

Musical Treasure Chest #44

When I turned 40, my husband gave me a wonderful present, a trip to Vienna. I have mentioned several times about my adventures in Austria, both as a player in a festival in Graz and then on various trips with my husband. On this birthday trip, which was now 20 years ago, we spent a week in the city of music, attending concerts, eating at delightful restaurants and just enjoying the incredible atmosphere of this place. I am not certain my husband enjoyed it quite as much as I did (he finds the Viennese to be a bit standoffish; completely immersed in the city's musical heritage I did not notice any snubs).

My husband booked a beautiful and historic hotel, Konig von Ungarn, in the heart of the old city, just a few steps from St. Stephens Cathedral and all the important musical sites (the churches where Haydn masses were premiered, Mozart's and Beethoven's apartments, the palaces where many important concerts were played....the list is endless). I was ecstatic, I had unlimited opportunities for exploring and experiencing; every street corner I turned had yet another historic placard, each describing some important musical event. The hotel itself was gorgeous, with an old world feel, setting the stage for my composer treks.

I brought with me on this trip one of my favorite books, a 1977 Mozart biography by Wolfgang Hildesheimer. I was hoping to refresh my memory about aspects of Mozart's life in Vienna, and to use the book as a jumping off point to explore important musical places in Vienna. Much to my husband's chagrin, these excursions involved long walks in cold weather through the city. I carried the book around with me like a bible, always looking for my next Mozart adventure.

Towards the end of our week there, we came down to the hotel's desk one morning to inquire about getting tickets to a performance. While I waited for my husband Fred to get the information, I looked behind the counter and saw an older employee faxing letters. His resemblance to the **pianist Alfred Brendel** was notable. Later I mentioned this to Fred, who had also seen the man, but he assured me I was wrong. The next morning we returned to the desk to get dinner

reservations, and the same man was there again, behind the counter, faxing materials. I mentioned to the concierge the striking resemblance to Alfred Brendel. His response: "Why, Madame, that is Alfred Brendel. He always stays here when he is in Vienna. In fact, he is staying in the room next to you." My response caught me completely off guard: like an adolescent meeting Elvis Presley, I became not only tongued-tied, but emotionally overwhelmed. The concierge asked if I wanted to meet him, instead I ran up to our room, mortified that I had teared up on learning the news. The next day Fred wanted to set up a chance for me to have tea with him, but I was too intimidated; instead, I opted to have him sign my Hildesheimer book. I have thought back on the chance encounter many times and wondered if I should be sorry that I didn't screw up my courage to sit and talk with him. But I think, actually, that I am happy to have seen him only from afar and to know that I was in the presence of one of the world's great musicians. He will always be on a pedestal for me (and I didn't give myself a chance to say anything stupid to him!!).

And, now I share with you one of my favorite pieces played so excruciatingly beautifully by Herr Brendel. Here is the **Mozart c minor Fantasia K 475**:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07AqvCQGJ6g>