



Cologne

WHEN THE CARNIVAL IS OVER, **ALBERT EHRNRooth** DISCOVERS THAT COLOGNE IS MORE THAN JUST A FANCY PERFUME

Where would you rather go: to salsa at the famous Rio Carnival or to dance the conga in Germany's cooler climate? Answer, the Cologne Karneval! Admittedly, Cologne can be pretty chilly in February, but when the Carnival is over, Cologne's great museums, historic churches and classical music get my vote. (In case you wondered about the seemingly far fetched comparison: Rio de Janeiro is one of Cologne's many partner cities.) And another thing: Kölsch beer is definitely better than any of the Brazilian varieties.

Young musicians are drawn to Cologne and presumably the main reason is the prestigious Hochschule für Musik und Tanz, Europe's largest music (and dance) academy. Cologne may be only a medium sized metropolis with a population of just over a million but despite its modest size it has produced a number of pioneering ensembles, composers and individuals that changed the course of contemporary music and helped to start the ball rolling for the early music movement.

Capella Colonies were at the forefront of historical performance practice when they made their debut in 1954 and continued to set the standard well into the 1970's. Violinist Reinhard Goebel founded Musica Antiqua Köln in 1973 and took them to virtuosic heights with their impeccable but speedy performances of forgotten pieces and neglected baroque composers. When Musica Antiqua disbanded Goebel had

already passed the baton to Concerto Köln. This versatile ensemble today excels in playing works from the classical era on period instruments.

The enthusiasm for early music makes perfect sense in a city where churches dominate the skyline. No cathedral in Germany pulls in the crowds like the Kölner Dom, which attracts more than 6.5 million tourists a year. This edifice, with its distinctive twin spires, elaborate Gothic decorations and clever architecture should be on your personal Unesco World Bucket List. The Dom was built over a period of 600 years and only finished in 1880, amazingly according to the original plans. During World War II the cathedral was (deliberately?) not flattened in the allied bomb raids that destroyed more than 90% of the old city centre.

The exterior is stunning enough but the interior is not to be missed either. The 14th-century stained glass windows vie for attention with the south transept window designed by local artist Gerhard Richter, who until recently held the world auction record for a living artist. His abstract work consists of 11,500 squares of glass in 72 different colours randomly arranged by a computer programme. The attention to detail that was required to decorate the Shrine of the Three Magi is astounding and the fact that it is 200 years older than the church itself is even more surprising. This massive gilded triple sarcophagus supposedly contains the bones of the Three Wise Men. A good way





BERLIN ●

● COLOGNE

GERMANY

MUNICH ●

TRAVEL INFO**Average Temperatures:**

Winter: -1°C-4°C Summer: 14°C-24°C

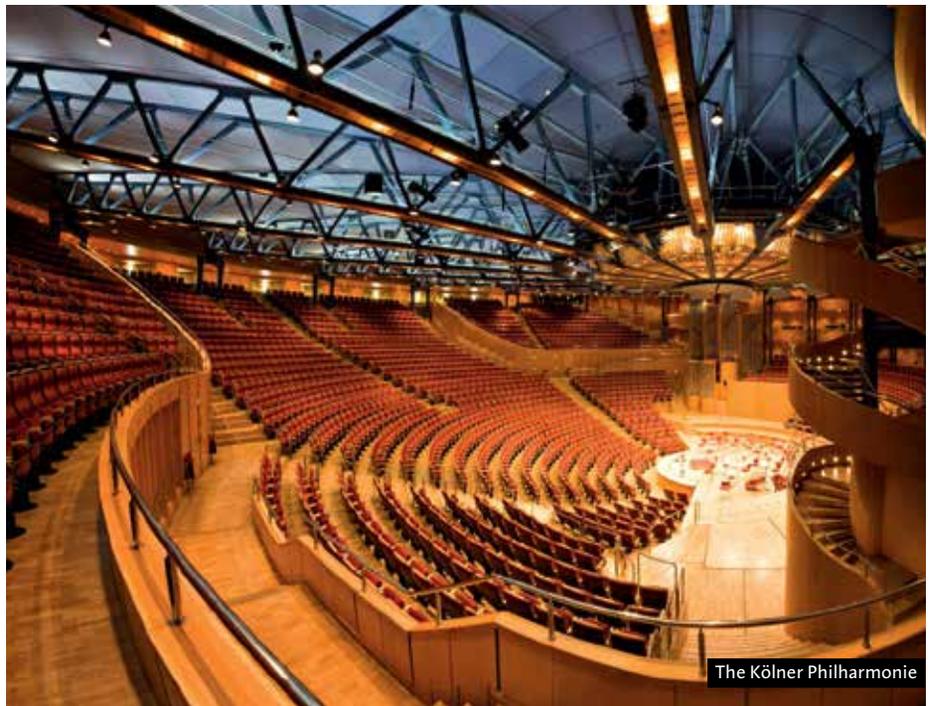
Currency: Euro (AU\$1=0.67 Euros)**Best time to visit:** Anytime at all, really, but look out for Karneval in February**TOURIST INFORMATION**www.cologne-tourism.com

to experience all this is to attend one of the regular organ concerts that are on during the Summer months or simply go to Mass to hear the famous boys' choir.

