

“Hertzka had an instinctive way of thinking, like a divining rod”

Hans W. Heinsheimer



Alfred Schlee (third from left) in 1929 with colleagues in the “Bruckner Room”. This is where Anton Bruckner taught and composed when the mezzanine was home to the Conservatoire of the “Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde”. This is presumably also where Gustav Mahler was given his two lessons by Bruckner. Today, Dr Isabella Hangel (left, Copyright) and Irene Baumann (licensing) work in the “Bruckner Room”.

Your first impressions are often the most lasting. The very first thing that caught my eye when I arrived at Universal-Edition was a small, scribbled note on the door of the porter’s lodge that read “Putting up posters”. I had just arrived from Germany, with a doctorate in law in my pocket to take up my position as a trainee in Vienna. Having entered the Musikverein building from Bösendorferstrasse, I had approached the porter’s lodge to ask where to go, only to find this note. Although I didn’t realise it at the time, I learnt soon enough that Vienna, Austria, had just given me a symbolic welcome.

The symbolic porter, it emerged, was enjoying his daily extended brunch in the public bar at Hotel Imperial, which left me to find my own way around. I found myself in a wide, cobbled passageway that was really almost a road. It was just wide enough to allow a carriage and pair or even a carriage and four to pass as it conveyed its high-society occupants to the imperial boxes or the artists’ rooms without them getting their feet wet or being bothered by the gawping rabble. As I continued along the narrow pavement, I had to press myself against the wall to allow carriages to pass which I imagined to contain

Richard Wagner or Paderewski, or even Emperor Franz Joseph himself.

To my left was a dark door with opaque glass; it was some time before I found out that there was nothing mysterious behind the door, just the dusty, dark, Universal-Edition storehouse. At the end of this imposing passageway there were a few steps on the left. Was I still being haunted by the ghosts of my imagination? No, there in the bright light of day, in the republican city of Vienna in 1923, a set of beautiful letters was carved, seemingly for all time, into black marble above a wooden door stained with age: “K. K. Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde” (Imperial and Royal Society of the Friends of Music). I looked around hastily, and (just to be sure, as you never know, particularly when you have only just arrived in a foreign country) surreptitiously took off my hat. Then I began to climb the worn flight of stone steps. At the top, on the first floor, a small sign told me that I had reached the offices of Universal-Edition.

This flight of steps, which would have taken me on up to the library and to the “Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde” archive, had been trodden by Gustav Mahler and Anton Bruckner, Hugo Wolf and Johann Strauß, Johannes Brahms and Archduke Eugen before me. I was still holding my hat in my hand, in awe every step of the way. However, when I descended again in the evening, my hat back in its rightful place, the ghosts had disappeared. Just that morning I had been accompanied by Bruckner and Brahms on my way up, but now my thoughts were full of Schönberg, Bartók and Janáček. Just one day at UE, even in the woeful position of a trainee, had changed my life forever.

This flight of steps had been trodden by Gustav Mahler.

Universal-Edition, which had been situated in the Musikverein building since 1914 (and is still there today), was founded in 1901 by a group of Viennese enthusiasts under the leadership of one of the legendary figures in the history of the Austrian music publisher: Kommerzialrat Weinberger, who published the works of Franz Lehar and numerous other delights. The founders of the company hoped that a new edition of the classical compositions, with green and pink covers featuring a lyre decorated in Art Nouveau style, could

successfully compete with the established editions. They began with Haydn's piano sonatas UE 1 and after only a year had an astonishing 500 works in their fledgling catalogue. They made good progress in North Bulgaria and certain regions of Romania, but their hopes proved otherwise illusory. After six years, the catalogue comprised 1550 works and the founders had a bulging storehouse and a negligible turnover. Then one of them mentioned a businessman who had enjoyed much success in the textiles industry. Emil Hertzka, a tall man with an impressive beard, a wide-rimmed floppy hat and flashing, penetrating, perhaps somewhat mistrustful eyes, was entrusted with the management of the fragile company. He was supposed to save what he could or liquidate the company if necessary. Instead, he turned UE into one of the world's leading music publishing houses. He remained the autocratic boss, the "Director", a title which seemed to have been given to him by the grace of God (the very thought that somebody could dare to call him Emil was akin to high treason and even his wife addressed him solely as the Director), until he died in 1932, just before the great flood swept away most of his achievements and kept them underwater for many years.

