

Bernadette Mayrhofer

Persecution and Murder of Members of the Vienna Philharmonic

"Even though I was thrilled to see Vienna again – as a city – I could not get used to the Viennese, the Nazis. In every Viennese person I saw an SS man and accomplice in the murder of our people, including my mother. The Viennese feel very sorry for themselves and it doesn't occur to anyone to admit their guilt, not even in part. [...] I want no more ties to the cultural life of Vienna. Again and again I think of the gassing of Swertka, Robitschek, and the others." ¹

Murdered after Deportation:

- 1. Moriz Glattauer (Violin I)**
- 2. Viktor Robitsek (Violin II)**
- 3. Max Starkmann (Violin I, Viola)**
- 4. Julius Stwertka (Concertmaster, Violin I)**
- 5. Armin Tyroler (Oboe II)**

Philharmonic Members who died in Vienna:

- 6. Anton Weiss (Violin I, section leader)**
- 7. Paul Fischer (Violin I)**

In 1938, thirteen active musicians were expelled from the Association of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra. Three additional retired members of the Philharmonic fell victim to the Holocaust. A total of five members of the Philharmonic were killed in the course of racist cleansings. One member of the Philharmonic died as a result of the eviction from his apartment, and another died in Vienna before his impending deportation.

The violinist **Moriz Glattauer** was deported together with his wife, Anna, to Theresienstadt on July 14, 1942. He died there on February 2, 1943. His wife Anna Glattauer was transferred to Auschwitz on May 15, 1944 and was probably gassed there.²

¹ "Obwohl ich gethrilled war, Wien – als Stadt – wiederzusehen, konnte ich mich an die Wiener lies Nazis [sic!], nicht gewöhnen. Ich sah in jedem Wiener einen S.S.Mann und Helfershelfer in der Ermordung unserer Leute, einschliesslich [sic!] meiner Mutter. Die Wiener tun sich sehr leid und keinem ist eingefallen sich – wenn auch nur teilweise – schuldig zu bekennen. [...] Ich will keine ties mehr haben mit dem Kulturleben Wiens. Ich denke immer an die Vergasung Swertka's, Robitschek's und der anderen." Letter of „Lippa“ to Förderl, Rochester, NY, October 20 (most likely in the first years following the end of the war, author's note), Archive/Föderl.

² Viennese registration records in the Vienna City and Land Archives concerning „Moriz Glattauer“; DÖW-database <http://www.doew.at/ausstellung/shoahopferdb.html>; membership register of the WPh, HAdWPh.

In connection with the *Polenaktion, Litzmannstadt*, the violinist **Viktor Robitsek** was deported to the ghetto Lodz/Litzmannstadt on October 28, 1941. Robitsek died in Litzmannstadt on June 10, 1942. His wife was murdered three weeks before her husband, on May 20, 1942, in the extermination center Litzmannstadt.³

On October 5, 1942, the violinist **Max Starkmann** was abducted together with his wife to the extermination camp Maly Trostinec near Minsk, where he was killed only a few days later, on October 9, 1942. The date of the death of his wife, Elsa Starkmann, is unknown.⁴

Concertmaster **Julius Stwertka** and his wife Rosa Stwertka were deported to the ghetto of Theresienstadt on August 27, 1942, where Julius Stwertka died only a few months later, on December 17, 1942.⁵ Rosa Stwertka was transferred to Auschwitz on May 16, 1944, where she was also murdered. The date of her death is unknown.

Armin Tyroler (oboe) and his wife Josefine were deported to Theresienstadt on August 27, 1942, the same day as his Philharmonic colleague, Julius Stwertka. Armin Tyroler participated in several concerts there before falling gravely ill. On October 27, 1944, he was transferred together with his wife to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, where he was murdered in the gas chamber the next day, October 28, 1944. The date of the death of Josefine Tyroler is unknown.⁶

Anton Weiss, also a violinist, died of a stroke on December 1, 1940, as a result of the eviction from his apartment.⁷

Highly ambiguous are the circumstances of the death of another member of the Philharmonic: After his dismissal and eviction, the violinist **Paul Fischer**, who had been

³ Viennese registration records in the Vienna City and Land Archives (*Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv*) concerning „Viktor Robitschek“; DÖW-database <http://www.doew.at/ausstellung/shoahopferdb.html> (spelling in the DÖW-database: „Robitschek“).

⁴ Viennese registration records in the Vienna City and Land Archives concerning „Max Starkmann“; DÖW-database <http://www.doew.at/ausstellung/shoahopferdb.html>.

⁵ Viennese registration records in the Vienna City and Land Archives concerning „Julius Stwertka“; DÖW-database <http://www.doew.at/ausstellung/shoahopferdb.html>; membership register of the WPh, HAdWPh.

⁶ Viennese registration records in the Vienna City and Land Archives concerning „Armin Tyroler“; DÖW-database <http://www.doew.at/ausstellung/shoahopferdb.html> (spelling in DÖW-database: „Armin Tiroler“); Ernst Kobau (text) and Josef Bednarik (research), Armin Tyroler (1873 – 1944), in: *Journal – Wiener Oboe*, 4 – 7, article in the HAdWPh, Armin Tyroler No. 101; Letter of Dr. Ingo Schultz to the WPh, 10.1.1993, HAdWPh, Armin Tyroler No. 101.

