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# Musical Venues in Vienna, Seventeenth Century to the Present

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Ingeborg Harer

Where in Vienna did performances of musical works occur? Which were the theaters, the opera houses, the music rooms, the concert halls where performances took place? Over the past four centuries a number of venues may be singled out that had a special place in the musical life of Vienna. Indeed, composers appear frequently to have conceived their works with a particular musical location in mind. In this article I offer a résumé of the principal Viennese musical buildings, the circumstances surrounding their construction, and the more important musical works presented in them.

## *Theaters and Opera Houses*

### 1. *Theater in der "Favorita"* (now the *Theresianum*)

A room in the former summer castle (built 1615-20). After the fire of 1683 (resulting from the Turkish siege) L.O. Burnacini rebuilt the castle (1687-91).

Operas were presented in the *Comoedien oder opern Saall* (probably the oldest room in Vienna where opera was performed) or in the garden (i.e., at the lake—where Johann Joseph Fux's *Angelica, vintrice d'Alcina* was presented in 1716— or at the *grotta*).

## **2. Grosses, Kleines Hoftheater (now the *Grosser, Kleiner Redoutensaal*)**

Giovanni Battista Carlone constructed this room, called *Neue Saal oder Danz Plaz zu Hoff*, along with a smaller hall in 1629-30. It was renovated several times (e.g. by Francesco Galli Bibiena in 1698) and after 1720 was called *Grosses Hoftheater*. The large hall (51.3 x 19m.) was used for opera performances until 1744. In 1747 Antonio Galli-Bibiena converted it into a ballroom (called the *Redoutensaal*). The large room (now called *Grosser Redoutensaal*) seats about 1500 (with a reverberation of 1.4 seconds). Until 1870 this was the largest concert hall in Vienna. The small room (now called *Kleiner Redoutensaal*) seats about 400.

Baroque operas presented here included the premières of Antonio Draghi's *Alceste* (1700), Fux's *Il fato monachico* (1700), and G.B. Bononcini's *Il natale di Giunone* (1708). Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven wrote dances for social occasions such as balls taking place in these rooms.

The large hall was frequently utilized for concerts (prior to 1870), including the first performances of Haydn's *The Seasons* (1801), of Beethoven's Symphony no. 8 (1814), and of Brahms's *Requiem* (1867). Other notable events were Paganini's first concert in Vienna (1828) and Brahms's conducting of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (1864, the first time in Vienna).

## **3. Theater "auf der Cortina" (today no longer existent)**

A separate wooden building was constructed in what is now the *Bibliothekshof* (the courtyard of the National Library) by Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini for the wedding of Leopold I and Margarita Teresa in 1666. It had a rectangular shape (64.6 x 26.6 m., 14.6 m. in height) with three galleries and probably seated about 1000 persons. It was pulled down in 1683, reconstructed in 1687, and eventually destroyed by fire in 1699.

