



The American-Austrian Cultural Society

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From the Editor:

Dear Members and Friends:

The carol "Silent Night, Holy Night" means a lot to me and my family. One of my ancestors served as pastor at the little church in Oberndorf, Austria, at the time this world famous song conquered the entire world. Only on Christmas Eve did we begin the celebration with this wonderful song, standing in front of the Christmas tree with real candles burning. This was the most enchanting moment for us children.

I want to convey positive thoughts for the coming years — we can do it:

Peace on Earth!

Warmly, Gerda Merwald



From the Embassy of Austria

Ambassador Eva Nowotny left the United States at the end of August 2008 after serving five successful, sometimes difficult but always rewarding, years in Washington. In her own words, "My husband and I leave with a strong belief in the strength of this country, of its institutions, of its value system, of its sense of responsibility, and we will be happy to continue to contribute to the transatlantic relationship, albeit from the other side of the Atlantic." We will



all greatly miss her personal warmth and great support of the American-Austrian Cultural Society.

Until her successor is appointed, Andreas Riecken is heading the Embassy as Chargé d' Affaires.

On October 26, 2008, the Austrian Embassy invited Austrians and friends of Austria to celebrate the Austrian National Day. In his speech on this

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John-Paul offers discounts for members of the American-Austrian Society.

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occasion, Mr. Riecken addressed many important facts some of which are highlighted below.

Austria's Sovereignty

It was exactly 53 years ago when Austria again took its place as a free and sovereign country in the family of nations, marking the beginning of Austria's remarkable development towards the country we know today. Austrians are very much aware of, and will always be grateful for, the significant contribution of the United States which made this development possible.

United Nations Elects Austria to UN Security Council

On October 17, 2008 Austria succeeded in being elected as one of the ten non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council for the next two years. Within the very first round, Austria won 133 votes, thereby reaching the necessary two-thirds majority. Austria was up against two strong competitors, Turkey and Iceland. Together with Austria, Turkey was also elected.



In its work for the Security Council, Austria will focus on those principles that have long characterized her commitment to the United Nations: A

determined commitment to dialogue, unflinching support for human rights and the rule of law, and persistent efforts aimed at disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Global Economic Crisis Affects Austria

As many other parts of the world, Austria, too, has been affected by the current financial and economic crisis. The continual economic prosperity of the last three years came to an end during the second quarter of 2008, whereby the strong economic growth over the last number of years was clearly due to Austria's exports. With an export volume of over 200 billion USD, Austria is the European Union's 9th largest exporter.

However, Austria is still considered one of the wealthiest countries in the world. In terms of prosperity based upon Gross Domestic Product per capita, Austria ranks 10th place worldwide and 4th place within the EU.

Schengen Area Enlarged

With the coming year 2009 we look back on the last twenty years since the fall of the Iron Curtain, what has been achieved in terms of building Europe together, and working to overcome difficulties cannot be underestimated.

One shining example of progress achieved is the enlargement of the Schengen area at the beginning of this



year. Where twenty years ago there once stood the Iron Curtain, there are no more border controls. Some 780 miles of Austrian borders, shared with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia, meanwhile function like our borders with Germany or Italy. The new Europe is the Europe of overcoming borders and lines of separation.

Linz Named a European Capital of Culture

In 2009 Linz will be the European Capital of Culture, together with Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. A wide array of events will showcase European diversity. Linz is a city of 190,000 inhabitants and center of an economically-thriving region located on the banks of the Danube River. This is an excellent opportunity to visit this city and to take advantage of the great offers Linz will extend to its guests in 2009.



Embassy Announces New Director of the Cultural Forum

Andrea Schrammel, the new Director of the Cultural Forum of the Austrian Embassy, has assumed her duties succeeding Margareta Ploder who took up a new assignment in New York.

St. Nikolaus & Krampus Children's Afternoon

On Saturday, December 6, 2008, the American-Austrian Cultural Society organized for the fourteenth consecutive time the traditional festive afternoon with St. Nikolaus and Krampus for families in the Washington, DC area, marking the beginning of the advent season.

In a change from past practice, the Church of the Annunciation on Massachusetts Avenue graciously allowed us the use of their lovely parish hall which provided a fitting frame for the celebration. Our sincere thanks go to Father Lockman and his staff.



This year's event featured a stunning musical performance by young singers, Drew Colby and Shauna Kreidler, under the leadership of Christian Meyers, Director of Music Ministries, Trinity Church, Upperville, VA. The young singers performed an impressive program of holiday music and led us in the traditional sing-along of American and Austrian carols. Additionally, the children were read one of Karl Heinrich Waggerl's Christmas legends.

St. Nikolaus again paid a visit to the children, telling them about the saint's life, and distributing advent calendars and goodie bags. He was ably supported by the wonderfully costumed, scary Krampus who had to be chased out of the hall lest he would frighten the smallest of our guests too much. Our thanks go to our Fred Obernberger and Richard Meyer and their spouses for their long-standing contributions to this part of the program.

