



WIENER  
PHILHARMONIKER  
— 1842 —

## **Bernadette Mayrhofer**

### **Ricardo Odnoposoff (Violin I, Concertmaster)**

**Born (as the child of Russian immigrants) in Buenos Aires/Argentina on Feb. 24, 1914, died in Vienna on Oct. 26, 2004**

Joined the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at age 19 (following an invitation from Clemens Krauss in 1933/34, who offered him a position as concertmaster without an audition) on Sept. 1, 1935; first performance as concertmaster with the Vienna Philharmonic on Dec. 25, 1933; On Sept. 1, 1938 termination of his contract with the State Opera due to massive political pressure exerted by the Nazi authorities;



*Ricardo Odnoposoff*

Education: lessons with Leopold Auer in Buenos Aires until 1927, studies with concertmaster Rudolf Deman for six months in 1928, then studies with the renowned violin teacher Carl Flesch at today's Berlin University of the Arts until 1932; during his studies Odnoposoff already performed solos with the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of Erich Kleiber; 1932 diploma examination and prize winner of the 1st International Competition for Voice and Violin in Vienna, placed second in the Ysaye Competition in Brussels (award of the State Prize); Paul Guggenberger, Edward Kudlak and Ortwin Ottmaier, all members of the Vienna Philharmonic, figured among Odnoposoff's students;

Escape from Vienna in the autumn of 1938; according to the *Wiener Melderegister* (Registry Office), he deregistered on Oct. 10, 1938; he first fled to Belgium and then, with the outbreak of war in 1939, to Argentina before going to New York (Feb. 1944-1956); he finally returned to Vienna in 1956;

Activities in exile: performed various concerts in South America from 1940 to the end of 1943, artistic breakthrough in New York with his debut at Carnegie Hall on Feb. 5, 1944; cooperation with impresario Sol Hurok as a result of his success, later change to Columbia Concerts; performed concerts with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the Zurich Radio Symphony Orchestra, among others; numerous international tours: e.g. in May 1946, to Latin America; in early 1947, tour in Europe, also concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic;



Returned to Vienna in 1956, end of his career as a soloist, 1957–1973 Professor of Violin at the Music Academy, teacher at the Vienna Music Academy and at the State University of Music and the Performing Arts in Stuttgart from 1964; 1975–1994 teacher at the Zurich School of Music;

Some of his numerous awards include: the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and the Arts, the Nicolai Medal, the Vienna Philharmonic Honorary Ring in 1994, the Silver Medal of Honour of the City of Vienna and several medals awarded by other countries;

For sources see footnote <sup>1</sup>

*„[...] he established himself as one of the outstanding violinists of the day. The Argentine artist, who came here virtually unknown to the general public, took his audience by storm by the virtuosity, power and fire of his performance. [...]”* <sup>2</sup>

Enthusiastic critique by Noel Straus of Ricardo Odnoposoff's debut at Carnegie Hall in New York on February 5, 1944, in the New York Times.

Very quickly Ricardo Odnoposoff, the Vienna Philharmonic's young concertmaster and an internationally successful violin soloist, was to receive a first bitter taste of the tense political situation in Austria after the Nazi takeover on March 12, 1938. When he returned from a solo tour in Italy in March 1938, he was suddenly denied access to the Vienna State Opera.<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of this incident, Odnoposoff was confronted with enormous pressure, being urged to provide satisfactory evidence of his Aryan origin and being questioned by the Gestapo ('Secret State Police'), presumably in the autumn of 1938, until he and his wife saw no alternative other than to flee the country. They went to Brussels for a few months before leaving for Buenos Aires to stay at his parents'. In 1944 Odnoposoff experienced a spectacular artistic breakthrough at his debut performance at Carnegie Hall in New York. He returned to Vienna in 1956, where he dedicated himself solely to teaching. Odnoposoff died in Vienna on October 26, 2004.

