



MUSICAL DESTINATIONS LUCERNE

Pauline Harding visits the Swiss lakeside city of Lucerne, a place steeped in history and which hosts an impressive range of music festivals with top-drawer performers

THE PLACE

Split in two by the shimmering waters of a massive Lake Lucerne, this Swiss city combines some very rural mountain views and fresh air with the bustle of a metropolis. Time seems to have forgotten Lucerne during the past 100 years: grey and white mountains loom over huge expanses of water, which are in turn lined by historic buildings, such as the 17th-century Italian Renaissance-style town hall, with its Swiss 'snow-proof' roof, the Hotel Schweizerhof where Wagner stayed in 1859, and the sky-scraping spires of the Renaissance Hof Church, built in 1645.

Lucerne began life in the 7th century as a fishing village where the Benedictine monastery of St Leodegar was founded.

During the 13th century it became a resting point for mountain traders and by the time a through-road was built in 1865, it had become a busy city and an inspiration for Turner and Wagner. After a visit by Queen Victoria in 1868, it became a tourist hot spot. And so it has remained – today Lucerne's main income is from an annual influx of five million culture hunters.

The city indeed revolves around culture, with music concert venues and art galleries at every turn. An unmissable display of 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces,



SMOKING BAN: Chapel Bridge was set alight by a bunch of careless puffers in 1993; (left) Wagner's favourite stop-over, the Hotel Schweizerhof; (right) Pierre Boulez, artistic director of the Lucerne Festival Academy



collected by local art dealer Angela Rosengart, even includes her own portrait, painted by Picasso.

History stretches right to the city limits – in the north east lies a striking memorial to those who died in the French Revolution attack on the Tuileries in 1792: a rock-cut figure of a dying lion. And in the north west stands the breathtaking 1386 Muesegg Wall, a monument to the centuries of the

MUSICAL CONNECTIONS RICHARD WAGNER

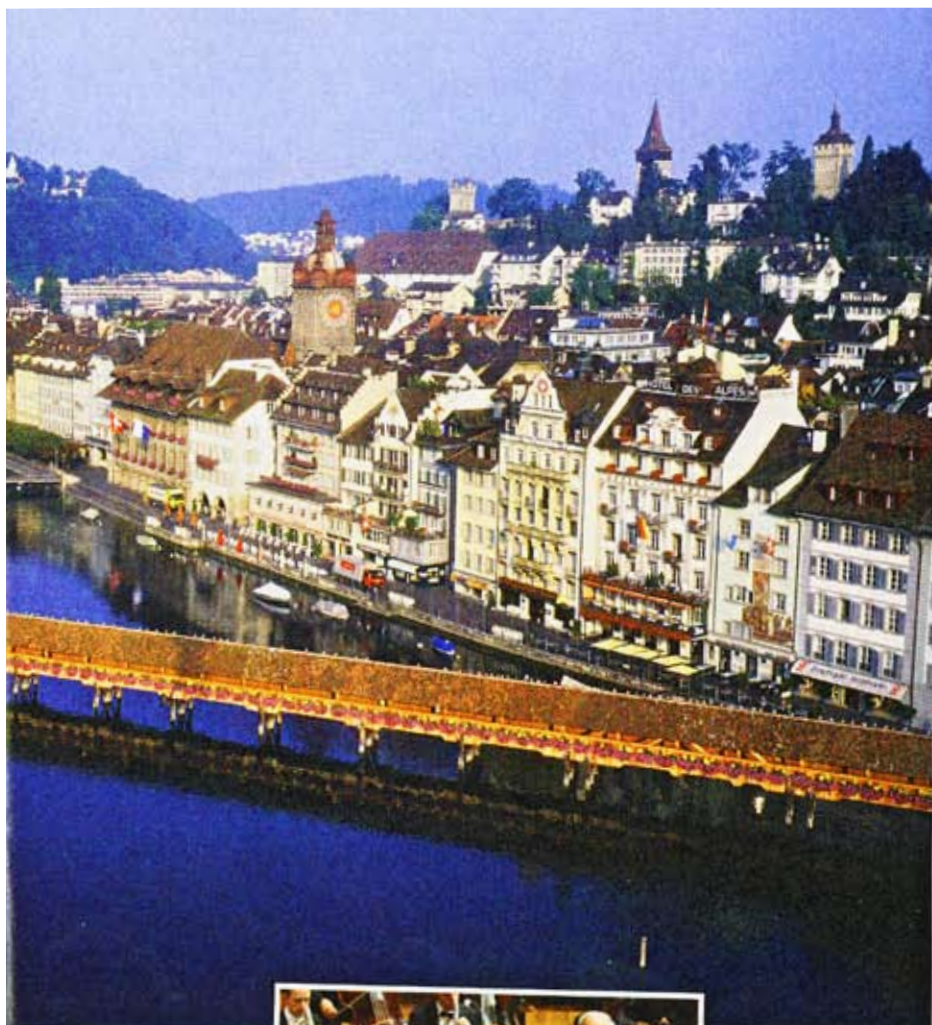
'WHEREVER I TURN OUTSIDE my house, I am in the midst of a magic world: I know of no more beautiful place on earth,' wrote Wagner to King Ludwig II of Bavaria in 1866 – the start of his six years in Lucerne. The house's setting is inspirational – green fields, blue water and snow-capped mountains all jostle for attention. It's a wonder that he managed to keep his guests – from Nietzsche and Liszt to King Ludwig – away long enough to let him focus on his work. Wagner wrote *Die Meistersinger* here and resumed work on the *Ring*, which had been untouched for 12 years. It was also here that the *Siegfried Idyll* was premiered for Cosima's birthday in 1870; Toscanini conducted it in 1939, unwittingly marking the inauguration of the Lucerne Festival.