Hertzka was never interested in Haydn sonatas. In his initial years at the helm, he concluded exclusive contracts with Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schönberg and Franz Schreker. He purchased Bruckner's symphonies and masses from other publishers. He went beyond the borders of Austria and brought back Alfredo Casella from Italy, Karol Szymanowski from Poland, Leos Janáček from Moravia, and Frederick Delius from England to UE. He printed songs by Joseph Marx and Leo Blech, the successful ballet *Klein Idas Blumen* by Klenau, Julius Bittner's *Das Höllisch Gold* and became the publisher and thus friend, confidant and advisor to Béla Bartók, Zoltan Kodály, Marius Milhaud, Max von Schillings, Alban Berg, Anton von Webern and many dozens of others.

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What could possibly have been better for a young trainee than to work in

such an environment, sharpening pencils, drawing lines on yellow paper and waiting for the bell in my tiny office to ring – which happened very, very rarely at first, but then more frequently as time passed. “His Master’s Voice”, as we dubbed this bell, would call me into Hertzka’s awe-inspiring room through whose curved windows you could see the beautiful columns of the Karlskirche in the winter and the lilac and trees in the spring and summer – and the No. 2 trams throughout the year. One had to walk straight into the room without knocking, as the heavily padded, black door would absorb any knocks. There would often be a visitor sitting there, who would then be introduced to me. It was usually an unforgettable encounter. One of these visitors was Alban Berg, and I was allowed to accompany the big boss to Berlin for the premiere of *Wozzeck* in December 1925. Another was Béla Bartók, who was shy, quiet, slightly saddened, immeasurably endearing and venerable, and who was still the same when I knew him later in New York, up until his death there more than twenty years later. Heinrich Kaminski came with his poet collar and half stockings: he and Hertzka were especially good friends, and Hertzka frequently visited him and his family in the Upper Bavarian backwater where he lived. They got on well with each other because they were both teetotallers and vegetarians, although Hertzka invariably exaggerated these aspects of his life, as he did with everything. I still tremble when I recall a festive meal at Walter Braunfels’ house in Cologne (he was another of the composers who was held in high esteem by Hertzka and whose works were tirelessly published), where we were served some delicious roast chicken. Hertzka was naturally the guest of honour and the food was offered to him first. “Thank you,” he said in a superior tone of voice, “Thank you, but I don’t eat animal cadavers.”

Hertzka’s outer office was separated from his magnificent room by an unpadding door – which meant that you could knock on it. This is where Miss Rothe sat at her own roll-top desk; this must certainly have been an intentional ploy, and it gave her great prestige because all the other offices were quite literally packed full of people. Miss Rothe remained at UE even longer than Hertzka himself. She was the Cerberus who jealously guarded the door to his inner sanctum, the private secretary for letters, which usually addressed Hertzka’s composers as “My dear master”. She played the role of mother or possibly aunt to the other secretaries in the company who came to her when they were lovesick or with their other troubles. For many of us, whose salaries had been spent all too soon on the various temptations of Viennese life, she was a continual source of advances towards the end of the month. However, we received them only after listening to long sermons and assuring her that this would definitely be the last time. Her assertion that the squandering solicitant was a “Niegerl” sounded half like a strict admonishment, half like a term of endearment, and nobody ever really knew

what it meant.

Around midday, weather permitting (if not, our lunches were unpacked and served in Hertzka's office, which had a cosy niche with a grass-green sofa), the Director would march briskly over to a vegetarian restaurant on the second floor of a crumbling old house at the Naschmarkt, followed by Miss Rothe. Many of us who were keen to further our careers would march over with him. We ate appalling green spelt schnitzels and drank beetroot juice or some other atrocious liquid; on our way back to the office, however, we would discreetly separate from him and stop off at Kaserer's to enjoy a juicy goulash at the stand-up café there.