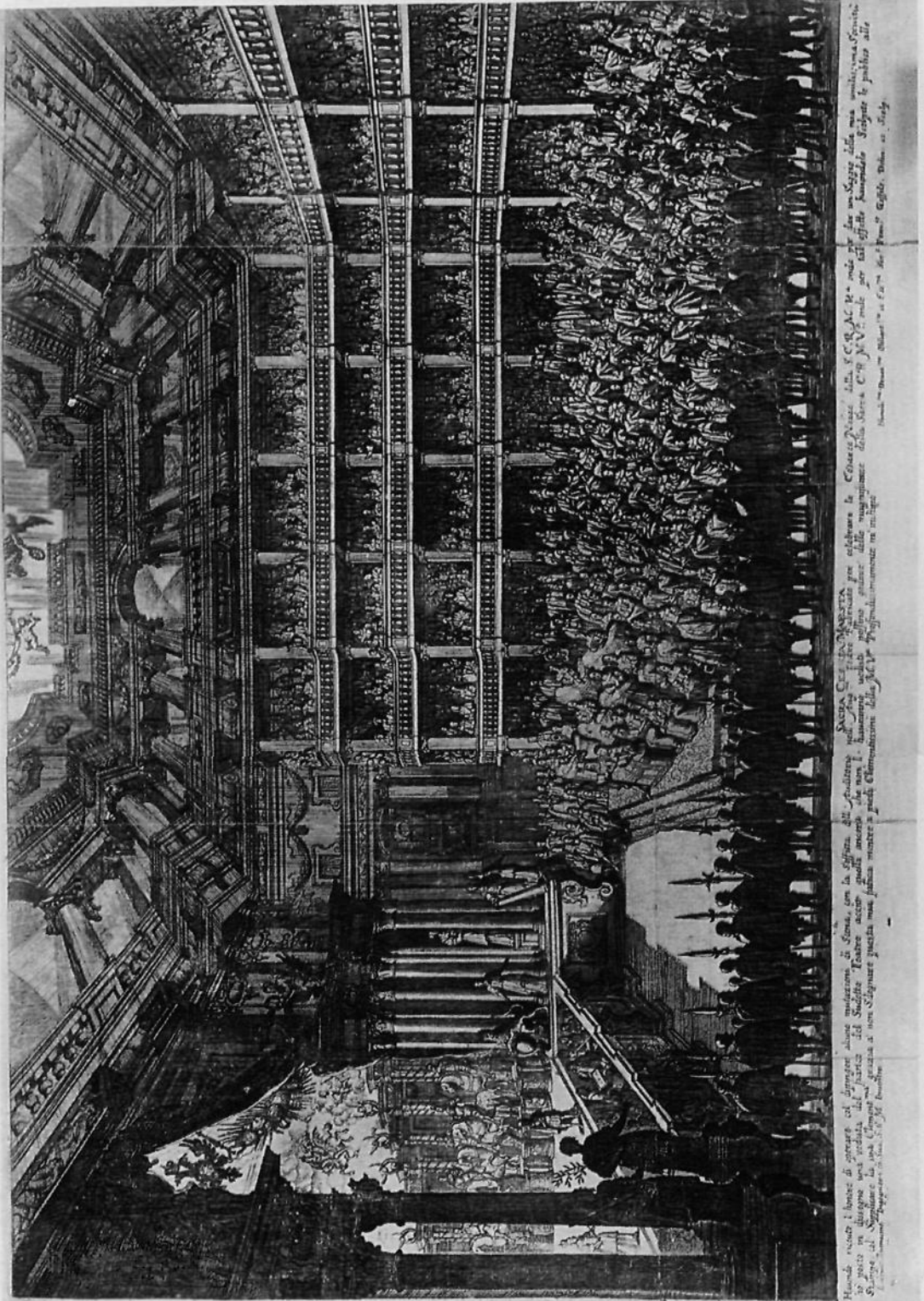
Antonio Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro* was first presented in this theater (part one, 12 July 1668; part two, 14 July 1668)—see the illustration on the following page.

## **4. Altes Burgtheater, Hoftheater nächst der Burg (no longer existent)**

This was the former *Hofballhaus* at Michaelerplatz, which was renovated under Maria Theresia and opened in 1748. The proscenium opening was only 9.2 m. in width, but the stage was 15 m. in depth plus 8 m. of back stage (i.e., the stage was funnel-shaped). For acoustic reasons the action

## Festival Performance of Cesti's *Il Pomo d'oro* (1668) in the Theater "auf der Cortina"

(Stich by Frans Geffels. Photo by courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Porträtsammlung und Bildarchiv, LW 75. 131.)



took place in the very front of the stage. Reverberation time (in the late 18th c.) was estimated as being between 1 and 1.3 seconds.

The theater opened 14 May 1748 with a performance of Gluck's *Semiramis*. Later Gluck presented his "reform" operas *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), *Alceste* (1767), and *Paride ed Helena* (1770) here. Hasse, Salieri, and Paisiello also composed their operas for this theater. During the 1750s the French type of "Opera comique" was introduced and Gluck worked with the (then French) troupe of the Burgtheater.

In 1778 the "Deutsches Singspiel" was initiated by Joseph II with the first performance of *Die Bergknappen* by Ignaz Umlauf (seven more of whose "Singspiele" were presented between 1778 and 1785). Until 1781 eight to nine "Singspiele" were given each month, often together with a drama on the same evening. Further examples of "Singspiele" include Johann Schenk's *Der Dorfbarbier* (18 June 1785) and Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf's *Der Apotheker und der Doktor* (11 July 1786).

Mozart composed his *Entführung aus dem Serail* for this theater (first performance 16 July 1782). Later, when in 1783 Italian opera (*opera buffa*) was introduced, Mozart wrote *Le nozze di Figaro* (1 May 1786) and *Così fan tutte* (26 January 1790) for this same theater. *Don Giovanni* was first performed in Vienna in this theater (7 May 1788).

