



Bernadette Mayrhofer

Paul Fischer (Violin I)

Born on August 31, 1876, in Vienna; died on November 4, 1942, in the Jewish Hospital at Malzgasse 16, in the 2nd District of Vienna.

Joined the Court Opera Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic on March 1, 1899; written notice of compulsory suspension on March 23, 1938;

Resignation from the Jewish Community (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde) Vienna 1913; married to Leopoldine Pohl (born on 8.11.1887 in Hodolany/Olmütz) on June 30, 1913, in the St. Leopold Church in the 2nd District of Vienna; two sons – Paul and Otto Fischer;

1886/87 – 1889/90 Studied at the Vienna Conservatory of the Society of Friends of Music; his instructors were Jakob Moritz Grün (renowned soloist, teacher of Carl Flesch and concertmaster at the Vienna Court Opera until 1909) and Sigmund

Bachrich (conductor at the Pariser Théâtre-Lyrique, member of the Vienna Philharmonic, violist in the Hellmesberger and Rosé Quartets), Bachrich was responsible for Fischer's preparatory violin study; Fischer completed his study and was awarded his diploma in 1890;

Paul Fischer was a k. u. k. court musician, was awarded the title of "Professor" in 1926, was a member of the Hofmusikkapelle and of the internationally renowned Rosé Quartet (whose prominent world premieres included works by Johannes Brahms, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Arnold Schönberg und Anton Webern);

For sources see footnote¹



Paul Fischer

¹ IKG Matriken/Database Department of Matters of Restitution, made available by Mag.^a Sabine Loitfellner, Department of Matters of Restitution, Jewish Community Vienna; Historical residency records for Paul Fischer, Archives of the State and City of Vienna; Information from the Austrian Musical Dictionary for Sigmund Bachrich and Jakob Moritz Grün from the from annual reports of the Conservatory of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna, compiled by Frau Dr. Lynne Heller, Archives of the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna; Richard Newman, Alma Rosé. Wien 1906/Auschwitz 1944. A Biography, Bonn 2003, 13 – 30.



Vienna Philharmonic member Paul Fischer was barely 62 years old when he was suddenly severed from his very successful professional life. Fischer had played first violin for 39 years with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic. Additionally he was a long time member of the internationally renowned Rosé Quartet, most particularly during the most outstanding period of the quartet between 1905 and 1920, playing alongside the prominent founder of the group, Arnold Rosé (violinist and concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic), as well as his two Vienna Philharmonic colleagues Anton Ruzitska (violinist) and Friedrich Buxbaum (cellist), who were also members of this famous ensemble. This quartet performed numerous notable premieres of compositions by Johannes Brahms, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern.²

On June 30, 1913, Paul Fischer married Leopoldine Pohl in the St. Leopold Church in the 2nd District of Vienna. Only shortly before their wedding, Fischer resigned his membership in the Jewish Community (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde). On June 28, 1914, their first son, Paul, was born and on March 3, 1921, their second son, Otto, was born. Under the National Socialistic racial doctrine Mrs. Fischer was classified as an "Aryan" who had produced two sons with mixed blood of the first category, since Paul Fischer was recorded as being a "Jew".³

After 39 years of service in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic, the management of the Vienna State Opera informed violinist Paul Fischer of his "compulsory suspension" in a letter dated March 23, 1938. „ *The administration of the Vienna State Opera informs you herewith of your immediate suspension until further notice. With German Greeting, Administration of the Vienna State Opera*“.⁴ Paul Fischer was forced into retirement effective July 1, 1938, and fired retroactively at the end of December 1938. He was forced to choose between a severance payment (consisting of 12 times his last monthly salary) or „(in the case of disability for service or having reached his 60th year) a surrender of his severance pay in favour a pension calculated at the time of the cancellation of his employment and reduced by one quarter“⁵. Twice, on December 12, 1938 and again on March 14, 1939, the musician made an official complaint in protest of this massive reduction of his rightful pension claims. As of January 1, 1939, all payments to Fischer were temporarily halted. In the March letter Fischer wrote "I sincerely and urgently request the positive handling of my request of December 12, 1938, and the disbursement to me of the pension payments outstanding since January 1,

² Newman, Alma Rosé (see footnote 1).

³ Letters of Paul Fischer to the Reich governor, Vienna, on March 14, 1939, contained in the report from Eckmann, Director of the State Theater Administration (SThV), March 27, 1939, SThV, Karton „Judenakten 1939 – 1940“ 1140/39.

⁴ March 23, 1938, AdR, Administration of the State Opera 367/1938.

⁵ Report of Dr. Alfred Eckmann, Director of the State Theater Administration, on December 12, 1938, AdR, SThV, 4219/38.



