

Martina Nussbaumer. *Musikstadt Wien: Die Konstruktion eines Images.* Freiburg i.Br.: Romback Verlag, Edition Parabasen IFK, 2007. 393 pp. EUR 38.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-7930-9472-2.



Reviewed by Joseph W. Moser

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Commissioned by Benita Blessing (Oregon State University)

Vienna's cultural identity results from many aspects of this diverse former capital of the Habsburg Empire. Music is certainly a central element of this identity, and one that has shaped the city for centuries. Martina Nußbaumer examines the construction of Vienna as the capital city of music in her book *Musikstadt Wien: Die Konstruktion eines Images*, focusing primarily on the period from 1860 to 1914. Despite some shortcomings, the book offers important insight into the relationship between music and Vienna's development.

The chapters in this book cover various topics concerning music in Vienna from the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of World War I. Several of the events covered offer insight into the political and cultural struggles of the time. In one chapter, for instance, Nußbaumer considers the Fourth German Choral Festival (*Sängerbundesfest*) in 1890, examining this gathering as part of the construction of Vienna as a German city of songs. Another chapter covers the Viennese Music Festival Week in 1912, which Nußbaumer sees as a project of Austrian integration. This contrast is

really quite fascinating. Still, it raises the question of whether the musical events actually influenced the city, or whether the city's political and cultural struggles impacted these kinds of musical events in the city. There is no doubt that music played a significant role in Vienna, but how is this different from other European cities? This is where the book is too concerned with specific musical institutions in Vienna without analyzing their relative significance to the world of music.

One reason for this lack of contextualization is Nußbaumer's almost exclusive focus on primary sources from Vienna (travel guides, pamphlets, and other written sources describing large musical events) from the period between 1860 and 1914. Although these materials provide unique insight into this period, one cannot view this period (and its written documents) in isolation from the geopolitical history that preceded and followed it, especially given the Austrian attempts to construct an unassailable, distinct cultural image that was not only the product of the second half of the nineteenth century. Nußbaumer's emphasis on

these years forces her to consider only the liberal period following neo-absolutism in Vienna--roughly from 1861, when the Vienna city legislature was first elected, until 1895--as the most formative in constructing this image. Certainly, much of present-day Vienna refers to this period which is also known as the *Gründerzeit* (foundational period). However, the fact that the city built several cultural institutions supporting music, as well as monuments of--and streets named after--famous musicians, does not necessarily set the city apart from other cultural centers of Europe.

Reading this book, one cannot help but wonder about music's role in Vienna before 1860. Obviously, even before the city's bourgeois class grew in importance, Vienna was one of the key centers of music in central Europe. The musical construction of Austria and Vienna in the First and Second Republics--continuing even during the seven years of the Nazi regime--is worthy of more research. Nußbaumer only briefly mentions these periods in her introduction, where she quickly explains that enough has already been written on music in these periods. This claim leaves the reader asking for more than just a few footnote references. Because the book's title does not include the time frame she covers, the perception that this book will comprise a history of the "Music City of Vienna" is somewhat misleading. Nonetheless, scholars who are interested in *Gründerzeit* culture and history, as well as urban and music history, will find this book an interesting addition to their libraries.

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