Mozart presented a "Musikalische Akademie" here (22 March 1783), playing the piano in his Concertos KV 415 and KV 175 and Rondo KV 382. In later subscription concerts Mozart offered for the first time his Concertos KV 482, KV 488, and KV 491. Beethoven's first performance as pianist in Vienna (29 March 1795) took place here with his Second Piano Concerto (Op. 19). Later (1801) he presented his *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* in this theater.

On the occasion of Franz II's birthday (12 February 1797) Haydn's "Gott erhalte"—the Austrian national anthem until 1918—was first performed in its orchestral version. Haydn's *Creation* was first performed here, with 180 musicians, on 19 March 1799. In 1888 the old theater was replaced by the new *Burgtheater* on the Ringstrasse.

##### **5. Kärntnertortheater, Hoftheater nächst dem Kärntnertor, Hofoper** (no longer existent)

In 1709 Antonio Beduzzi built this theater "next to the Kärntnertor." It burned down in 1761, was rebuilt in enlarged form in 1763, and reopened

in 1766. It was finally closed on 17 April 1870.

In 1780 Antonio Salieri became the musical director and wrote his operas primarily for this theater (during the reign of Joseph II German troupes performed at the *Burgtheater*, Italian at the *Kärntnertortheater*).

In 1781 (3 April) Mozart offered a "Musikalische Akademie," including a symphony and solo performance on the piano. In 1814 a third (successful) version of Beethoven's *Fidelio* was presented here, as was his Symphony no. 9 and three movements of the *Missa solemnis* in 1824 (first performances).

## 6. *Schönbrunner Schlosstheater*

Built for Maria Theresa (1744-47) this is the oldest existing theater in Vienna, and is nearly unchanged.

## 7. *Freihaus auf der Wieden* (no longer existent)

This theater was opened in 1787 and run by actor-manager Emanuel Schikaneder

Mozart's *Zauberflöte* (libretto by Schikaneder) was written for this theater and first performed 30 September 1791 (it was repeated 222 times by 1801 when the theater closed). *Don Giovanni* was performed here in German in 1792.

## 8. *Theater an der Wien*

This theater was opened in 1801 with Schikaneder as director. There was a concentration on German operas to rival the Italian operas at the *Kärntnertor*.

This was the venue of a great many of Beethoven's first performances: *Christus am Ölberg* (1803), Symphony no. 2, Piano Concerto no. 3, Symphony no. 3 (1805), *Fidelio* (1805, not successful), Symphonies no. 5 and 6 (1808), Piano Concerto in G Major (1808), and *Chorfantasie* (1808).

Other first performances include Weber's *Abu Hassan* (1813) and Schubert's *Zauberharfe* (1820) and *Rosamunde* (1823). In 1862 Wagner performed the Overture to *Die Meistersinger* here for the first time in Vienna. It is reported that he did not like the acoustics and had a wooden cupola built.

### 9. (*Kaiserlich königliches Hofopernhaus*) (today the *Staatsoper*)

Built (1861-69) by Eduard van der Nüll and August Siccardusburg according to the architectural style of an Italian opera house (*La Fenice* in Venice). It was destroyed on 12 March 1945, but reopened on 5 November 1955 with 1658 seats and 580 standing places (the reverberation time is 1.3 seconds).

Famous composers who conducted their own works here include Wagner (*Lohengrin*), Verdi (*Aïda* and *Requiem*), and Brahms (*Deutsches Requiem*). First performances were presented by R. Strauss of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1916) and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919). Other famous conductors were Gustav Mahler, Felix Weingartner, Franz Schalk, and Clemens Kraus.

### 10. "*Kaiser Jubiläums-Stadttheater*" (today the *Volksoper*)

Built in 1898 by Franz Karl Freiherr von Krauss and Alexander Graf, it was remodeled in 1938 and enlarged in 1962 and 1973.

### 11. *Josefsstädter Theater*

Beethoven wrote his Overture to *Die Weihe des Hauses* for the opening of this theater (1822).

## *Music Rooms, Concert Halls*

### 12. *Saal zur Mehlgrube* (no longer existent)

This building was constructed in 1698, very likely according to plans by Fischer von Erlach. It was used as a concert hall until 1830, but later it became a ballroom. Finally, as the Hotel Munch it was closed in 1896 and destroyed in 1897.

