

Bernadette Mayrhofer

Expulsion and Murder of Vienna Philharmonic Musicians after 1938

*"Why can I not play music with them? I belong! I'm the concertmaster!"*¹

Arnold Rosé upon his expulsion from the orchestra immediately after the "Anschluss"

Thirteen active musicians were expelled from the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic in 1938. Three additional musicians who were already in retirement also became victims of the holocaust. A total of seven musicians were not able to escape in time into exile. Of these, five were deported and murdered in concentration camps, while one musician died as a result of the eviction from his apartment and another died in Vienna while awaiting his impending deportation.

Expulsion from the Orchestra

As in all musical ensembles, immediately after the "Anschluss" key positions within the Vienna Philharmonic were immediately re-staffed with National Socialist sympathizers. Most cultural institutions implemented the anti-Semitic Nazi dogma within Austria even before the adoption of the Nuremberg racial laws of May 20, 1938, and the *Reichskulturkammergesetz* of May 31, 1938, which went into effect on June 11, 1938. Whether or not a member of the orchestra had Jewish ancestors or was married to a woman of Jewish heritage was known before 1938. Even before the "Anschluss", this racial factor affected the social boundaries within the orchestra. The grandson of one of the exiled musicians described this phenomenon as follows:

*"The gist of it was that [...] the Jews were always somehow marginalized. So there were "us" and "them". And then there were those somewhere in between who did not consider themselves anti-Semites."*²

The first large wave of expulsion of musicians from the State Opera in the days after March 11th affected primarily prominent artists who, according to the National Socialistic racial doctrine, were considered Jewish, as was the case with the concertmaster and soloist **Arnold Rosé** and his colleague, principal cellist and soloist **Siegfried Friedrich Buxbaum**.³

This was followed only a few days later by the next stage of expulsions of those orchestral members who were designated as Jewish according to Nazi terminology. Philharmonic musicians **Paul Fischer, Max Starkmann, Josef Geringer, Berthold Salander, Dr. Daniel**

¹ Richard Newman, Alma Rosé. Wien 1906/Auschwitz 1944. Eine Biographie, Bonn 2003, 105.

² Interview Bernadette Mayrhofer mit Roger Salander, Wien, 30. Mai 2005.

³ Letter from Kerber/Vienna State Opera administration to the BThV, March 18, 1938, AdR, SThV 886/1938.

Falk, Viktor Robitsek and **Ludwig Wittels** were barred from further service in the orchestra and were informed of their compulsory suspension in writing by the administration of the State Opera on March 23, 1938.⁴

Another consequence of the implementation of the Nuremberg racial laws in Austria as of May 20, 1938, and particularly by means of the "Regulations for the Re-Organization of Austrian Professional Civil Servants of May 31, 1938", which were used as a 'legal' justification for the expulsion of civil servants of Jewish heritage, was a third wave of expulsions which threatened those orchestra members of "mixed heritage" or who were "related by marriage" (jüdisch Versippte), according to Nazi terminology. The administration of the State (SThV) attempted to stem the further loss of artistic personnel by way of a special arrangement which consisted of submitting Applications for Exemption, the so-called "Belassungsanträge"). Paragraph 3, Section 3 of the Civil Service Decree of May 31, 1938, according to which employees "can in exceptional cases remain in their positions with the special approval of a representative of the 'Führer' or an office appointed by him" provided the legal basis for these exceptions"⁵. The individual directors were prompted to submit such exemption requests.⁶ The administration of the State Opera, with the support of the prominent conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, first submitted requests for "special permission" for nine orchestra musicians."⁷ Specifically excluded from this privilege were the musicians **Leopold Föderl** and Arthur Schurig, who according to Nazi terminology were "related by marriage".⁸ **Hugo Burghauser**, who had been removed from his position as Philharmonic chairman, was included in the list for special permission. For political considerations, however, he chose to go into exile. Burghauser's wife, the well-known choreographer, ballet mistress and director Margarethe Wallmann, who was of Jewish heritage, was already at this time in Buenos Aires.⁹ The Argentine concertmaster and soloist **Ricardo Odnoposoff** also escaped, first to Brussels, then - after the outbreak of war in 1939 - to Buenos Aires, when he was unable to satisfactorily document his ancestry.

