

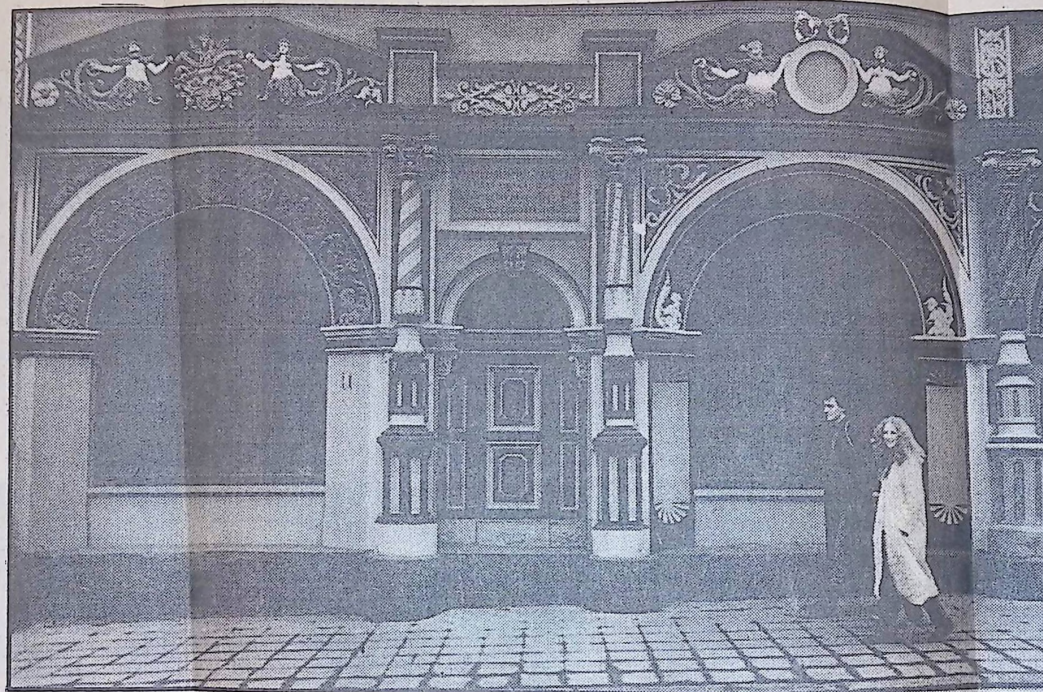
Weimar's Poets in Residence

The East German city celebrates Goethe and Schiller, and even William Shakespeare

By KRISTA WEEDMAN

In 1775, the 26-year-old Johann Wolfgang von Goethe came to Weimar for a short visit and was so enchanted with the town that he made it his home. Twenty years later, Friedrich Schiller followed him, and their combined works formed the centerpiece of German classical literature. Weimar became a stopping point for German writers and thinkers, and such literary luminaries as Heinrich von Kleist, Johann Gottfried von Herder and later the architect Walter Gropius, lived and worked here at some time in their lives. In 1919, as a groundbreaking Constitutional Convention met there, the Social Democratic leader Friedrich Ebert called upon the "spirit of Weimar, the spirit of the great philosophers and poets," to infuse the new democracy — the first in German history — with life.

The collapse of the Weimar Republic, 14 years later, instead created the vacuum in which Hitler took power. During the Nazi period, a spot on the outskirts of town where Goethe had often gone to rest and ponder was chosen as the site of a concentration camp. The tree stump upon which Goethe sat to write that "here, one feels himself vast and free," stood at the center of Buchenwald, where 250,000 people from 32 countries were imprisoned, and 56,548 died. Buchenwald was liberated in 1945 by the United States Army — a fact modern-day East German historians rarely mention, since Weimar, along with the rest of Thuringia and Saxony, was later given over to the Red Army. "Because of the social changes since 1945," one pam-



Photographs by Berlinde Koelbl

The city has restored a number of Renaissance houses, among them that of Lucas Cranach.



A performance in the German National Theater.



Two of Weimar's local heroes: Goethe and Schiller.



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chitecture. More adventurous souls can keep wandering — in good German tradition — to a collection of diverse castles in the hills and forests outside the city. Following the Tiefurter Allee eastward from the Garden House, you will reach Tiefurt castle, Anna Amelia's onetime summer home, with its pavilions and garden. If you take the Belvederer Allee (by the Roman House) in the opposite direction, you will come to the luxurious Baroque Belvedere Castle, with its garden and its collections of historical coaches and rococo art. Both castles may be reached on foot in an hour; Tiefurt may also be reached by bus from the main bus station near Schillerstrasse.

