



When Beethoven arrived in Vienna, in November of 1792—after he'd left Bonn for good—the city was still one of the most sophisticated in Europe.

Unlike Paris—still devastated by the French Revolution and in the throes of the "Great Terror"—Vienna was a good place for artists and musicians to live and work. (That, of course, would change once Napoleon turned his attention to Vienna.)

Vienna was the city of Mozart (although the townspeople seemed to no longer to appreciate him when he died an early death) and Haydn (with whom Beethoven would study). It was the capital of the Holy Roman Empire, featuring an impressive imperial palace (depicted in this illustration). And ... it was a city whose inhabitants loved music.

It was, in other words, a great place for Ludwig—then nearly 22-years-old—to begin his adult career.

How did the Vienna of Beethoven compare to the Vienna of today? We learn more from John Suchet (who has studied and written about him):

*The Vienna that Beethoven knew bears remarkable similarities to the Vienna of today. For nearly 300 years it had been surrounded by a huge city wall, the Bastion, built to resist the Turkish invaders, which it had successfully done twice, in 1529 and 1683.*

*In front of it lay a wide expanse of grass, known as the Glacis, like a moat surrounding a castle. The Turkish army camped on the Glacis to lay siege to the city. In Beethoven's time, it was the scene of military parades, funfairs, social gatherings.*

*The Bastion was pulled down in the mid-nineteenth century - 30 years after Beethoven's death - and it and the Glacis were replaced by the Ringstrasse, the wide circle of boulevards that surround the city today.*

Because the city within the Ringstrasse (the inner city) is so similar to the Vienna within the Bastion (the city during Beethoven's day), we can see the same streets with the same names.

This illustration—of the Grand Ballroom, in the Hofburg, as it appeared at the end of the 18th century—is based on an engraving by Joseph Schütz and is currently maintained at the Städtische Sammlungen, Vienna. It depicts, in other words, how the grand ballroom at the Imperial Palace appeared when Beethoven first arrived in town.

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image of the Große Redoutensaal (Grand Ballroom), Hofburg, Vienna. Engraving by Joseph Schütz, end of 18th century. From the Städtische Sammlungen, Vienna. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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