

Inside Out Glamorous Divo Life



Illustration by VOOK / Shutterstock

Christopher Gillett lives it up in Vienna - he's the lucky international tenor who gets to spend his evenings with the washing machine, a three-ring stove and BBC Radio 4 on iPlayer. He tells it how it is.



It's a beautiful, bright, sunny day in Vienna. The sort of day when you'd like to wander the streets, visit a gallery and palace or two and end the day tucking into yet another Wiener Schnitzel and a few glasses of local wine at a jolly restaurant. And that's how I guess you imagine we opera singers spend our days in the many glamorous cities we get to work in.

Well, my day - it's Saturday - is pretty typical of how it really is for 99 per cent of my profession, and it isn't like that at all. But I'll get to that in a moment.

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I've been in Vienna for five weeks so far. The Theater and der Wien has no large rehearsal space on its premises, so every day we've travelled by U-bahn and tram to a pre-war film studio out in the suburbs, and after every day's work we've journeyed back into the city and gone back to our separate digs and our separate lives. In five weeks I've dined out just four times, three of those times at the end of the working week on a Saturday night (for opera singers work a six day week). The truth is that going out in the evenings is simply far too exhausting, and talking above the hubbub of a popular restaurant is a killer to your voice. We're not being paid to party after all, we're being paid to sing.

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The commonly asked questions on Facebook by singers are not 'where shall I eat' or 'good bars in Copenhagen?' but 'how can I watch British telly on my computer when I'm abroad?' or 'does anyone know any cheap digs in Berlin?'. We may work in gilded opera houses but we spend most evenings unwinding with soap operas and our digs are anything but fancy. My essential needs are met by good WiFi and a washing machine. Anything more than that is a bonus. I found my digs here on AirB&B and they are certainly not luxurious; an old apartment filled with IKEA furniture and a bizarre three-ringed stove. It's fine and it fits my budget. (By the way, I reckon, from experience of digs around the globe, that 90 per cent of the world's books are sitting on Billy bookshelves. Thought you should know next time you're buying bookcases.)

So my Saturday looks like this (this week Saturday is our free day as we're working tomorrow):

1. Get up late.
2. Dose up against the back end of the cold I'm battling.

3. Buy groceries from Lidl (which they call Hofer here) a few doors from my apartment.
4. Do laundry.
5. Write this.
6. Go back to bed and listen to Radio 4 all day on iPlayer.
7. Cook dinner and watch a movie on my iPad.
8. Go back to bed.

Thrilling stuff, eh? In the next six days I have six orchestral rehearsals and three dress rehearsals. I'd be mad to do anything else.

Christopher Gillett is appearing at the Theater an der Wien in the world premiere of Iain Bell's *The Harlot's Progress* from 13-27 October

(http://www.viennaconcerts.com/month/Operas_in_Vienna/Theater_an_der_Wien/October_2013/2013/10).

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