1939".⁶ The financial pressure was so great that Fischer went to the administration of the state theaters in an attempt to clarify the situation regarding the retirement payments being withheld. A report of the state theater administration dated March 27, 1939, interpreted the cessation of the pension payments as a "misunderstanding". Fischer was forced to acquiesce to the discriminating stipulations and accepted a large reduction in his retirement package.⁷ Apparently the payments were then continued under the new conditions. Following the death of Paul Fischer in November 1942, the retirement payments were transferred to his widow, Leopoldine Fischer.⁸

The living situation and daily life in Vienna must have been agonizing and traumatic for Paul Fischer and his family. The anti-Semitic laws increased dramatically. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, "Jews" were forbidden to be on the streets after 8:00 PM, to listen to the radio, and to appear in public places was completely prohibited.⁹ In September 1940 legal protection against dismissal for "Jews" was abolished. Between 1940 and 1942 "Jewish" families were often forced to change their place of residence numerous times, in many cases residing with many different people in a single room, without any washing or cooking facilities.

There is no question that the death of a 66-year-old man in poor health („extreme general neuritis")¹⁰ who, following a very successful musical career, had been driven from the orchestra and from his apartment at Schönbrunnerstrasse 66¹¹, cannot be considered 'natural' or 'peaceful'. The miserable living conditions in ghetto-like dwellings have already been mentioned. That Paul Fischer and his family also found themselves in great financial need is confirmed by his desperate requests to the Reich governor to remove the reduction levied on his retirement payment, as well as in a later letter, where he merely "protested" its complete cancellation as of January 1939. In the first letter of December 12, 1938, Fischer relied mainly on his long and varied professional life as foundation for his claim to receive full retirement benefits. In his next letter, dated March 14, 1939, he primarily based his argument on the fact that his wife was "Aryan", and his sons were of "mixed race of the first degree", all of whom he had to support. Fischer's desperation in this letter of petition to the Reich

⁶ Letters of Paul Fischer to the Reich governor, Vienna, on December 12, 1938 and March 14, 1939, included in the report of Eckmann, Director of the State Theater Administration (SThV), March 27, 1939, Bundesadministrationsakten, Karton „Judenakten 1939 – 1940" 1140/39.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Entry from December 18, 1942, Vienna Philharmonic Depot State Opera, personell folder Paul Fischer.

⁹ Zu wenig Gerechte. Österreicher und Judenverfolgung 1938 – 1945, Graz-Wien-Köln 1985, 37f, 41-43.

¹⁰ Letter Paul Fischer to the Reich governor, Vienna, on December 12, 1938, included in the report of Eckmann, Director of the State Theater Administration (SThV), March 27, 1939, Bundesadministrationsakten, Karton „Judenakten 1939 – 1940" 1140/39.

¹¹ From April 1942 non-Jews (Fischer's wife was "Aryan"), who were married to Jews, had to move into Jewish living quarters. For additional information see Bruce Pauley, Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus. Von der Ausgrenzung zur Auslöschung, Vienna 1993. Until his eviction, Paul Fischer had lived at Schönbrunnerstr. 66. See " Pensionierung jüdischer Angestellter", June 1, 1938 AdR, Management of the Vienna State Opera 701/38.



governor is tangible when he describes the consequences of his denied retirement payments. *"soon my family will be reduced to extreme poverty (...) because my prolonged illness has devoured all of my savings."*¹² These statements demonstrate the perversions and humiliations to which these people were submitted. The victims were forced outwardly to adapt themselves to the biological-racial delusions propagated by the Nazis in order to survive.¹³

In addition to these difficult living conditions the Fischer family suffered an additional misfortune. Their younger son, Otto Fischer, died in February 1941 at the age of only 26. The circumstances resulting in Otto Fischer's death are unknown to the author.¹⁴ Otto's father, Paul Fischer, was at this time gravely ill and his life during the Nazi period was characterized by his dismissal from the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Vienna Philharmonic; the end of his professional activities; brutal eviction from his home; forced relocation; extreme poverty; the death of his son; and his own severe illness. This exceptional violinist and one-time member of the Vienna Philharmonic died on November 4, 1942, at the age of 66, in the Jewish hospital at Malzgasse 16 in the 2nd district of Vienna.¹⁵

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¹² Letter of Paul Fischer to the Reich governor, Vienna, March 14, 1939, included in the report of Eckmann/Direktor der SThV, March 27, 1939, Bundesadministrationsakten, Karton „Judenakten 1939 – 1940“ 1140/39.

¹³ On this the historian Raul Hilberg writes: "Sometimes the petitioners appealed to the interests of Germany. [...] The word 'wenigstens' (at least) was anchored in the thought processes of the victims (in petitions, for example). This demonstrates the hope that no further worsening of the situation would be caused, but spokesmen for the victims soon recognized that a reversal of the process was hopeless." Raul Hilberg, *Die Quellen des Holocaust*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, 160ff.

¹⁴ Entry in the municipal cemetery database: „Otto Fischer, 26 J., bestattet 25.2.1941“, Information provided by Mag.^a Sabine Loitfellner, Department of Matters of Restitution, Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien.

¹⁵ Date of death for Paul Fischer from the Wiener MA 35, provided by Mag.^a Sabine Loitfellner, Department of Matters of Restitution, Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien.