

Report on the German and Austrian Tour
Summer 1982

The tour of Germany and Austria by Southampton Youth Orchestra took place as planned from Sunday, July 18th to Sunday, August 1st. Early on July 18th a hired van set off from Southampton with the large instruments to travel to Altotting, Bavaria, via Dover-Boulogne, Belgium and into Germany, rather than accompanying the coaches on the Southampton-Le Havre route to Strasbourg via French motorways and then into southern Germany.

The departure of the orchestra, ferry-trip, coach journey and overnight stay in Strasbourg were all accomplished without incident, and the thought and well planned help given by the coach drivers from Watson's Travel enabled a very long journey to be completed with ease and in comfort. After a second long day of travel we met up with the instrument van a few miles before Altotting, and arrived exactly on time to meet the host families from the Gymnasium des Landkreises. Having already received the Gymnasium Choir in Southampton earlier in the year, excellent relations had been established, and all staff and orchestra members received excellent accommodation and entertainment during his part of the tour.

The orchestra gave three concerts in the next two days, two in schools and one in the Town Hall, all of which were enthusiastically received. Gunter Grumbeck, the conductor of the Altotting choir and organiser of the events in that town, had arranged a courtesy visit to the Mayor, who gave everyone a small present, a conducted tour of the main church and shrine, a talk and organ-recital, swimming and a visit to the castle of Berghausen. All in the two full days we were there.

On Friday, July 24th the party moved on to Salzburg, Austria, some 40 miles away from Altotting. The Youth Guest House accommodation was quickly allocated, though a little spartan after the extreme comfort of the home accommodation in Bavaria. The food in the hostel, though adequate, was not too inspiring.

Our time in Austria was divided between sightseeing trips on one hand, and concert days on the other. Saturday July 24th was a coach trip via various lakes to Bad Ischl, whereas Sunday 25th was a day of rehearsal followed by a superb concert/service in the Hernau Church in Salzburg. This arrangement had been worked out by the director of Austria Youth Touring and the Priest, and was extremely successful on all accounts.

The trip to Berchtesgarden on the following day, though marred by rain, gave the orchestra the opportunity to play in a major concert-hall with excellent facilities. A fairly large audience heard the orchestra give a superb performance of Sibelius' Symphony No. 2. This was an afternoon concert, and because of the poor

weather an early return was made to Salzburg.

The next day to Hallein, where a splendid visit to the Salt Mine preceded our final concert in the Salzberghalle. Although the audience was poor, the orchestra gave their best concert ever, making worthwhile all the effort of planning and money raising.

On Wednesday 28th July a splendid alpine tour was followed the next day by sightseeing and shopping in Salzburg town. That being the final evening of our stay, the coach drivers had arranged a social evening at a restaurant out of town.

The return journey to England was marred a little by the breakdown of one of the coaches soon after leaving Austria. This was serious enough to mean the hiring of a German coach to convey half the party as far as Boulogne - changing to another coach from Watsons at Dover. This breakdown caused some hours delay and a late arrival at the Hotel in Strasbourg. Dinner had been held up for us, and there were no other problems with the travel arrangements. After a long journey from Strasbourg and a short sea-crossing to Dover, the journey continued to Southampton. The coaches arrived at 8.0 a.m., exactly in Southampton as planned.

This had been a first rate trip, on which a group of splendid youngsters had been happily looked after by a group of staff which consisted of teachers, 'friends', and parents. It was the first foreign trip for the orchestra for many years, and it is now hoped that the experience can be repeated regularly.

Other than the coach breakdown, which was completely unexpected and unforeseen, the only other complaint was about the travel carnets issued by the Chamber of Commerce for the instruments. They had been obtained to ensure easy passage from country to country for the instruments as proof that they would not be sold. Every foreign customs officer found the documents a nuisance, and the paperwork needed at each crossing point held up both the van and the coaches considerably, though the instruments were never inspected.

An official complaint has been made to the Chamber of Commerce with specific reference to the varied comments of customs officers. However, this nuisance was little to have to put up with when balanced against a really successful tour.

October 1982

Keith Smith