### **Expulsion from the Orchestra in 1938**

The introduction of the laws of the Reich Chamber of Culture (RKK) on June 11, 1938, and the establishment of the Reich Chamber of Culture in Austria provided the basis for the implementation of the Nazis' anti-Semitic 'racist cleansings'. From that time on, repression

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<sup>1</sup> Information on Odnoposoff, compiled by HAdWPh/Dr. Silvia Kargl (archivist); Clemens Hellsberg, Zum Gedenken an Ricardo Odnoposoff, Musikblätter of the Vienna Philharmonic, volume 59, episode 3, pp. 154-156, Gdal Saleski, Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin, New York 1949, 384; Interview with Burkhard Laugwitz, „Ein starker Geiger aus Wien“ – Ricardo Odnoposoff, in: Das Orchester. Zeitschrift für Orchesterkultur und Rundfunk-, Chorwesen, 44. Jahrgang, Heft 9, Mainz 1996; Josef Reitler, 25 Jahre Neues Wiener Konservatorium. 1909 – 1934, Teacher list, Wien 1934, 31; Historical residency records for Richard Odnoposoff, Archives of the State and City of Vienna.

<sup>2</sup> NYT, Sunday, February 6, 1944, pg. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Hellsberg, Zum Gedenken an Ricardo Odnoposoff (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 157.



also affected artists and musicians whose 'racial' descent, according to the regime's ideological criteria, could not be clarified. From the early summer of 1938, foreign artists of the Vienna State Opera and Vienna Philharmonic, such as concertmaster and violin virtuoso Ricardo Odnoposoff were affected. The managing director of the Vienna Philharmonic was officially urged to "*Consider it part of the necessary adaptation process to help your personnel make sure that everyone obtains the necessary 'Aryan certificate' (translator's note: document which certified that a person was of Aryan descent). You are asked to cooperate by ensuring that every one of our national comrades ('Volksgenossen') who turns to you for advice is notified of our office, since not everyone is yet aware of the fact that there has been an Office for Foreign Genealogy Research ('Auslandssippenforschung') ever since the change of power.*"<sup>4</sup> This letter arrived at the State Theater Administration (SThV) on September 14, 1938. Odnoposoff, who was of Argentine descent, was a member of both the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra from 1934 to 1938. Apart from being an Argentine national, Odnoposoff had also taken on Austrian citizenship while working at the opera. His father's family originally came from Russia – a fact that resulted in even greater personal harassment apart from the already burdensome and humiliating procedure of obtaining an 'Aryan certificate'. However, since Odnoposoff's outstanding artistic potential was also recognized as such by the orchestra, the State Opera administration did in fact sympathize with him. On July 3, 1938, opera director Erwin Kerber asked the administration of the State Theater to extend Odnoposoff's deadline: "*Regarding Richard Odnoposoff, it is not at all clear at this stage that he is Jewish. Odnoposoff is still in search of his documents. Given that his family is from Russia, this process will certainly take some more time. Until the administration is provided with the necessary information, it will have to consider Odnoposoff's contract non-terminable.*"<sup>5</sup>

In an internal report of June 21, 1938, both Kerber and Kosak, Deputy Head of the State Theater Administration, agreed that Odnoposoff should be granted "a reasonable time limit in order for him to obtain his Aryan certificate" and that his salary needed to be paid throughout this period.<sup>6</sup> The period was to end on August 31, 1938.<sup>7</sup> The fact that Odnoposoff held dual nationality (Argentine and Austrian) was only a peripheral issue in the correspondence between the SThV and the State Opera Directorate. Odnoposoff was primarily urged to provide evidence of his Aryan descent. According to a letter Odnoposoff wrote to the SThV and the State Opera Directorate on September 22, 1938 he was unable to gain access to "*Russian documents which would prove his Aryan origin [...] despite major*

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<sup>4</sup> "Auslandssippenforschung" ("Foreign Genealogy Research") (leader Ludwig Adamus) addressing the *Betriebsführer* (managing director), letter arrived at the SThV on September 14, 1938, AdR, ÖSThV 3141/38.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Kerber to the SThV (annex), June 3, 1938, AdR, State Opera Directorate 701/38.

<sup>6</sup> June 21, 1938, ÖBThV, 2312/38, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20; see also 'Urlaubskorrespondenz', August 20, 1939, ÖBThV, 2980/38.



efforts", since he had "never received any reply from Russia"<sup>8</sup>. Therefore he believed that it would be "best to terminate the employment contract by mutual agreement and prior to its expiry on August 31, 1939. Furthermore, I ask to be granted a three-month severance pay, as I will not have any income until I take on a new position elsewhere"<sup>9</sup>. In accordance with Odnoposoff's request, the Directorate forwarded a recommendation to the administration of the State Theater.<sup>10</sup> Already on August 31, 1938 he was paid his last salary and his request for a severance pay was denied due to the settlement 'based on mutual agreement'. However, what he did manage to negotiate at least was the payment of his pension contributions for the period from January 1, 1934 to September 1, 1938.<sup>11</sup>

In an interview in 1996, Odnoposoff recounted that he had been summoned by the Gestapo in order to be told that his security was of limited duration. In this interview, he did not comment on his efforts to get access to his documents in Russia, which were the prerequisite for his *Ahnenpass* (proof of ancestry). In fact, this could be viewed as a strategic attempt at diversion in order to protect himself and play for time.<sup>12</sup>

### **Escape from Vienna – 'Richard' again becomes 'Ricardo' Odnoposoff**

Since he was an Argentine national, Odnoposoff did not consider himself an expatriate and never ceased to stress this fact. In a conversation with Burkard Laugwitz in 1996, he briefly addressed the events of 1938: "And still I was summoned by the Gestapo. They made it perfectly clear to me: We can still protect you. Of course, this was enough of a reminder for me. This was when my wife and I packed our things and went to Brussels. There I had placed second behind David Oistrach in the second Ysaye Competition in 1937 and my wife and I consequently received support from various people. When the war started in 1939, we left Europe behind and went to Argentina to stay at my parents'."<sup>13</sup>

According to the historical *Meldeunterlagen* (residency registration documents) of the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna, Ricardo Odnoposoff officially deregistered in Vienna on October 10, 1938 and specified his new destination: "Brussels, Belgium"<sup>14</sup>. It is

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Richard Odnoposoff to the Opera Directorate, Vienna, September 22, 1938, AdR, State Opera Directorate 1049/38; September 22, 1938, ÖBThV, 3322/38; Dr. Alfred Eckmann, head of the State Theater Administration (SThV) repeated Odnoposoff's arguments in his letter to the Office of the Reich governor, saying that "despite major efforts, he did not succeed in gaining access to his documents in Russia, which would prove that he is of Aryan descent", April 6, 1939, AdR, SThV 1829/39.

<sup>9</sup> September 22, 1938, ÖBThV, 3322/38.

<sup>10</sup> September 27, 1938, ÖBThV, 3322/38.

<sup>11</sup> Odnoposoff's letter from Brussels to the SThV, May 15, 1939, AdR, SThV 1829/39.

<sup>12</sup> Odnoposoff, because of his Jewish roots, had good reason to flee from 'Austria'. Saleski, *Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin* (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), pp. 384-385; Laugwitz, "Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien" (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Laugwitz, "Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien" (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Historical *Meldeunterlagen* (residency registration documents) on Richard Odnoposoff, Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna.

uncertain, though, whether Odnoposoff actually departed that day. Judging from a letter written by the State Opera Directorate, Odnoposoff left Vienna at least before April 3, 1939.<sup>15</sup> On May 15, 1939 he was definitely in Brussels already. This is proven by a letter he sent from Belgium, asking to be paid his pension contributions and have them transferred to his father-in-law in Vienna, who had covered the expenses of his moving to Brussels.<sup>16</sup> The outbreak of war in 1939 finally forced Odnoposoff and his wife to flee the continent and go to Argentina to temporarily stay at his parents'. In 1944, Odnoposoff settled in New York, where he would stay for a period of 14 years.<sup>17</sup>

### **“Argentine Takes Audience by Storm in First U.S. Recital”<sup>18</sup> – Artistic breakthrough in America**

Odnoposoff's 'fate' was basically sealed when he had his first solo performance of just three minutes at the tender age of five in Buenos Aires, his home town in Argentina.<sup>19</sup> The piece he played, called “Der Nymphentanz”, must have moved the audience so deeply “*that he was carried about the concert hall on the shoulders of admirers*”.<sup>20</sup> This was the moment that would boost Odnoposoff's career as a violinist: Ever since he was eight years old he had regularly been performing on stage. He was properly trained by well-known teachers and musicians such as Leopold Auer in Buenos Aires and both Paul Hindemith and Carl Flesch in Berlin, with whom he had lessons as early as 1927, when he was 13 years old.<sup>21</sup> For Flesch he had the greatest of respect, paying tribute to him for having revolutionized the nature of violin teaching. Until Flesch died in exile in 1944, Odnoposoff had maintained regular contact with his teacher. The fact that the internationally renowned violin teacher, Carl Flesch, had always taken an interest in his student's professional advancement is reflected in their intense exchange of letters, part of which has been printed in his son Carl F. Flesch's book that recounts the story of his father's life.<sup>22</sup>

While he was still a student, Odnoposoff already had the privilege to perform with the Berlin Philharmonic as a soloist under the baton of Erich Kleiber – a privilege showing that he

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<sup>15</sup> Letter from the Opera Directorate to the President of the *Reichsmusikkammer* (Reich Music Chamber), April 3, 1939, in reply to the request concerning Odnoposoff's whereabouts prior to his moving to Vienna, see: annex: letter from the *Reichsmusikkammer* (Reich Music Chamber), Berlin, March 27, 1939, AdR, Vienna State Opera Directorate 498/39.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Odnoposoff from Brussels to the SThV, May 15, 1939, AdR, SThV 1829/39.

<sup>17</sup> Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Enthusiastic review on Odnoposoff's first concert in New York by Noel Straus published in The New York Times, NYT, February 6, 1944, p. X5.

<sup>19</sup> Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Saleski, Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 384.

<sup>21</sup> At first it was only Ricardo Odnoposoff's father who accompanied his son from Buenos Aires to Berlin and also managed to find work there. Eventually, though, his whole family left Buenos Aires for Germany. Originally, his father was from Russia, but he and Ricardo's grandfather emigrated from their home country, choosing Argentina rather randomly as their new 'homeland'. Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), pp. 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> Carl F. Flesch, “...und spielst du auch Geige?”, Zurich, 1990, pp. 69-70, 112, 319.



indeed enjoyed great recognition. In Vienna he celebrated his first huge success by winning his first international violin competition. His musical triumphs then continued: After his successful tours in South America and Spain in 1933, he was engaged as concertmaster with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1934. However, since he was both young and a foreigner, he had to “endure major intrigues” in his new position, being supported primarily by Clemens Krauss.<sup>23</sup> Despite the doubts expressed by some of his colleagues, Wilhelm Furtwängler, who had just taken on his new position in Vienna, was convinced of the young concertmaster’s talents, having him play the famous violin soli of Strauss’ “Don Quixote”, “Zarathustra” as well as “Heldenleben”.<sup>24</sup> The conductor Arturo Toscanini also wanted to have Odnoposoff on the first stand. Another demonstration of his abilities was the legendary concert on January 26, 1936, which included three works by Camille Saint-Saëns under the baton of Felix von Weingartner, in which Odnoposoff shined as soloist.<sup>25</sup> From 1934 to 1938, Ricardo Odnoposoff worked as a teacher at the Vienna Conservatory, where he also led concerts of his violin class.<sup>26</sup> Another highlight of his career was the internationally prominent “Ysaye-Musikwettbewerb” [“Ysaye Music Competition”] in 1937, where he was awarded a controversial second prize, due to an unfair allocation of points that left a Russian competitor as the winner.<sup>27</sup>

After having been expelled in 1938, Odnoposoff returned to Buenos Aires, the point of departure for his numerous concerts throughout South America.<sup>28</sup> On February 5, 1944, his debut at Carnegie Hall in New York made him an internationally famous musician. As Odnoposoff recounts in an interview with Burkhard Laugwitz, the success of this debut had a great impact: *“In 1944, I performed at the New York Carnegie Hall for the first time. The concert took place in the afternoon and at 8 p.m. The New York Times’ evening edition was issued, including a critique by Noel Straus. It was excellent; so good that the impresario Sol Hurok immediately offered me a contract. With that I rented an apartment in New York where I stayed for 14 years.”*<sup>29</sup>

The above mentioned critique by Noel Straus in The New York Times was in fact excellent. Straus praised the soloist to the skies, saying: “[...] he established himself as one of the

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<sup>23</sup> Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 20; Cf. Saleski, Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 384.

<sup>24</sup> Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Clemens Hellsberg, Demokratie der Könige. Die Geschichte der Wiener Philharmoniker, Zurich, 1992, p. 451.

<sup>26</sup> Josef Reitler: 25 Jahre Neues Wiener Konservatorium. 1909-1934; Vienna, 1934, Lehrerliste, p. 31;

Cf.: Mitteilungen des Neuen Wiener Konservatoriums, Director: Prof. Josef Reitler, July 1935/episode 4 (also in January 1936/episode 8, Feb. 36/episode 9, July-Aug. 36/episode 14, Sept. 36/episode 15, July 37/episode 25).

<sup>27</sup> Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), pp. 21-22.

Flesch, “...und spielst du auch Geige?” (see footnote<sup>23</sup>), p. 112; Mitteilungen des Neuen Wr. Konservatoriums, Reitler, 27<sup>th</sup> schoolyear, April 1937, episode 22.

<sup>28</sup> Laugwitz, “Ein sehr starker Geiger aus Wien” (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

*outstanding violinists of the day. The Argentine artist, who came here virtually unknown to the general public, took his audience by storm by the virtuosity, power and fire of his performance.*<sup>30</sup> Still, Odnoposoff considered his cooperation with the famous music manager Sol Hurok rather unfavorable to his career: *“The thing is, he did pay me really well, but he would not let me play as often as I would have wanted to. Eventually I changed over to Columbia Concerts and even performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic.*<sup>31</sup>

However critical Odnoposoff’s statement may be, there are numerous reviews of his artistic performances and announcements of both his live concerts and of concert broadcasts to be found in the New York Times. For the period between February 6, 1944 and February 1, 1976, the author found a total of 32 articles on Odnoposoff in this newspaper, the majority of which, 28, being published between 1944 and 1956. Although later reviews did not always live up to the initial boundless enthusiasm of Straus, they do bear witness to Odnoposoff’s continuing artistic successes, providing proof of the fact that his concerts attracted the attention of the public.<sup>32</sup>

Before and in addition to his musical activities in the U.S., Odnoposoff also went on numerous international tours. In May 1946 he made his seventh tour of Latin America. Less than one year later, in early 1947, he toured through Western Europe, performing in Scandinavia, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Portugal.<sup>33</sup> As he was already in Europe, he took the opportunity to stop off in Vienna and visit the orchestra of which he had once been a member. As part of the Vienna Philharmonic subscription concert series, Odnoposoff performed the Brahms Violin Concerto under the baton of Josef Krips on February 1 and 2, 1947.<sup>34</sup>

### **Return to Vienna**

Odnoposoff eventually ended his career as a soloist and decided to dedicate himself to teaching. In 1956, he returned to Vienna, where he accepted a job offer at the Music Academy. From 1964, he also taught at the State University of Music and the Performing Arts in Stuttgart. It remains unclear why, after he had returned to Austria in 1956, Odnoposoff did not resume his position with the Vienna Philharmonic, but preferred to teach at the Vienna Music Academy instead. Odnoposoff maintained a friendly relationship with the orchestra for the rest of his life. In contrast to other expelled members, the relationship between

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<sup>30</sup> NYT, Sunday, February 6, 1944, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of concert announcements and reviews on Ricardo Odnoposoff located by the author see: 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, pp. 130-133.

<sup>33</sup> Saleski, Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 384.

<sup>34</sup> Hellsberg, Zum Gedenken an Ricardo Odnoposoff (see footnote<sup>1</sup>), p. 158.



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Odnoposoff and the Vienna Philharmonic did not seem to suffer from the terrible events of 1938. This may be due to the fact that Odnoposoff did not see himself as an emigrant and that, contrary to the cases of other former members, mutual appreciation and artistic cooperation between them never came to a halt. After the Brahms concerto in February 1947, there were several other joint performances of Odnoposoff and the Vienna Philharmonic - in January 1961, for example, on the occasion of a Mozart Gala Concert in Innsbruck and two concerts during the Salzburg Mozart Week with the Sinfonia Concertante, KV 364, under the baton of Carl Schuricht. Finally, their last concert together, the premiere of Theodor Berger's Violin Concerto under the baton of Eugene Ormandy took place in the Large Hall of the Konzerthaus on June 13, 1965. Almost 30 years later, on February 25, 1994, Ricardo Odnoposoff was formally honored and awarded the Honorary Ring of the Vienna Philharmonic during a ceremony in the Golden Hall of the Musikverein.<sup>35</sup> Ricardo Odnoposoff died in Vienna on October 26, 2004.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.