In 1781-82 the first subscription concerts occurred, and Mozart performed here as piano soloist. In 1785 he organized six concerts. His father Leopold reported that 150-200 persons were in attendance.

**13. *Grosser Saal des Niederösterreichischen Landhauses, Landständischer Saal (Sitzungssaal der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung)***

Built in 1571 by Hans Saphoy it is almost unchanged today. It is 26 x 12 m. and has excellent acoustics.

Don Cesare Gonzaga's opera *La caccia felice* was performed 9 March 1631 for the wedding of Ferdinand III and Dona Maria of Spain. The hall was rented for concerts beginning in 1813 and reportedly could hold as many as 100 musicians and 200 listeners. "Concerts spirituels" took place here during the season of 1821/22. Between 1825 and 1828 Schubert performed frequently in this hall. The last concert occurred in 1840.

**14. *Festsaal der Alten Universität, Aula der Universität* (today the *Akademie der Wissenschaften*)**

Originally constructed (1753-55) according to plans by Jean Nicolas Jadot, it was destroyed by fire in 1861.

Subscription concerts took place here during the winter of 1807/08, and the first four symphonies of Beethoven were performed 10 times. A famous performance of Haydn's *Creation* (27 March 1808), with the composer in attendance (his last public appearance) and 1300 in the audience, was directed here by Salieri—see the picture on the following page. On 8 December 1813 Beethoven's Symphony no. 7 as well as his *Wellingtons Sieg* were first performed in this hall.

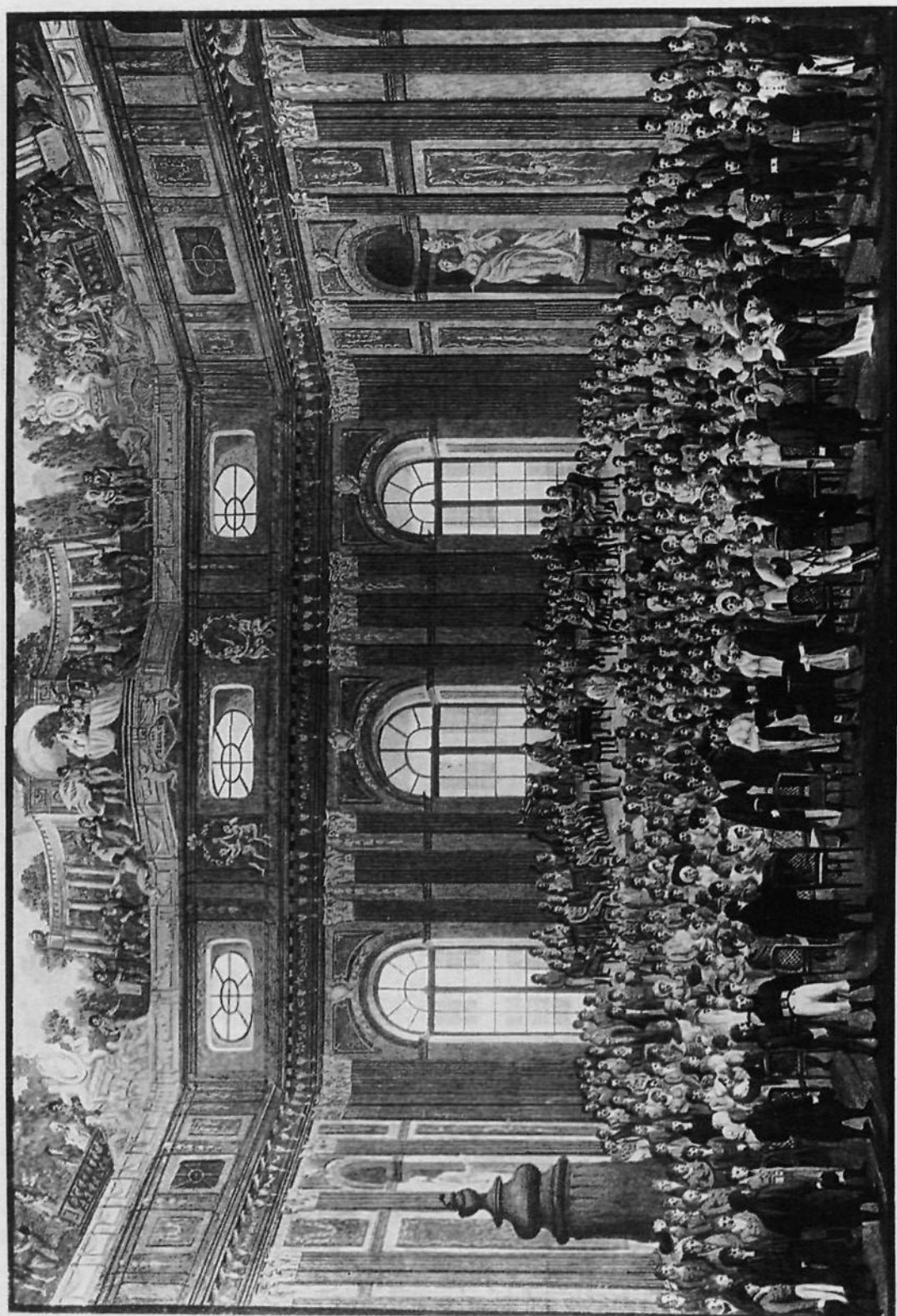
**15. *Winterreitschule* (today the *Spanische Hofreitschule*)**

