



Bernadette Mayrhofer

Viktor Robitsek (Violin II)

Born May 19, 1877, in Vienna; murdered June 10, 1942, in Litzmannstadt

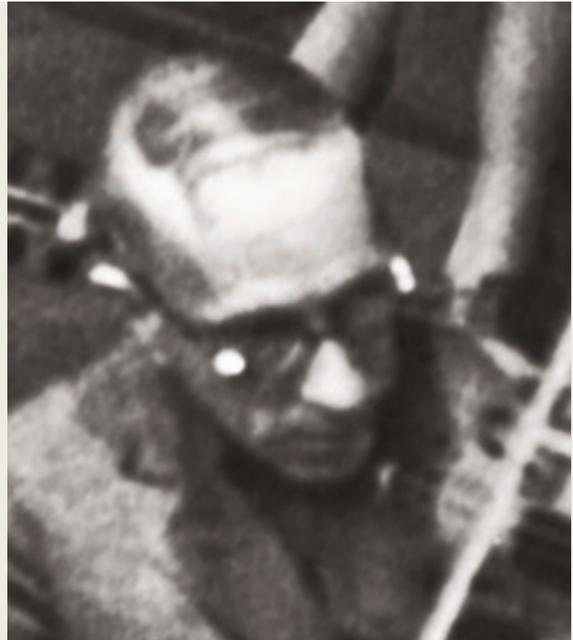
Joined the Vienna Court Opera Orchestra and Vienna Philharmonic on November 11, 1902; Compulsory suspension on Mar. 23, 1938;

Married to Elsa Robitsek (born June 10, 1880); Resignation from the Jewish Community of Vienna (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde) 1914; thereafter no religious affiliation;

1887/88 - 1896/97 (with hiatus) studied at the Vienna Conservatory, where his instructor was Joseph Hellmesberger, Jr. (solo violinist, concertmaster and conductor of the Court Opera);

Deported on October 28, 1941 (along with his wife, Elsa Robitsek), from Vienna to the ghetto Lodz/Litzmannstadt;

For sources see footnote ¹



Viktor Robitsek

After 35 years of service in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Vienna Philharmonic, Viktor Robitsek received notice from the management of the State Opera informing him of his compulsory suspension: "*The Management of the State Opera informs you herewith that effective immediately you are released from employment until further notice. With German Greeting, Management of the State Opera*"² Robitsek was forced into retirement on July 1, 1938, and the end of December 1938 was fired retroactively. He was now forced to choose between severance pay (twelve times his last monthly salary) or "*(in the case of your*

¹ Information regarding Viktor Robitsek was compiled in the Historical Archives of the Vienna Philharmonic (HAdWPh) by Fr. Dr. Silvia Kargl (archivist); Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG), Matriken/Databank Department of Matters of Restitution, provided by Mag. A Sabine Loitfellner, Section for Matters of Restitution, Jewish Community of Vienna (IGK); Information from the Austrian Musical Dictionary online regarding "Joseph Hellmesberger" and from the yearly reports of the Vienna Conservatory of the Society of Friends of Music, collected by Frau Dr. Lynne Heller, Archives of the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna; Historical Records of Places of Residence for the State and City of Vienna and Archives; Documentation Archives of the Austrian Resistance, Online-Database, <http://www.doew.at>. (Spelling in the DÖW-Datenbase: "Viktor Robitschek").

² March 23, 1938, AdR, Management of the Vienna State Opera 367/1938.



*incapacity to fulfil the requirements of the position, or your reaching the age of 60) a forfeiture of the severance pay and the payment of your pension figured at the time of the termination of your contract and reduced by one quarter"*³. Robitsek's decision, along with the length of time the payments from the management of the State Opera continued, is not known. From the Vienna Philharmonic he received a severance payment in the amount of 240 Reich Marks.⁴

The daily situation for Viktor Robitsek and his wife, Elsa (born June 6, 1880), must have been tortuous and traumatic. The anti-Semitic laws had sharpened dramatically. Immediately upon the commencement of the war, 'Jews' were forbidden to be seen on the streets after 8 PM. They were not permitted to listen to radio or to visit public places.⁵ In September 1940, the protection against eviction for 'Jews' was officially revoked and between 1940 and 1942 many Jewish families were forced to move their residences numerous times, often being housed with many different people in one room, lacking any facilities for washing or cooking. It is documented that the Robitseks were forced to move four times: in December 1940, Robitsek and his wife moved from their apartment at the Königsklostergasse 7, in the 6th district to the Wipplingerstraße 32 in the 1st district ("Pension Elite"); as of October 1, 1941, the couple were registered in the Peter-Jordan-Straße in the 19th district ("Pension Peter"); and from October 22, 1941, they were registered in the 8th district at Alserstraße 21 ("Pension Zenz").⁶

One day before the Robitseks were to be deported, the chairman of the Vienna Philharmonic, Wilhelm Jerger, in a letter to Walter Thomas, general advisor to the regional governor Baldur von Schirach,, attempted to intervene on their behalf: *"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!"*⁷

³ Report Dr. Alfred Eckmann, Director of the State Theater Management on December 12, 1938, AdR, SThV, 4219/38.

⁴ The payment was made on Oct. 10, the year is not given. Probably this payment was made in 1939, as was the case with his colleagues. See information regarding Moriz Glattauer, compiled from the Historical Archives of the Vienna Philharmonic (HAdWph) by Fr. Dr. Silvia Kargl (archivist).

⁵ Erika Weinzierl, *Zu wenig Gerechte. Österreicher und Judenverfolgung 1938 – 1945*, Graz-Wien-Köln 1985, 37f, 41-43.

⁶ Historical residency records for "Viktor Robitschek", Archives of the City and Province of Vienna.

⁷ Letter from Wilhelm Jerger, Chairman (*Vorstand*) of the WPh, addressed to the Chief Advisor (*Generalreferent*), Walter Thomas (responsible for all cultural issues), Vienna, October 27, 1941, Vienna Philharmonic Depot State Opera, personnel file Wilhelm Jerger.



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It is unknown who informed Jerger of the deportations scheduled for the next day. Jerger's attempt to rescue his former colleague failed. On October 28, 1941, Viktor and Elsa Robitsek were deported to the ghetto of Lodz/Litzmannsstadt.⁸

In the fall of 1941, mass deportations from Vienna to Lodz were carried out. The Robitseks found themselves among approximately 5,000 other Jewish victims who arrived in Lodz between October 15 and November 2, 1941. More than 78 percent of those were older than 45 years of age and more than 41 percent were older than 60. Nearly 9 percent were over 70 years old with the over-all percentage of women being very high (much more than half). *"Within a few weeks the death rate of Viennese Jews rose considerably. Until May 1942, 771 died of hunger, illness and exhaustion."*⁹ As of May 1942, many Viennese Jews were transported to Chelmno/Kulmhof and killed in so-called "gas wagons" (mobile death units). Approximately half of all the people who were removed as part of the mass deportation of October/November 1941 to Lodz were killed by the SS before the beginning of summer 1942. Among these victims were Viktor Robisek of the Vienna Philharmonic, who was murdered on June 10, 1942, and his wife, Elsa Robitsek, who had already been killed three weeks before her husband, on May 20, 1942.¹⁰

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⁸ Documentary Archives of the Austrian Resistance, Online database, <http://www.doew.at>. (The spelling in the DÖW database is "Viktor Robitschek" and "Elsa Robitschek").

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.