



Bernadette Mayrhofer

Exiled Members of the Vienna Philharmonic

„Bemerken möchte ich noch, dass mein seeliger Mann, ein geborener Wiener war, seelisch darunter litt, dass man ihn aus der Opera (sic!) gejagt hatte, als das Hitlerregime begann. Er sprach immer wieder davon, es frass (sic!) an ihm innerlich all diese Jahre. Es ging mit ihm schlafen und stand mit ihm auf.“¹

[“I would also like to add that my husband, God bless him, was born in Vienna and that he suffered psychologically from the fact that he had been driven out of the opera as soon as Hitler’s regime had emerged. He talked about that time and again, it haunted him for all these years. It was there when he went to bed, and it was still there when he got up in the morning.”]
Quote from a desperate letter written by Katia Wittels, widow of the Vienna Philharmonic member Ludwig Wittels, who fled to New York, asking the Vienna Hilfsfonds (Relief Fund) for financial support.

- 1. Hugo Burghauser (Bassoon I, Chairman)**
- 2. Friedrich Buxbaum (Principal Cellist)**
- 3. Daniel Falk (Violin II)**
- 4. Leopold Förderl (Violin II)**
- 5. Joseph Geringer (Violin I)**
- 6. Ricardo Odnoposoff (Violin I, Concertmaster)**
- 7. Arnold Rosé (Violin I, Principal Viola, Concertmaster)**
- 8. Berthold Salander (Violin II)**
- 9. Ludwig Wittels (Violin I)**

Nine members of the Vienna Philharmonic managed to flee into exile. Two of them were already fairly old at that time. The concertmaster **Arnold Rosé** escaped to London at the age of 75; his colleague **Friedrich Buxbaum** was almost 69 years old when he fled from Vienna, also going to London into exile. After the outbreak of war, **Ricardo Odnoposoff**, a virtuoso violinist who did not consider himself an emigrant due to his Argentinian origin, was forced to go to Buenos Aires/Argentina and temporarily stay with his parents. In 1944, Odnoposoff finally went to New York, staying there for 14 years before returning to Vienna. The director of the Vienna Philharmonic, **Hugo Burghauser**, fled in arduous circumstances via Budapest, Zagreb, Milan, Paris and New York to Toronto/Canada until, after having worked as a bassoonist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for a few months, he finally settled in New York. The violinist **Leopold Förderl** escaped to Chicago/USA. Apart from Odnoposoff, he was the only member of the Vienna Philharmonic who returned to Vienna. The musicians **Josef Geringer**, **Daniel Falk**, **Berthold Salander** and **Ludwig Wittels** emigrated to New York/USA.

¹ Letter from Katia Wittels to the Vienna Hilfsfonds (Relief Fund), dated New York Feb. 3, 1957, *Entschädigungsakten* (compensation files) on Ludwig Wittels, no. 08973/3a/30, AdR – Hilfsfonds.



Unfortunately, (so far) only very limited historical data has been available on the circumstances surrounding their escape.

Gruelling Administrative Barriers Preceding the ‘Departure’

Although the Nazis undoubtedly intended to cause a massive exodus from Austria, particularly by engaging in excessive violence, evictions, denaturalizations, thieving expropriations and threats, most of the people affected were confronted with almost insurmountable difficulties as they tried to find legal ways of escaping. The way the expulsions were initiated was primarily meant to economically exploit the Jewish population: As much as 25 percent of the emigrants’ assets were collected as the so-called “Reichsfluchtsteuer” (Reich Flight Tax); in order to legally emigrate, a tax clearance certificate (“Unbedenklichkeitserklärung” der “Steuerabzahlung”) was required, which needed to cover the total statistical life expectancy (“statistische Lebenserwartung”); ‘emigrants’ were allowed only a maximum of 10 Reichsmark in cash and a foreign currency amount adding up to 20 Reichsmark when leaving the country, and the transfer of personal belongings to a foreign country involved complicated and tedious procedures requiring sworn experts, who had to estimate their monetary value; newly acquired property was subject to an additional tax of 100 percent of its original price.² In fact, these cumbersome administrative burdens hampered any form of ‘legal’ emigration during the first months following the “Anschluss”: During the first three months, ‘only’ 18,000 Jews fled the country, whereas there were already 32,000 emigrants in the next three months. Due to all the obstacles mentioned above, many people tried to flee the country ‘illegally’ and with very little in their bags.³ For artists like the musician Hugo Burghauser, it was advisable to seize the opportunity provided by the pretext of having found artistic employment abroad.

