

The Fairburn singers – Yorkshire & Humber – Sally Whittingham

Trip to Vienna – 19 - 23 May 2025

The Fairburn Singers, a 40 strong mixed voice choir based in the tiny village of Fairburn, North Yorkshire, have been on our travels again, this time to the beautiful city of Vienna. Vienna is located in north eastern Austria, at the eastern most extension of the Alps in the Vienna Basin. The earliest settlement, at the location of today's inner city, was south of the meandering Danube while the city now spans both sides of the river.



Our party, consisting of 27 choir members (singers) and 20 friends and family, embarked on our journey to Manchester airport on Monday 19 May, arriving in plenty of time for our flight. Accompanied as usual by our amazing Musical Director, Andris Ugulis and our accompanist, Mandy Jones, we arrived in Vienna in the early evening and were in our hotel in Kaiserwasser by 8.30pm, where, travel weary, most of us retired to bed early.

Tuesday 20 May dawned sunny and warm, as we made our way via the U-Bahn subway just across the road from hotel, into the city centre to St Stephensplatz and St Stephen's Cathedral, Austria's most prominent national symbol, known for its intricately tiled roof and nearly 500foot south tower. This was the venue for our "flash mob" a capella recital of *If ye love me*. We then had some free time to explore more of the city and get some lunch, before getting back to the hotel to prepare for our first concert.

We headed off by coach to Gumpoldskirchen, 26 km south east of the city of Vienna. Gumpoldskirchen is located on the so-called thermal line (ger. Thermenregion), which produces unique climatic conditions for viticulture. Our hosts, the Austrian Male Voice Choir (MACH4) had invited us to a joint concert in their church. We were met by the Chair of the choir and taken to the ancient building where the wine had originally been pressed and is now a wedding venue, and told about the history of the village and the wine produced there.

After that, we headed down the hill into the small town (4000 inhabitants) and the Town



Hall where we were met by the Mayor who welcomed us to her town, with a short speech followed by wine and an exchange of gifts, and the presentation of a plaque to be added to a list of all the other choirs who have visited the town since 1995, after which we headed into the church for a short rehearsal, before our concert began, to a full audience, at 7.30pm. Introductions in English and German were made and both choirs sang a selection of their

favourite songs, and the concert ended with a joint rendition of *Die Nacht*, which we had been learning back at home. Further exchanges of gifts took place after the concert and

then we were escorted to the winery where we were provided with a traditional Austrian meal of different meats, potatoes and salads, and lots and lots of their local wine, the very lovely Konigswein, Spätrot Rotgipfler, a white wine endemic to the town. However, the highlight of the evening was the informal singing from both choirs and the general air of bonhomie in the room. MACH4 were the perfect hosts and kept us topped up with both food and wine, and entertained with their fabulous singing. We have taken some fantastic memories away from that evening.

Wednesday 21 May – another fairly early start and another trip on the U-Bahn subway back to the city centre to take part in a walking tour with two excellent and well-informed tour guides who took us through the streets of Vienna and told us about the history of the city, including the Habsburgs, King Franz Joseph I and his wife, the Empress Elizabeth (known as Sisi), and prior to them, Empress Maria Theresa, the only woman to reign in her own right in Austria.

We toured all the wonderful buildings including the Schönbrunn Palace, Hofburg, State



Opera House, Secession, the Haas-Haus, the Belvedere museum and saw many more statues and gardens, where we found Mozart, situated at the head of a beautiful treble clef of flowers. We were also walked through Hero Square and along Ring Road.

From the late-19th century to 1938, the city remained a centre of high culture and of modernism. A world capital of music, Vienna played host to composers such as Johannes Brahms, Anton Bruckner, Gustav Mahler, and Richard Strauss, as well as Joseph

Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Franz Liszt. The city's cultural contributions in the first half of the 20th century included, among many, the Vienna Secession movement in art, the Second Viennese School, the architecture of Adolf Loos, the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the Vienna Circle.

The walking tours are certainly the best way to see the city, but after two hours of walking, everyone was exhausted, and I was not surprised to find that my step count for that day was over 13,000!

After all this culture, and another couple of hours of free time to grab some lunch, we made our way back to the hotel to prepare for our second concert. Back on the subway and then onto a tram, we arrived at the Anglican Christ Church located next to the British Embassy in Jauresgasse 17-19 and which has grown from a small embassy community to a thriving and diverse church in the heart of a great city. Here we were welcomed by the Church Council to the Church Centre a few hundred yards from the church with tea (English Breakfast) and sandwiches and cake, before making our way into the church for a quick rehearsal. Our concert started at 7.30pm and the church was almost full to capacity. Our repertoire included choir favourites, *One Voice*, *Let the*

*River Run, Benedictus (from the Armed Man), Let the Earth Resound and When the Saints go Marching In.* Afterwards, it was back to the Church Centre for wine and nibbles before we made our way back to the hotel via tram and subway (we were getting good at this by this time!).

Thursday 22 May – a free day. No plans had been made for our final full day in Vienna, so we all made our separate choices of places to visit. I joined a group who went on a boat trip on the Danube canal where we sailed serenely up and then back again, slightly disappointed not to have actually touched the River Danube at all. We then went back into the city centre, did a little souvenir shopping and then found a lovely traditional café where we ate wonderful cake in beautiful surroundings.



For our final evening, Andris had arranged a meal for us at a typical Austrian restaurant a ten minute walk from the hotel. The staff were not fazed by 47 people arriving en masse and we were soon seated and presented with a menu all in German. Much googling took place to establish what was on offer and orders placed. We had a lovely final evening, the food was delicious and the bar was open, and we were back at the hotel by 10pm. Some final packing was done and an early night ready for our homeward journey the next day.

We left Vienna to drive to Bratislava airport for our flight home, as this proved more convenient than flights from Vienna. Bratislava, located just over the Austrian border into Slovakia is a modern airport with no-one in it. Ours was the only flight going out, but we still had to wait over an hour for the check-in to open and about the same for the duty free and café in departures to open their doors. A good flight home and arrival at Manchester airport all went to plan, although the massive queue to get through passport control was somewhat mind-boggling. Eventually, after finding our coach, we were then on the road home to Fairburn, where we arrived nearly 2.5 hours later due to holiday and Friday traffic on the M62.

So, another very successful 'Fairburn Singers on Tour' completed for 2025. Our collective thanks go to Andris for his absolutely excellent arrangements and attention to detail which meant that everything was under control and went according to plan.

Vienna is a beautiful city and our concert with MACH4 was the undoubted highlight of our trip and we are delighted to be welcoming them to England and in particular to a joint concert at Selby Abbey on Saturday 31 May, followed by a reception hosted by the Fairburn Singers.

Sally Whittingham, Secretary, The Fairburn Singers, May 2025