Only in the park, or in the forest, does Weimar's past seem to harmonize with its present. Most historic buildings have been, happily, maintained and restored to their original — mostly Renaissance — architecture. But the exhibits inside, while certainly interesting in themselves, are inevitably accompanied by explanations that place them firmly within a Marxist-Leninist context. It is everywhere implied that Goethe and Schiller were really Socialists at heart, and a documentary film shown at Buchenwald (in English as well as in German) creates the impression that concentration camps were primarily designed by capitalists, for the sake of persecuting Communists. The extent and brutality of the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany is only briefly touched upon.

That Buchenwald is interpreted in such a way is disturbing. So is the visible presence of large numbers of Soviet and East German soldiers. And the incompatibility of the city's rich cultural heritage with the esthetic hollowiness of its modern-day socialism can be ultimately saddening. But a visit to Weimar is nevertheless a trip into history — past and present, real and interpreted.

As for the present...

phlet relates, "Weimar has developed into a flourishing Socialist city."

There are two things then to observe...

Another museum is installed in the Liszt House at Marienstrasse 17, where the...

...no literary past and its ideological present. Begin with the past. The Hotel Elephant, on the Markt at the center of town, is the best place to stay. It was made famous by Thomas Mann's "Lotte in Weimar" ("The Beloved Returns"), and has been frequented by celebrities of both prewar and postwar Europe — Bach, Tolstoy, and Lilli Palmer among them. From the Markt, one can easily walk to many of the city's numerous monuments and museums.

The Goethe House (am Frauenplan 1), where Goethe lived for nearly half a century and where he wrote "Faust," is a two-story Baroque building of 1709. Its 14 exhibition rooms are colorful and crowded — much as Goethe and his wife, Christiane Vulpius, left them — with original art and mineral collections and a library of more than 5,000 books. The more stately Schiller House (Schillerstrasse 12), where Schiller lived with his family for three years until his death in 1805, has been restored as a museum containing a variety of displays on the life and work of the writer, ranging from scripts and costumes from Schiller's plays to an exhibit on Schiller's interpretation in East Germany.

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...and composed spent some time during the last decades of his life. This two-story house, once the residence of Weimar's royal gardeners, holds memorabilia of Liszt's personal and creative life, including letters between the composer and Wagner, Schumann and Smetana and pianos at which he played and taught.

The Wittumspalais, at Palais 3, was built as a Franciscan monastery. In the 18th century, Duchess Anna Amalia acquired it and turned it into a gathering place for Weimar's nobility and artistic elite. The rooms of its western wing, with classical and rococo details, have been restored and filled with furniture and paintings of the period. The eastern wing of the palace is dedicated to the life and work of Christoph Martin Wieland, a novelist, editor and teacher of the Enlightenment, who worked and retired in Weimar.

In addition to its historic buildings, the city of Weimar has an art collection, the third largest in East Germany, that is housed in a crumbling 16th-century castle at the edge of town. The assemblage is eclectic, with works that range from Cranach to Klee, including a selection of Bauhaus furniture and a sampling of modern East German painting.

Nearby are the sleepy little river, the Ilm, and a sprawling park, one of the country's most naturally beautiful areas, filled with

trees and bordering on the Thuringian forest. The park is alternately called the Park on the Ilm, the Weimar Park and the Goethe Park, since it contains Goethe's Garden House, where he lived when he first came to Weimar and which remained his hideaway. There, Goethe pursued his studies of nature and anatomy; in spring, he wrote to a friend, "the area around my garden is infinitely beautiful." Facsimiles of his drawings of the park and surrounding landscape adorn the walls of the cottage.

An exhibit on the history of the park is to be found in the Roman House, set near the Belvedere Allee on the other side of the Ilm. This small classical villa was commissioned by Duke Karl August to please Goethe, who traveled often in Italy and favored Roman ar-

Buchenwald, a relic of Nazi brutality, stands at the outskirts of town.



...the main pedestrian boulevard, and browse in its shops. Of the three bookstores, one is an antiquariat, or used book store. Antiquariats, frequented by book lovers and students, are common features in this country, where the best new book are always sold out fast. Look in the other two stores on the Schillerstrasse for a broad collection of socialist literature — Marx, Lenin, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg — and works by writers approved by the government, such as Brecht and Goethe. As a matter of principle, books are extremely inexpensive in East Germany, and careful browsing can produce some bargains for those who read German. Paperbacks (of Kleist or Rilke, for example) cost anywhere from 75 cents to \$2, and I saw "War and Peace" (in German translation) in hard cover for \$3. At the record store in the same cluster of shops, one may, for \$5 or \$10, buy very high quality recordings of works by such composers as Bach, Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin.

When you are tired of walking, go for afternoon coffee and cake at the large, noisy, Cafe Esplanade — a favorite of the local residents — or the smaller, more elegant Goethecafe on Wielandstrasse. You will have to share your table with others, and this is a good occasion to strike up a conversation with your East German neighbors, many of whom speak some English. The warmth and curiosity of the East German people — especially in this Thuringian region — are remarkable.

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