



Vienna

by Craig Kaczorowski

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The capital of Austria, Vienna is also the country's largest city, as well as its political, economic, and cultural center, and the undisputed hub of Austrian gay and lesbian life. The city has a population of approximately 1.7 million, of which 10 percent, or about 170,000 people, are estimated to be homosexual.

While Vienna does not have predominantly gay and lesbian neighborhoods, the city has developed a diverse glbtq scene, with cafés, bars, dance clubs, bathhouses, sports clubs, guest houses and hotels all catering to the diverse needs of the community.

Early History of the Austrian Habsburg Dynasty

Founded around 500 B.C.E. and originally a Celtic settlement, the area that is now known as the city of Vienna became a Roman military outpost (named "Vindobona") by the first century B.C.E. It was later abandoned by the Roman Empire in the late fourth century C.E. and subsequently overrun by multiple empires, including the Franks, the Magyars, and the Babenberg Dynasty.

In 1282 Rudolf of Habsburg, an obscure Swiss nobleman who had earlier been elected King of Germany, as Rudolf I, in 1273, proclaimed Vienna, and the land around it, a Habsburg family possession, and it was to remain the heart of the Habsburg power--with a few brief interruptions only--until 1918. Under the Habsburg Dynasty, Vienna grew into a leading cultural center for arts and sciences, particularly during the reign of Empress Maria Theresia, in the eighteenth century.

One of the first and most prominent figures in early Viennese gay history is François-Eugène, Prince of Savoy-Carignan (1663-1736), a French-born officer who came to Vienna at the age of 20 to offer support in the rescue of the city, which was at that time besieged by the Ottoman army. Historically known as Prince Eugene of Savoy, he quickly distinguished himself in a cavalry battle at Petronell, in Lower Austria, on July 7, 1683, and led multiple victorious military campaigns in the years following.

Prior to Prince Eugene's arrival in Vienna, the French King Louis XIV had refused his request to join the royal troops, presumably due to the Prince's notoriously flamboyant behavior, his well-known affection for young men, and his predilection for appearing in public dressed in women's clothing.

Nonetheless, Eugene managed to build his military career and expand his power base during the reigns of three Austrian Habsburg emperors. In 1714, he began construction of his summer palace, Schloss Belvedere, one of Vienna's finest examples of baroque architecture. Structural details of the palace directly refer to Prince Eugene's military victories against the Ottoman Empire by imitating the form of Turkish army tents in the green roofs of the building. Prince Eugene died in his sleep at the palace in 1736.

Emperor Charles VI (1685-1740), father of Empress Maria Theresia, is also a noted figure in the city's gay history. Charles was rumored to have had an intimate friendship with Count Michael Johann Althan III, who



Prince Eugene of Savoy, one of the most prominent glbtq figures in early Viennese history. Portrait by Jacob van Schuppen.

was one of the closest members of the introverted Emperor's inner circle. Although few details are known about the nature of the relationship, Charles lavished several palaces on Althan in Vienna, apparently so that the two men could remain close at hand, and once wrote to Althan as "my truest servant, my heart's friend, who loves me as I have loved him for nineteen years in true, profound friendship."

Archduke Ludwig Viktor (1842-1919), known affectionately as "Luziwuzi" among his friends, was also the cause of scandal for the House of Habsburg. The younger brother of Emperor Franz Joseph, Ludwig Viktor was notorious for his openly homosexual relationships and penchant for cross-dressing. He frequently visited the Centralbad indoor swimming pool (today the gay *Kaiserbründl* bathhouse) and caused widespread gossip when an officer of the Austrian army slapped him in the face after the Archduke had made sexual advances. After the incident, the Emperor was forced to forbid Ludwig Viktor to stay in Vienna. He was exiled to Schloss Klessheim near Salzburg where he died in 1919, at the age of 76.

Other Significant Nineteenth-Century GLBTQ Cultural Figures

From the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Vienna's culture--in particular, its music--was famous worldwide. Such illustrious composers as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, and Gustav Mahler resided in Vienna, while the city was the birthplace of Johann Strauss (father and son), Arnold Schoenberg, and Franz Schubert.

Schubert (1797-1828), whose houses of birth and death may be visited in Vienna today, has long been rumored to be gay. During his lifetime he was reputed to have very little interest in female companionship, and spent at least two years living with his librettist Johann Baptist Mayerhofer--a notorious homosexual--in a sublet room where they shared a bed. Their affection for each is documented in several song texts written by Mayerhofer for Schubert, as well as their unfinished opera "Adrast."

Schubert's sexuality was not explicitly discussed until 1981, when the musicologist Maynard Solomon published a well-reasoned and researched article in *American Imago*, later expanded in *19th Century Music*, which argued that the composer's primary orientation was homosexual.

Vienna's artists and architects--Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Josef Hoffmann, Otto Wagner, and Adolf Loos among them--experimented with new styles, forms and materials to reflect the idea that society itself was rapidly changing.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, with the city's population exceeding one million, Vienna experienced a tremendous increase in building activity. During this period, Emperor Franz Joseph ordered the construction of the Ringstrasse, the circular road surrounding the *Innere Stadt* district (the city's Old Town), along the route of the former city walls originally built in the thirteenth century. The boulevard remains one of the city's most celebrated and glorious sights.