Everybody greatly enjoyed the delicious holiday cookies and Gugelhupf as well as Glühwein expertly prepared by Wilhelm Jonach, our famous Austrian-born chef and master baker.



The celebration came to a perfect conclusion as snowflakes started to fall gently, right on cue, at the end of the afternoon, with children running to the windows with delighted squeals "It's snowing! It's snowing!"

As in years past, the modest proceeds from the event will benefit the SOS Children's Villages. Our thanks go to those of you who contributed financially and to all of St. Nikolaus' "elves" who made this event possible.

Frohe Weihnachten und Prosit Neujahr!

Herzlichst,
Ulli Wiesner
Managing Director

News from Austria

Austrian expatriates: Voting is Easier Thanks to New Postal Vote

By introducing the postal vote, major barriers to participating in the parliamentary elections on September 28, 2008 have been removed for about 500,000 Austrians living abroad, e.g. the need for witnesses. In a press interview on September 4, 2008, Gustav Chlestil, President of the World Association of Austrian Expatriates (Weltbund der Auslandsösterreicher / AÖWB) stressed his hope that the election turnout would increase. "A few thousand votes had often been decisive for the election result." The AÖWB also wanted to have a representative in Parliament, Chlestil said.

Instead of having to bring witnesses, it was now sufficient to depose an affidavit. More information on the election procedure for Austrian expatriates is provided on the Web sites of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior:
www.wahlnfo.aussenministerium.at
www.bmi.gv.at/wahl08.

Pope Benedict XVI. Attends Concert of Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

The seventh edition of the Festival of Sacred Music took place in Rome from October 12 to November 30, 2008. The most beautiful churches of the Eternal City are the venue of 13 concerts. One

of the highlights was the concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Christoph Eschenbach in the Basilica San Paolo fuori le Mura (St. Paul's outside the Walls) on October 13, 2008. Pope Benedict XVI. enjoyed the interpretation of Anton Bruckner's Sixth Symphony.

Moreover, the **Youth Orchestra of the Americas and the New England Conservatory Orchestra** under Helmuth Rilling performed Joseph Haydn's "Harmony Mass" at St. Peter's Basilica on November 26, 2008.

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Haydn Year 2009

Would you know who composed Germany's National Anthem? It was Joseph Haydn!

In 2009, the music world around the globe will commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). Haydn started his career as a member of the Vienna Boys' Choir in Vienna, the city to which he also returned after working for the Princes Esterházy in what is now Burgenland and Hungary.

In Vienna, he enjoyed his world renown for 19 years. Joseph Haydn was a very beloved person, esteemed by his contemporaries, diligent, humorous, affable and a straight shooter who was not spoiled by his steep climb from humble conditions into the highest social circles.

To Mozart he was a fatherly friend and Beethoven was his most famous student. Numerous sites in Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland and Sopron attest to the life of the then and now so popular composer, Joseph Haydn.

"Papa Haydn" enjoys unbowed popularity to this day. For example, every year the Haydn Festival draws music lovers from all over the world, Vienna's Theater an der Wien will stage a Haydn opera and more.



190th Anniversary of the first performance of "Silent Night, Holy Night" ("Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht")

The story of the world famous carol started in 1816, when Joseph Mohr wrote a six-stanza poem with each verse beginning with "Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht." He asked his close friend Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolmaster, organist, and choirmaster from Arnsdorf, near Oberndorf, to compose a melody to his poem. Franz Xaver and Joseph could not imagine the impact their composition would have on Christmas celebrations around the globe for many generations to come.

A family of traveling folk singers from the Zillertal Valley in Tyrol made this song part of their regular repertoire, and performed throughout Europe, as well as on a tour to America in 1819. Over the years, "Silent Night" has been translated into more than 300 languages and dialects and still serves as the centerpiece of Christmas celebrations around the world.

Planned Events by the Society

The Board of Directors will meet again in January 2009 and firm up events in the near future, such as the "Kaffeehaus Jause," cooking lessons, especially Apfelstrudel by Wilhelm Jonach, literature readings, and much more. Look for upcoming event dates and information in our newsletter.



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Lufthansa's Acquisition of Austrian Airlines To Undergo European Commission Probe

PARIS (AFP) — Air France-KLM said Thursday it had filed a complaint with the European Commission against conditions surrounding the acquisition of Austrian Airlines by Germany's Lufthansa. The sale of Austrian Airlines (AUA) to Lufthansa "includes state aid components that call for an in-depth probe by the European Commission," an Air France-KLM statement said. The Franco-Dutch carrier had been an unsuccessful bidder for AUA. Austria approved the sale of its stake in loss-making AUA to Lufthansa despite protests from unions, opposition parties and rival airlines. AUA declined to comment directly, referring all inquiries to OeIAG, where spokeswoman Anita Bauer said, "The sale process is in line with EU regulations and this has been confirmed several times by a number of independent experts."



The Board of Directors, American-Austrian Cultural Society, wish all Members and Friends Happy Holidays and Prosit Neujahr 2009!