⁷ Viennese registration records in the Vienna City and Land Archives concerning „Professor Anton Weihs“; information concerning Anton Weiss, compiled by the HAdWPh/Fr. Dr. Silvia Kargl (archivist).

suffering from illness, died on November 4, 1942 in the Jewish Hospital in the second municipal district of Vienna, on Malzgasse 16.⁸

The population groups persecuted by the Nazis were confronted with the constant fear of being threatened, denounced, evicted, picked up and/or deported at any time. One distressing event concerned the Philharmonic musician **Josef Geringer**, who on November 9, 1938 – at the very onset of the November pogrom, in which 6,547 “Jews” were arrested in Vienna alone⁹ – was arrested and deported to the concentration camp at Dachau. Mrs. Geringer turned for help to Wilhelm Jerger, the Provisional Director (*kommissarische Leiter*) of the Vienna Philharmonic, who was able to successfully intervene with the Director of the Military Police (*Feldpolizeidirektor*), Dr. Roman Loos, and Geringer was released.¹⁰ According to the records of the AdR, Geringer had returned to his apartment on December 23.¹¹ Following this traumatic event, the psychological stress and existential fear on the part of Josef Geringer and his family must have been extreme – from this point on, flight into exile must have seemed like the only possible alternative. Geringer and his wife were able to escape to the USA in time. His three children were saved by one of the children’s transports to England.

In October 1941 Wilhelm Jerger attempted to spare five Jewish colleagues from their immanent deportation to concentration camps. Jerger wrote a memo to Walter Thomas, the cultural advisor to Gauleiter Baldur von Schirach. “I would be grateful if it would be possible to initiate an arrangement in the question of the relocation of the five elderly members, who are named below.”¹² It is impossible to clarify from the available sources the question why in this letter Jerger had not also mentioned and taken a stand for the severely threatened colleague Paul Fischer.

⁸ Clemens Hellsberg, *Demokratie der Könige. Die Geschichte der Wiener Philharmoniker*, Zürich 1992, 504; Concerning Fischer, see also AdR, ÖBThV, 2123/38.

⁹ Bruce Pauley, *Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus, Von der Ausgrenzung zur Auslöschung*, Wien 1993, 349.

¹⁰ According to statements by Lilly Drukker, Josef Geringer’s daughter, her father was arrested only on November 10, 1938. Correspondence WPh with the daughter of Josef Geringer 2008, HAdWPh, Josef Geringer, No. 161; Hellsberg, *Demokratie der Könige* (as in note 2), 505.

¹¹ “According to telephonic communication on the side of Mr. Schewa Geringer, he has already been released from protective custody in Dachau and has returned to his apartment.” [„Laut telefonischer Verständigung seitens Frau Schewa Geringer ist er aus der Schutzhaft Dachau bereits entlassen und in seine Wohnung zurückgekehrt.“] Signed on December 28, 1938 by Hermann Juch (Director of Finance (*Finanzprokurist*) of the SThV), AdR, SThV 4458/38, Karton „Judenakte“.

¹² “Ich wäre Ihnen dankbar, wenn sich, was diese 5 alten Mitglieder betrifft, eine Regelung in der Frage der Verschickung (*sic!*) in die Wege leiten ließe und gebe Ihnen nachstehend die Namen bekannt.” Letter of Wilhelm Jerger, Directorate (*Vorstand*) of the WPh, addressed to the Chief Advisor (*Generalreferent*), Walter Thomas (responsible for all cultural issues), Vienna, October 23, 1941, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra Depot State Opera, personnel file Wilhelm Jerger.



Only a few days later, on October 27, 1941, Wilhelm Jerger again attempted to intervene with Walter Thomas, this time on behalf of his colleague Viktor Robitzek and his wife, Elsa, who were both threatened with deportation to Theresienstadt." *As I have just been informed, the former member Viktor Israel Robitzek (sic!) must leave Vienna tomorrow, Tuesday, at 9 AM, as part of the deportation. In consideration of the medical condition and age of Robitzek (sic!), as well as his wife, 64 ½ and 61 years, a request is made to initiate a stop to this deportation. Robitzek suffers from digestive and heart problems. Mrs. Robitzek (sic!) has trouble walking due to a bad spine. Heil Hitler!"*¹³ It is unknown who informed Jerger of the deportations scheduled for the next day. Jerger's attempt to rescue the five Philharmonic musicians from deportation failed due to the Nazi Governor (Reichsstatthalter) Baldur von Schirach and his Cultural Officer, Walter Thomas. All five colleagues whom Jerger attempted to rescue fell victim to the Shoah.

© Bernadette Mayrhofer

<http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/>

All rights reserved. Permission granted for personal use only. Subsequent use and reproduction for any other purposes is forbidden.

Translation: Dennis Johnson

¹³ „wie mir eben mitgeteilt wird, muß das ehemalige Mitglied Viktor Israel Robitzek (sic!) morgen Dienstag um 9 Uhr früh (sic!) im Wege des Abtransportes Wien verlassen. In Anbetracht des Gesundheitszustandes und des Alters des Robitzek (sic!), sowie seiner Ehefrau, 64 ½ bzw. 61 Jahre, wird gebeten, die Stornierung des Abtransportes in die Wege leiten zu wollen. Robitzek leidet an einer sichtbaren Verengung am Anfang und am Ende des Verdauungskanals sowie an schweren Herzzuständen. Die Frau Robitzeks (sic!) an Gehstörungen, die vom Rückenmark ihren Ausgang nehmen. Heil Hitler!“ Letter from Wilhelm Jerger, Directorate (Vorstand) of the WPh, addressed to the Chief Advisor (Generalreferent), Walter Thomas (responsible for all cultural issues), Vienna, 27. Oktober 1941, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra Depot State Opera, personnel file Wilhelm Jerger.