Built between 1729 and 1735 as the riding school of the Emperor (after plans by Fischer von Erlach), it was the setting for horse carousels during the 18th and 19th centuries. Together with the *Grosse Redoutensaal* this was the largest concert hall in Vienna before the new concert buildings were opened in the late 19th century.

The first concert of the "Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde" took place here on 29 November 1812 with a performance of Handel's *Timotheus*, involving 700 musicians. Until 1848 the hall was used mainly for performances of oratorios by composers such as Handel, Haydn, and Maximilian Stadler, with space for 800 musicians and 1500 listeners.

## Performance of Haydn's Creation in the *Festsaal* der Alten Universität

(by permission of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, from *Porträt-sammlung und Bildarchiv L 36.905*, "Aquarell auf einer Kassette")



### 16. *Jahn'sche Saal* (no longer exists)

On 4 March 1791 Mozart performed his Piano Concerto KV 595 here (this was his last appearance in public), also on the program was the clarinet virtuoso Joseph Beer. In 1793 Baron van Swieten directed the first performance of Mozart's *Requiem*. Beethoven presented two "Musical Academies" here in 1797 and 1798, including the first performance of his Quintet (Op. 16), the Aria *Ah perfido*, and one of the Violin Sonatas in Op. 12 played by Beethoven and Ignaz Schuppanzigh.

### 17. *Konzertsaal in Palais Lobkowitz* (now the "*Eroicasaal*" im *Theatermuseum*)

In 1803 Beethoven directed his Symphony no. 3 in this concert hall prior to its first public performance in *Theater an der Wien*.

### 18. *Konzertsaal in Palais Rasumofsky*

A large hall with columns, it was destroyed by fire in 1816. Beethoven liked the acoustics of this hall.

Count Rasumofsky's string quartet, with Schuppanzigh as first violin, performed many of Beethoven's quartets here for the first time.

### 19. *Grosser Musikvereinssaal (Goldener Saal), Brahmsaal*

Constructed by Theophil Hansen (1867-69), the "*grosse Saal*" opened 5 January 1870. It is 56.3 x 19.8 m., seats 1985 persons, and is considered one of the world's finest concert halls. It has a flat main floor of wood, a pair of side galleries, slightly raised from the floor, and a balcony around all four sides. The interior is mainly in plaster with an ornamented plaster-paneled ceiling. The reverberation time is slightly over 2 seconds at middle frequencies when the hall is filled. The *Brahmsaal* is separate and has a capacity of 517 seats.

Brahms was artistic director of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* from 1872 to 1875. In 1873 Bruckner's Symphony no. 2 was performed here by the *Wiener Philharmoniker* with the composer conducting.

### 20. *Bösendorfersaal in Palais Liechtenstein* (no longer exists)

Formerly the stables in the courtyard of *Palais Liechtenstein* (constructed from 1788-97), it was adapted by the piano manufacturer Ludwig Bösendorfer into a concert hall, and opened in 1872. It was destroyed in 1913.

Hans von Bülow played the opening concert in 1872. Brahms, Liszt, Karl Reinecke, and Anton Rubinstein also played here.

**21. *Konzerthaus: Grosser Saal, Mittlerer Saal, Kleiner Saal***

This hall was built by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer in neo-baroque style with neoclassical interior. It opened on 20 October 1913.

Richard Strauss composed a *Festliches Präludium* for the opening concert.