Cologne still boasts 12 Romanesque churches and most of them have been restored to their former glory. St. Columba was given a holistic make-over by the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor and turned into a museum for the Archdiocese's art collection. Architecture buffs call Zumthor the "prophet" and divine inspiration may have been a factor when he enveloped the surviving ruins and a chapel, that was still in use, in a gray brick monolithic structure with perforated bands which allows speckled light into the galleries.

Julia Agrippina (the Younger) was Caligula's sister and married her uncle, the Emperor Claudius. She was born in Cologne and thanks to her it was made the capital city of the Roman province of Germania Inferior. Agrippina's legacy is fairly grim, not helped by the fact that she was Nero's over-affectionate mother, but that makes a visit to the Römisch-Germanisches (the Romano-Germanic) museum even more fascinating.

The historic centre of the city gives the impression of being a perpetual building site and I can't help wondering if older people are reminded of the bomb sites that dominated this part of the city after the war. The area has been christened The Archaeological Zone and contains the



The Kölner Philharmonie

remnants of the Roman governor's palace, the Jewish quarter and many other ruins from the Middle Ages.

A surprisingly large part of the Altstadt (the old city) has been reconstructed in a manner that echoes what was lost in the war. The façades are particularly picturesque around the Alter Markt (the Old Square) and along the banks of the mighty river Rhine. For centuries Cologne was a member of the powerful Hanseatic League and it was one of the trade capitals of Northern Europe. The Town Hall with its splendid Renaissance loggia proves that money was in no short supply.

Would Cologne have had significant art museums without a number of generous merchant patrons? Probably not, but two magnificent art institutions for a city of Cologne's size is pretty good going. Wallraf-Richartz Museum-Foundation Corboud's strength is Medieval and early modern art, with some Dürer, Rembrandt and Rubens thrown in for good measure. This is the place to see what money could buy in the olden days. The collection of the Museum Ludwig was put together with chocolate money. The brick and zinc façade I find questionable, but chocolate magnate Peter Ludwig's taste for modern art can't be faulted. Top tier Picassos, Russian avant-garde and the best collection of pop art outside the USA form the highlights. Museum Ludwig is part of the same complex as the Philharmonie concert hall, which is built into the cathedral hill.

What is so remarkable about Cologne

is that traditional and contemporary art, architecture and music seem to be so equally well represented. I am not aware of any other German city that can offer between 500-700 new music concerts per year? Lovers of symphonic music can't complain either. The WDR Symphonie Orchestra Cologne is particularly well respected for its interpretations of 20th-century repertoire. The Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne is steeped in tradition and under their Principal Conductor Markus Stenz they have dared to explore less traditional programming.

“CHOCOLATE MAGNATE PETER LUDWIG'S TASTE FOR MODERN ART CANNOT BE FAULTED”

Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928- 2007) studied here and made some of his most groundbreaking compositions at the Electronic Music Studio of the broadcasting company (WDR). He lived most of his life in Kürten just outside Cologne where the Summer courses continue to be held in his spirit. The legacy of Stockhausen and younger composers is kept alive by one of the best new music ensembles in the world, the musikFabrik. It no doubt helps that they have a couple of Australian members as well! The fact that musikFabrik moved from Düsseldorf to Cologne indicates where the action is. ●

THE PLACE TO CATCH THE BEST

The Kölner Philharmonie is one of the best concert halls in Germany and the principal concert venue for both the Gürzenich Orchester Köln and the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln. The Gürzenich Orchestra (GO) is steeped in history giving world premieres of Brahms's Double Concerto, Mahler's Fifth Symphony and two of Richard Strauss's tone poems, to mention a few. GO's current chief conductor Markus Stenz (formerly of the MSO) says that audiences in Cologne "like to explore new grounds". Stenz is also the musical director of the highly regarded local opera company, which moves into brand new premises next year. All GO's concerts in the Kölner Philharmonie are recorded live and can be bought on CD immediately after the end of the performance or downloaded from iTunes.