Escaping to the U.S.

The American music world was not too thrilled about the arrivals of European refugees; quite the contrary, incoming foreign musicians were met with rejection. However, this was barely a case of anti-Semitism, but rather linked to the idea of the immigrants being responsible for the high unemployment that existed.⁴ They were accused of having adopted an extremely patronizing attitude towards American cultural life. Furthermore, the Americans did not approve of the fact that European musicians, in contrast to their American counterparts, had

² Erika Weinzierl, *Zu wenig Gerechte. Österreicher und Judenverfolgung 1938–1945*, pp. 31–58.

³ Bruce Pauley, *Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus. Von der Ausgrenzung zur Auslöschung*, p. 353.

⁴ American musicians mainly feared that the European immigrants would ‘flood’ the American music market, that they were higher skilled and would offer their teaching services at a lower price (dumping), attracting their competitors’ students, etc. From 1938 at the latest, however, the labor market began to recover from the effects of the Great Depression – a process driven by a network of aid organizations that had formed after the eruption of the crisis. Regina Thumser, *Vertriebene Musiker. Schicksale und Netzwerke im Exil 1933–1945*, dissertation, Salzburg 1998, pp. 20-21, 62-63.



allegedly received government support. Their negative stance was sometimes reflected in several music magazines, such as the “Musical Digest” or the “Musical Courier”, which were usually not read by emigrants, though. It is noteworthy in this context that, according to the music historian Regina Thumser, the European immigrants themselves were not really aware of the disapproval they were confronted with owing to the fact that *„die Neuankömmlinge [...] zu einem großen Teil von der direkten Auseinandersetzung mit amerikanischen Musikern abgeschirmt [waren]“* [“the newcomers were mainly shielded from any direct confrontations with American musicians]. Moreover, *„lief die Vergabe von Jobs häufig durch Informationen innerhalb der Netzwerke von Emigranten, bzw. auch durch amerikanische Hilfsorganisationen“*⁵ [“contracts were mostly awarded through the emigrants’ own networks or even through the American relief organizations”].

On the other hand, immigrant musicians also had an advantage over other foreign professionals: It was generally easier for them to deal with the new situation they faced in exile, since the aspect of ‘language’ was more or less unimportant in their professional sphere. In addition, as musicians they had been used to touring before they emigrated, thus having become accustomed to coming across foreign languages, cultures and people – all these factors definitely made things easier for them.⁶ Teaching, the refugees’ most important source of income, did not necessarily require them to adapt themselves accordingly, as they were welcome to adhere to their traditional musical values and pass them on to others.⁷ The clash of different musical traditions and attitudes to life was an issue raised over and over in Burghauser’s memoirs, for instance; it seemed to have been of significant importance amongst his fellow migrant colleagues – a group of people who may well be described as tending to be both elitist and conservative - and even had had an impact on their sense of identity. Vienna’s classical music scene was considered the ultimate measure of all things and it seems that the American audience was the cause of particularly great annoyance: *„Sie redeten, als ob sie in einer Cafeteria wären, und hatten – was das Störendste war – unweigerlich Plätze zehn oder zwölf Sitze weit in einer Reihe. Zehn Leute mußten aufstehen, schlurften, ihre Programme hinlegen und sich dann wieder setzen. Gustav Mahler hatte sich ein derartiges Benehmen bei Aristokraten im Wien der Jahrhundertwende verboten, und hier nahm sich der Bourgeois – unschuldig, aber durch und durch ungebildet – derartige Freiheiten heraus!“*⁸ [“They were talking as though they were in the cafeteria and had – which was the most annoying thing – as many as ten or twelve seats in a row, of course. Ten people had to stand up from their seats, shuffle and put down their programs only to take a

⁵ Ibid. pp. 69-71.

⁶ Anthony Heilbut, *Kultur ohne Heimat. Deutsche Emigranten in den USA nach 1930*. Weinheim/Berlin 1987, p. 32.

⁷ Horst Weber/ Manuela Schwartz, *Quellen zur Geschichte emigrierter Musiker 1933-1950*. California/Munich 2003, introduction.