Persecution, Deportation and Murder of Philharmonic Musicians

Thirteen active musicians were expelled from the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic in 1938. Three additional musicians who were already retired fell victim to the holocaust. A total of seven Philharmonic musicians were not able to escape into exile

⁴ Letter from Kerber/Vienna State Opera administration to the SThV, March 24, 1938, AdR, SThV 886/1938, Schreiben von SThV, 25. März 1938, AdR, SThV 886/1938.

⁵ Report by Kosak, June 21, 1938, AdR, SThV 2312/1938, 11.

⁶ Report by Kosak, June 21, 1938, AdR, SThV 2312/1938, 12f.

⁷ Letter of the Reich Propaganda Ministry in Berlin to opera director Erwin Kerber, July 20, 1938, AdR, Karton "Judenakte 1939-1940", Bundestheater Administrationsakten 958/38.

⁸ Report by Kerber to the SThV, October 21, 1938, AdR, Karton „Judenakte 1939-1940“.

⁹ Wiener Staatsoper, 70 Jahre danach. Die Wiener Staatsoper und der „Anschluss“ 1938, Opfer, Täter, Zuschauer, Katalog zur Ausstellung im Gustav Mahler-Saal der Wiener Staatsoper 10. März bis 30. Juni 2008, 46.

in time, with five of them - **Moriz Glattauer, Viktor Robitsek, Max Starkmann, Julius Stwertka** und **Armin Tyroler** - being deported and murdered in concentration camps. Two additional Philharmonic musicians died under dramatic circumstances while still in Vienna: **Anton Weiss** died on Dec. 1, 1940 as the result of a stroke suffered while being evicted from his apartment. The violinist **Paul Fischer** died on Nov. 4, 1942, at the age of 66 years in the Jewish Hospital in Vienna – after having suffered dismissal from his position, forced eviction and relocation, financial hardship, illness, miserable living conditions, etc.¹⁰

The arduous living conditions in Vienna for the musicians expelled from the Philharmonic until their escape into exile or forced deportation and murder in the concentration camps were characterized by large-scale waves of arrest beginning in March 1938, pogrom-style demonstrations against the Jewish populace, brutal disappropriation, forced relocation into Jewish living areas, plundering and intimidation in many shapes and forms.

Escape into Exile

Nine Philharmonic musicians were able to escape into exile in time. **Arnold Rosé** and **Friedrich Buxbaum** escaped to London, England. They were already advanced in years and despite having many advantageous contacts it was difficult for them to gain a foothold in the British musical scene. **Hugo Burghauser** escaped first to Toronto, Canada, moving later to New York, USA. **Daniel Falk, Josef Geringer, Berthold Salander** and **Ludwig Wittels** successfully escaped to New York, USA. The violonist **Leopold Föderl** escaped to Chicago, USA, while **Ricardo Odnoposoff** emigrated by way of Brussels, Belgium, to Buenos Aires, Argentina and later to New York, USA.¹¹

Failed Opportunity to Reintegrate Expelled Musicians into Austrian Cultural Life

Only two of these musicians returned to Austria. After several delays, Leopold Föderl reemigrated to Austria in 1953. After numerous international concert tours, Ricardo Odnoposoff returned to Vienna in 1956. Neither Föderl nor Odnoposoff ever rejoined the Vienna Philharmonic after their return to Austria.¹²

Research in Progress

In the course of this research work, numerous historical sources have been utilized. Nevertheless, these sources manifest, both qualitatively and quantitatively, a high degree of disparity. The amount of data on the lives of the musicians Leopold Föderl and Arnold Rosé is quite good, whereas the amount of information available on the violinist Ludwig Wittels is, at

¹⁰ Sources from the Historical Archives of the Vienna Philharmonic (HAdWPh); Clemens Hellsberg, *Demokratie der Könige. Die Geschichte der Wiener Philharmoniker*, Zürich 1992, 504.

¹¹ Bernadette Mayrhofer, "Die Angelegenheit des Judenabbaus geht jetzt ganz ruhig vor sich". *Vertreibung von Wiener Philharmonikern nach 1938 und ihr Leben im Exil*, Thesis, Vienna 2005.

¹² ebd.



this time, very modest. Accordingly varied in length and detail are the texts concerning the individual Philharmonic musicians who were driven out of the orchestra. The project's research, consolidation and augmentation of the biographical portraits of the victims will be continued until August 2013.

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