He was also convinced of the therapeutic effect of music, and his understanding of music was centred on its life-giving and balancing effect.

Goethe's theory of colour

Goethe's attempt to devise a theory of sound arose in parallel to his work on colour theory, in which he conducted experiments for years to understand and describe the nature of colour in its entirety. Isaac Newton's light and colour experiments and his finding that the primary colours exist in sunlight was vehemently contested by Goethe. He believed that sunlight contained only white light and that colours were formed in the human brain. In keeping with the philosophy of the time he based his ideas on his own perception, hence the famous formula: "Colours are the deeds of light that first arise in the human mind and then express themselves only there in deeds and suffering." In other words they were produced purely by the brain – unlike light, which was just colourless brightness.

From Goethe's "tone colours" to twelve-tone music

In the early 20th century the "physiological complementarity of Goethe's tone colours" became a structural aspect of chromatic music, leading to twelve-tone music. Emancipating itself increasingly from the major-minor tonality, the music was free and atonal, with compositions based on twelve successive related tones. Ideas like this were developed in Vienna at the turn of the century by Arnold Schönberg, Anton Webern and Josef Hauer.

Even as an old man Goethe recalled a concert by the young Mozart in Frankfurt and spoke of his astonishingly “polychromatic” piano playing. Although Mozart’s music felt as if it had just been invented, he believed that it had been created spontaneously and fully formed in his head. Goethe compared Mozart with master painters like Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo and looked for links between sound and coloured painting. He said that Mozart had the same abiding importance as a genius as these Italian painters. The sentence “Mozart can be compared with Shakespeare” also comes from him.

A colour experience by Mozart and Goethe on one and the same day

On 10 December 1777 Mozart wrote to his father from Mannheim that the prince elector did not want to hire him after all and that he would travel to Paris. He later wrote to his friend and patron Michael Puchberg about this devastating “grey experience”, that he had almost fallen into a dark black hole and only his music had protected him from it. At the same time, Goethe was walking on the Brocken, the highest mountain in north Germany, and happily observing the colours of the sky, which ended in the “grey light of evening”. He drew a grey sketch of the landscape, the Brocken by moonlight – two completely different experiences, but both to do with the colour grey and both on the same day!

Mozart, Goethe and the natural sciences

Mozart and Goethe were both interested in the latest scientific discoveries. They carried out astoundingly similar observations of animals and nature, as telescopes and measuring instruments continued to be refined. Inspired by the work of J. Ebert, Mozart had gradually acquired a picture gallery of birds and other animals, to which he soon added detailed drawings of plants. The following anecdote is illustrative.

Mozart’s father Leopold died on 28 May 1787 in Salzburg, on the same day as Mozart’s bird, a starling, which he had bought on 27 May 1784 and which had shared his study for three years. It could whistle the first five bars of the Rondo from the Piano Concerto in G major for Barbara Ployer note perfect. Mozart invited friends to an almost macabre double burial procession in memory of his father and the dead bird. Everybody had to follow him and the laid out bird to a small grave that had been dug in the garden. He then wrote a poem dedicated to the starling. He bought another bird, a canary, which kept him company on the many lonely nights while his wife was taking a cure in Baden. Mozart set it free a few hours before he died from this deathbed in a small house at Rauhensteingasse, Stadt 970, Vienna.

The exhibition features original objects such as the only living mask of Goethe made by K. G. Weisser around 1807, Goethe’s fragment “Die Zauberflöte Zweyter Theil” from 1798, and many books from the estates of Mozart and Goethe never before seen in Vienna.

Gernot Friedel, the curator of this special exhibition, grew up in Innsbruck and studied theatre at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Max Reinhard Seminar and the University of Vienna. As assistant director at the Burgtheater and the Salzburger Festspiele he worked with the likes of Herbert von Karajan, Heinz Hilpert, Leopold Lindberg, Fritz Kortner and Otomar Krejca. As a permanent assistant to theatre manager and director Ernst Haeussermann he was responsible for the theatre programme of the Salzburger Festspiele and the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna. His first venture as a director was Martin Walser’s *Zimmerschlacht* at Theater in der Josefstadt with Susi Nicoletti and Curd Jürgens. His work in the theatre includes three new productions of *Jedermann* by Hugo von Hofmannsthal at the Salzburger Festspiele, with Klaus Maria Brandauer, Helmut Lohner, Gerd Voss and Ulrich Tukur in the

main roles. He has received an award from the Province of Salzburg for his work. Friedel has worked as a director for films and television with productions like the documentary *Mozart und Da Ponte*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Mozart fragen*, a film based on his own play, and *Salieri sulle tracce die Mozart*, with performers like Wilma Degischer, Heinz Marecek, Klaus Maria Brandauer, Helmut Lohner and Mario Adorf. His work includes plays such as *Othello darf nicht platzen* with Otto Schenk, scripts, literature programmes, exhibitions and novels.

The painter and sculptor Bernd Fasching, born 1955 in Vienna, created a furore in the year 2000 with his project "Westwerk" at St Stephan's Cathedral in Vienna, which was specially opened up for his contemporary exhibition. In a project entitled "12 Days, 12 Nights", the artist created twelve pictures in each of seven cities between 1987 and 2006 inspired by the 12 Labours of Hercules and conversations with the people watching him while he worked. With his walk-in sculpture "The Hammer of Thor" (1990) in the entrance area of the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna, the project "Terra Nova" (1996–7) in the Dominican Republic and his latest work "A More Complex Reality" in Istria the sculptor sends visitors on a personal journey of discovery and brings art to life. The works entitled "Mozart Vibrations" shown in this exhibition are the result of an intensive study of Mozart.

The special exhibition is included in the admission price for Mozarthaus Vienna!

Mozarthaus Vienna: opening hours and admission prices

Mozarthaus Vienna with the Wien Museum Mozart apartment, a member of the Wien Holding group (A-1010 Vienna, Domgasse 5), is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Information on the museum, special exhibition and event programme in German and English is available at www.mozarthausvienna.at.

Admission prices: €10 full price ticket, €8 reduced (students, senior citizens), €7 groups (10+ persons), €3 children up to 14 years, €20 family ticket (2 adults and up to 3 children).

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