⁸ Hugo Burghauser cited in Helen Epstein, *Der musikalische Funke. Von Musikern und vom Musizieren mit berühmten Interpreten*. Bern/Munich/Vienna 1988, p. 190.

seat again. Gustav Mahler refused to tolerate it when aristocrats behaved like that in Vienna at the turn of the century, and here the bourgeois, innocent but ignorant to the core, dared to take such liberties!”]

Despite the American musicians’ rejection, their migrant counterparts were still able to find work through their positive commitment (“Positives Engagement”), the American aid organizations as well as an effective internal network comprising other immigrants. In the end, and compared to the anti-Semitism they had experienced in Europe, the negative stance of their American colleagues probably appeared relatively harmless to them and was very likely to be regarded as ‘the usual’ initial problem related to such a situation.⁹

Escaping to Great Britain

In light of the fears of competition on the labor market, resistance against foreign artists was primarily exerted by the UK’s professional body for musicians, the “Incorporated Society of Musicians” (I.S.M.). Especially following the major wave of immigration in 1938/39, the association called for tighter restrictions in accordance with the ban on employment regarding foreign musicians.¹⁰ The BBC’s stance was equally protectionist even though, paradoxically, it would have needed the immigrants’ skills for its anti-Nazi propaganda from 1939. The Times, on the other hand, tended to support the foreign musicians. The ‘magic recipe’ for an exemption from the general ban on employment was to be provided with a certain ‘patronage’, meaning that it was crucial for the musicians to maintain close contacts with influential personalities who would act as their advocates when it was up to the British authorities to decide upon „*Wert oder Unwert eines ausländischen Musikers für das britische Musikleben*“[“*a foreign musician’s value or lack thereof*”] and who would use their power for the benefit of the applicants.¹¹

In the case of the two European emigrants **Arnold Rosé** and **Friedrich Buxbaum**, knowing the right people – and in particular Sir Adrian Boult – was what tipped the scales in favor of some, albeit limited, exemptions despite their age. Buxbaum, for example, obtained permission to teach on November 30, 1938.¹² Still, the fact that it was quite hard for these two excellent musicians to gain a foothold in the British world of music, notwithstanding said (limited) permits, will be further discussed in their individual portraits.

⁹ Thumser, *Vertriebene Musiker* (see footnote⁴), p. 71.

¹⁰ The I.S.M.’s negative stance was best reflected in the speech of the British composer George Dyson in January 1942. Dyson focused on the country’s economic situation, which he considered the root of the exclusion of foreign musicians on the labor market. His speech sparked a broad public discussion; those affected by the exclusion, however, did not take part in that debate. Jutta Raab Hansen, *NS-verfolgte Musiker in England: Spuren deutscher und österreichischer Flüchtlinge in der britischen Musikkultur*, Hamburg 1996, pp. 112-114.

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 97-100, 117, 121.

¹² Richard Newman, *Alma Rosé. Wien 1906/Auschwitz 1944. Eine Biographie*, Bonn 2003, pp. 128-129.

Finally, in 1943, the “Incorporated Society of Musicians” started to change its mindset; the “Musicians’ Refugee Committee”, a British refugee organization, had played an essential role in this context. Moreover, a number of important British personalities, such as the pianist Myra Hess, who was also a friend of the Queen, and the renowned conductor Sir Adrian Boult as well as the well-known English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, had also contributed to that change.¹³

Portraits: Members of the Vienna Philharmonic who fled the Country

The following portraits of expelled members of the Philharmonic Orchestra focus on their professional achievements in exile on the one hand, and on the other hand also picture the contacts and relations they maintained with each other as well as the living conditions of both affected musicians and their families. Of course, personal and professional developments in exile also depended on the musicians’ personal and shared experience prior to their expulsion, such as the individual’s artistic and political ambitions, their personal qualities and values, their family situation etc. The introduction of biographical background information is aimed at shedding some light on the refugees’ professional/artistic developments in exile, making them more tangible, transparent and authentic by presenting a comprehensive overview instead of cutting them loose from their ‘earlier experience’. Unfortunately, though, and to the author’s regret, it will be impossible to fully realize this ambition, particularly in view of the differences in the amounts of data available.

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¹³ Raab Hansen, NS-verfolgte Musiker in England (see footnote¹⁰), pp. 117, 133-134.