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city it has defended. On the mountain slopes beyond the lion is the Glacier Garden museum (www.gletschergarten.ch), which features 20,000 year-old glacial potholes and remnants of the last ice age, with a 19th-century house of mirrors attached.

Several bridges span the city's lake, including two 14th-century covered walkways – the Chapel Bridge and Spreuer Bridge. The Chapel Bridge was restored in 1993 after being almost completely destroyed by fire in 1993, and together with its octagonal 34-metre Water Tower, it remains Lucerne's prize landmark.



THE MUSIC

On arrival in Lucerne by rail, you'll be greeted by a striking silhouette against the Swiss mountains – the 'Kultur- und Kongresszentrum Luzern', or KKL.

Built in 2000, the KKL is home to a modern art gallery and concert hall. The hall's 1,840 seats welcome concert-goers all year round, including the crowds that swell the city for Lucerne's now legendary musical feasts: the Easter, Summer and Piano Festivals – each with their own unique flavour and ambience.

The Lucerne Festival Orchestra has perhaps become more famous than the festivals itself. Set up in 2003 by Claudio Abbado and Michael Haefliger, it consists of hand-picked members of the Berlin Philharmonic and Mahler Chamber orchestras plus players from the Alban Berg and Hagen quartets. This unique, mighty ensemble has to be heard to be believed.

It's hardly surprising that a festival with an orchestra of that stature draws in superstar talent from all over the world. Last summer, the incredible array of artists walking onto its

stage included Daniel Barenboim, Yo-Yo Ma, Anne-Sophie Mutter and Evgeny Kissin. Pierre Boulez provides a constant presence with his artistic directorship of the Festival's annual

three-week long Academy.

Musical activity is, of course, not limited to the KKL. Historic churches dotted all over the city use any opportunity they can to show off their architecture and acoustic, whether it's the Baroque Jesuit Church (1673), the medieval gothic Franciscan Church (1280), or St Matthew's Church (where Wagner married Cosima von Bulow in 1870). Up in the lofts often lurk some starry names in the organ fraternity, including Ton Koopman and Dame Gillian Weir. For details of the three main Lucerne Festivals taking place in 2008, see www.lucernefestival.ch.

GETTING THERE

Pauline Harding flew to Zurich, before catching a train to Lucerne from the station on arrival. The journey took about an hour.

A DAY IN... LUCERNE



MOUNTAINS AND FOUNTAINS: Lucerne's KKL

MORNING

Catch a bus to Wagner's old house in Tribschen, which is now a museum surrounded by soaring mountains, and see Valhalla emerge in all its glory. Inside, see Wagner's piano, clothes, photos and manuscripts, and wander upstairs to see some unusual – though not Wagnerian – 17th- to 19th-century instruments.

AFTERNOON

Book a guided tour through the best of old and new Lucerne, from city ramparts to art galleries. If the weather's fine, you can enjoy the snowy mountain views with a boat trip down Lake Lucerne (pack a coat, though – it's little nippy). See www.luzern.org/en for details.

EVENING

A selection of hot and cold food is available at the KKL but for more traditional meals explore the local restaurants before attending a concert at the KKL or a local church, or visiting the city's theatre.

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY... THREE TASTES OF LUCERNE

EAT: For a taste of traditional Lucerne try the Swiss 'dumpling'. This is actually a large, stodgy vol-au-vent with a side-serving of chips and extremely alcoholic raisins – a fantastic winter warmer. The authentic Swiss chocolate speaks for itself...

DRINK: In the winter, treat yourself to a mug of Swiss hot chocolate (not that we're obsessed, of course) before tackling the city snow; in the summer, visit the Rathaus Brauerei (www.rathausbrauerei.ch) in the city centre for a taste of the local beer.

BE MERRY:

Wander around this glorious city on foot, absorb the stunning views, enjoy the exceptional music and food, and hope to become as inspired as the Wagners and Turners of Lucerne's past.

