MEDIAINFO

The “Silent Night” locations in Tirol

Singing families from the Zillertal valley spread the song across the entire world

The Christmas song “Silent Night” made its way from Oberndorf near Salzburg to Fügen in the Zillertal valley with the help of a Tirolean organ builder. And from Tirol, the song spread across the entire globe: As Tirolean national singers, the Strasser siblings from Hippach and the Rainer singers introduced the song to the rest of Europe, Russia and the USA. Together with the Achensee region, Fügen and Hippach thus make up the three Silent Night locations in Tirol.

The Zillertal valley originally belonged to Salzburg and only became part of Tirol in 1816. Beginning in the 18th century, many farmers spent their winters months, when the mountain pastures were covered in snow and agriculture came to a halt, wandering around Europe as cattle or goods traders. They made an additional income by selling produce from home at fairs and markets. Initially, the singing of local folk songs was only intended to increase attention to their offers. But the Tiroleans received so much recognition and admiration that more and more musical families and groups started coming together as “Tirolean national singers”. Soon, singing became even more lucrative than trading itself: The reputation of the Tiroleans preceded them all the way to the European royal courts. Among them were also the Rainer singing family from Fügen and the Strasser family from Hippach, and both carried the “Silent Night” song in their repertoire.

Fügen: home of organ builder Carl Mauracher and the “Ur-Rainer” singers

One day, Carl Mauracher, an organ builder from Fügen, received the order to repair the organ of the St. Nikola church in Oberndorf. This is where he was introduced to Franz Xaver Gruber and the song “Silent Night”, and brought it back to his hometown.

Fügen was also the home of the Rainer siblings, who today are considered among the founders of the Tirolean national singing tradition. A key event in their success was a small home concert performed by the Rainers in 1822: In that year, the major and chamberlain Graf Ludwig von Dönhoff (1769-1838) received Emperor Franz I of Austria and Alexander I of Russia at Fügen Castle. To entertain the guests, a performance was organised for the evening featuring the siblings Maria, Felix, Franz and Joseph Rainer. The famed guests were so amazed by the family’s singing abilities and their performance, that Alexander I even invited them to come to Russia. From then on, the siblings — later known as Ur-Rainer — began their world tour. Following recommendations, they appeared in countless cities across Europe between 1824 and 1839, performing on the noblest of royal courts, among them also that of the English King George VI. Today, Fügen is the largest municipality in the Zillertal valley with over 4,000 inhabitants.

Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- At the **cemetery of the parish church in Fügen**, you will find a memorial dedicated to the Ur-Rainer singers, the burial place of the Dönhoff family as well as the grave plate of Carl Mauracher. A memorial plaque reminds of the visit of Alexander I of Russia and Franz I of Austria to Fügen.
- The **Museum at Widumspfiste** in Fügen contains a separate area dedicated to the song “Silent Night: Here you will find the **world’s largest collection of Silent Night vinyl records**. Many of the records can be listened to. Furthermore, visitors will

Salzburg State Board of Tourism
Wiener Bundesstraße 23
5300 Hallwang | Salzburg

Michaela Obernosterer
m.obernosterer@salzburgerland.com
T +43 662 6688 77
M +43 664 8066 8877

Tirol Tourist Board
Maria-Theresien-Straße 55
6020 Innsbruck

Mag. Manuela Mörtenbäck
manuela.moertenbaeck@tirolwerbung.at
T +43 512 5320 656

Upper Austrian Tourist Board
Freistädter Straße 119
4041 Linz

Sabine Günterseder
sabine.guenterseder@oberoesterreich.at
T +43 732 7277 552
M +43 664 32 68 911

Tourismus Salzburg GmbH
Auerspergstraße 6
5020 Salzburg

Martina C. Trummer
trummer@salzburg.info
T +43 662 88987 605

learn exciting details about the Tirolean national singers from the Zillertal valley, the organ builder Carl Mauracher, as well as about old local handcrafts and Fügen's mining industry. A zither from the 19th century is also on display: The zither has become a typical alpine instrument as a result of its use by the national singers.

- During Advent Season, a seasonal play that traces the story of "Silent Night! Holy Night!" is performed at **SteudlTENN** Cultural Center.

Hippach: home of the Strasser singing family and siblings

The Strasser family, with its four siblings Anna, Joseph, Amalia and Karolina, originally came from the district of Laimach, part of the small Hippach municipality in the Zillertal valley. On Christmas of 1831, the farmer family had a stand at the Leipzig Christmas market, where — next to selling goods from home — they also sang local Christmas songs, among them "Silent Night". The crowds reacted so positively that the family followed up with a concert at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in January 1832. An additional concert was performed in Leipzig on Christmas 1832. Between 1832 and 1834, the publisher A.R. Friese from Dresden published a collection of authentic Tirolean Christmas songs, among them "Silent Night". Following their success in Leipzig, the Strassers started dedicating themselves entirely to singing and began journeying through Germany as a travelling singing group and were affectionately called the "Larks from the Zillertal valley" by their admirers. The band was dissolved in 1835.

Experience "Silent Night" here today:

- The birthplace of the Strasser siblings originates from the 18th century and is a farmer's house made entirely of wood, with smoke-blackened beams, an old parlour with a rolling furnace, crown glass and door fittings. The landmarked "**Strasser Häusl**" is now a museum and recounts the tough lives of the Zillertal valley farmers that carried "Silent Night" into the world.

The Achensee region: home of the flamboyant Ludwig Rainer

Ludwig Rainer (1821-1893), one of Maria Rainer's sons (from the Ur-Rainer band), founded the Rainer-Quartett in 1838 and thus laid the foundations for the second generation of Rainer singers: When he was just 18, he travelled together with Helene Rainer, Simon Holaus and Margareta Sprenger to America, completing a "tour" for several years as the beloved "Rainer Family". On Christmas Eve of 1839, "Silent Night" was heard for the first time in the New World, at the Trinity Church at New York's Wall Street. Following their return in 1843, Ludwig Rainer formed the "Rainer Gesellschaft" in 1851, which consisted of several formations and groups and performed for nearly all of Europe's ruling families. This also included the Tsar's courts in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, where they spent nearly ten years. "Silent Night" was always part of their repertoire. When Ludwig Rainer returned to Tirol in 1868, he commissioned the construction of the Seehof Hotel in Achensee, which opened in 1870. The elegant and noble establishment — equipped with all kinds of comforts and luxuries — attracted guests from all over the world and also became Ludwig Rainer's new domicile. On 15 May 1893, Ludwig Rainer died unexpectedly. The hotel switched owners several times over the coming decades and was demolished following a large fire after the turn of the millennium.

Experience "Silent Night" here today:

- Ludwig Rainer, the most famous offspring of the Rainer singers, "Silent Night" ambassador and one of the first "music producers" in history found his **final resting place** at the Achenkirch cemetery. On his tombstone, you can read the inscription: "Done suffering, done exerting himself, he travelled much and sang a lot."

- The **Seehofkapelle chapel** at the Achen Lake, with its neo-gothic altar, was rebuilt at the instigation of Ludwig Rainer and can still be visited today.

- The **“Sixenhof” Museum Achental** provides visitors with great insight into what life and work were like around the Achen Lake during the last couple of centuries. Among the exhibition pieces, you will find Ludwig Rainer’s original garment chest. Starting in **November 2018**, a completely **new exhibition** will be dedicated to the famous national singer Ludwig Rainer and the international dissemination of the song “Silent Night”.