Vienna's famous *Staatsoper* ("State Opera House"), one of the most notable buildings along the Ringstrasse, was built by the architects Eduard van der Nüll (1812-1868) and August Sicard von Sicardsburg (1813-1868), who were partners in life as well as in business.

Unfortunately, the gay architect couple began construction on the *Staatsoper* before the street level of the Ringstrasse had been officially established. The street level was later raised by one meter making the edifice look (as it still looks today) as if it had sunk into the ground. As public criticism of the architects' work escalated (even the Emperor himself supposedly expressed dissatisfaction), van der Nüll--who was already prone to depression--committed suicide on April 3, 1868. Barely ten weeks later, on June 11, 1868, his partner Sicardsburg died too, purportedly of a "broken heart."

Two of the most influential figures in the study of homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conducted their groundbreaking work in Vienna. The Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) and the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) both played crucial roles in codifying homosexual identity and theorizing about its origins and implications.

Krafft-Ebing, author of the pioneering book *Psychopathia Sexualis* ("Psychopathy of Sex"), concluded that both male and female homosexuals did not suffer from mental illness or perversion (the prevailing belief at the time). Freud wrote, in a letter to the mother of a homosexual man, that "homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness." However, he continued that "we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual development."

Vienna and the Two World Wars

The assassination on June 28, 1914 in Sarajevo of Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria and heir presumptive of the Austro-Hungarian throne, precipitated the Austrian declaration of war against Serbia and marked the beginning of World War I. After its defeat in 1918, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was dissolved, ending the 640-year old Habsburg dynasty, and the first Republic of Austria was established. The young republic suffered massive inflation, unemployment, and near economic collapse.

On March 12, 1938, German troops marched into Austria and the country was incorporated into Greater Germany by the Nazi regime. This annexation, or *Anschluss* ("political union"), was one of the first major steps in Adolf Hitler's long-desired creation of an empire incorporating the German-speaking lands and territories Germany had lost after World War I. Following the annexation, Hitler triumphantly entered Vienna and publicly exclaimed, "This city, in my eyes, is a gem! I shall mount it in a setting worthy of it, and entrust it to the care of the entire German Reich!"

The German law, known as Paragraph 175, prohibiting "criminally indecent activities" between men was imposed throughout Austria. In September 1939, the National Socialist leadership sent the first group of Austrian homosexuals, who were primarily from Vienna, to Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Austria near Linz.

A large percentage of homosexual men were sentenced to hard labor at the rock quarries of the Dora-Mittelbau underground rocket factory. They were also subjected to medical experimentation, including castration, in search for a "cure" to their "sexual deviance."

At the end of World War II in 1945, Austria was restored to its pre-war frontiers and occupied by the victorious allies--the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France--for a decade. On May 15, 1955, the Austrian State Treaty was ratified, with Austria declaring its permanent neutrality.

Today's Vienna

In 1995 Austria became a member of the European Union. Vienna's Historic Center was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001, and its "urban and architectural qualities" were designated to "bear outstanding witness to a continuing interchange of values throughout the second millennium."

Several important crusades have been won over the last decades in the fight for legal and political equality in Vienna. In 1971, the country's sodomy laws were repealed, although it was not until 1996 that a federal law prohibiting public displays of homosexuality was abolished.

In 1979, in defiance of a ban against homosexual organizations, a group of gay activists founded the

Homosexuelle Initiative Wien (Homosexual Initiative Vienna, or HOSI), which remains the strongest voice for gay men and lesbians in national politics. It publishes the magazine *Lambda-Nachrichten* (Lambda-News).

More recently, section 209 of the penal code, which set the age of consent for sex between men at 18 while lesbians and heterosexuals were legally allowed to have sex at the age of 14, was overturned in 2003.

However, unlike many other European countries, Austria still has no registered partnership law or same-sex marriage, nor an anti-discrimination act despite the fact that European Union law requires such a statute. Nonetheless, Vienna is the positive exception in Austria, having already passed widespread anti-discrimination legislation, including laws on tenancy and other housing issues.

When it comes to public support of the gay and lesbian community, in many ways Vienna is setting standards for other European cities. One of the most elaborate, and profitable, AIDS charity events in the world, Life Ball, held each May, has reached international popularity since its beginnings in 1993. Vienna's annual pride event *Regenbodenparade* ("Rainbow Parade"), established in 1996, attracts some 100,000 spectators each June and boasts one of the most spectacular routes down the historic Ringstrasse.

Other glbtq-community events include the art festival *Wien ist Andersrum* ("Vienna is Queer"), which offers a collection of off-beat cultural performances each year. The *Regenbodenball* ("Rainbow Ball") is a classic, formal-attire Viennese ball for the gay and lesbian community. The annual *Rosenball* ("Rose Ball") is a more flamboyant alternative to the traditional Opera Ball.

In 2005, Vienna was ranked third in the world in terms of quality of life by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), based on "personal risk, infrastructure, and the availability of goods and services."

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