Apart from the well-known composers, those who had already "made it" – the masters, there were also contemporaries of mine, composers such as Ernst Krenek and Kurt Weill, both of whom were born in 1900, the same year as me. They were my comrades. We got on very well with each other and naturally joined forces to fight our battles. Hertzka had an instinctive way of thinking, like a divining rod, and it was at its most brilliant in his relationships with this younger generation. It was often an entirely uncommercial work, such as a string quartet, or as in the case of Kurt Weill, a song cycle to texts by Rilke, which motivated him to offer young, unknown composers a contract and monthly allowance, which was vitally important to them. He remained loyal to them, often over the course of many years, until suddenly a Threepenny Opera or a Jonny Strikes Up obliterated the depressingly huge advances overnight and turned a Mr Krenek or Mr Weill into a "dear master", whereas he had previously merely been tolerated with a certain amount of disdain and impatience. It all soon changed when Hertzka died. Instead of having a brilliant mind to support us, we were watched over by unpleasant bankers showing obvious signs of stomach ulcers, and what they saw in those years of such rapidly approaching catastrophes was not pretty. Not long after, everything was scaled back to an absolute minimum. Before we reached rock bottom, however, a merciful turn of fate took me to America early in March 1938.

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“Hertzka’s outer office was separated from his magnificent room by an unpadded door – which meant that you could knock on it. This is where Miss Rothe sat at her own roll-top desk; this must certainly have been an intentional ploy, and it gave her great prestige,” recalled Hans W. Heinsheimer. This room is now the office of Eric Marinitsch (Head of Promotion).

After the war, I returned to Vienna for a visit. The Musikverein building was still intact, and only the Russian signs on the opposite pavement, the barricades and the well wrapped-up sentinels around Hotel Imperial, who even stopped the porter with his posters from entering his beloved public bar, were new. The old steps were still there, perhaps slightly more worn than before. The same uncertain darkness still lingered in the UE lobby, but a smart young man had taken the place of the wrinkled old woman who had asked for your name, position and business. It was an inspiring sign of the new times. There was a picture of Hertzka with his beard, hat and flashing, mocking eyes hanging above the green sofa in his office. My old friend and colleague Alfred Schlee was sitting at Hertzka’s desk, another man had settled in Miss Rothe’s private realm, and a third – it seems they needed a troika to replace Hertzka’s unique qualities – was based in London and flew over from time to time, a tireless patriarch. The next generation was waiting in the wings.

Everything seemed to be moving forwards, just like in the good old days. The new era was influencing everything – electronic scores with numbers and arrows, aleatoric music with arrows and numbers and huge rolls of papier mâché, in which piano pieces by Stockhausen were delivered, complete with clothes pegs for attaching the score to the piano. Films, audio tapes and the like – the whole range of tools used by the new New Music. A drama department had been set up, and a music shop with a sentimental, waltz-like name offered the latest gadgets for the hi-fi era. A Rote Reihe (Red Series) focused on new teaching materials (the brochure stated that “Long before red became the colour of revolution, it was the colour of love. In the Rote Reihe it has both definitions.”), while another edition, simply and plainly entitled Die Reihe (The Series), attempted to explain the new New Music in the mysterious and incomprehensible language of the new New Music.

The whole range of tools used by the new New Music.

It was all lavish, interesting and expensive, and certainly not at all planned by bankers with stomach ulcers, but by entrepreneurial and clear-sighted, modern music publishers. The host of young men who designed, produced and preached this concept, the trainees of the seventies, worked tirelessly from morning until night, just like we, the trainees of the twenties, had done. Now they are constantly disappearing off to music festivals, where music with arrows and numbers and clothes pegs is performed and discussed, where films whirl, sound and image sequences are shown, shreds of quotes by Mao and Fidel Castro buzz through the air and ten audio tapes can be heard simultaneously. For those of us who were there when *Wozzeck* was abandoned and *Lulu* was banned, when *Webern* was ridiculed and *Schönberg* was mocked, and when Kurt Weill owed UE so much money that even the great man with the divining rod was beginning to have his doubts, it is nice to think that these young men can now safely produce all those arrows and numbers and clothes pegs and papier mâché rolls, and go on all those wonderful journeys precisely because the abandoned *Wozzeck* from 1925 and the banned *Lulu* from 1935 have now become goldmines throughout the world. And also because *Webern* is now being played like *Strauß*, because *Schönberg* is now being honoured with a complete edition of his works, because it looks likely that *Janáček* will become the *Puccini* of the seventies, because *Mackie Messer* is the uncrowned king of the jukebox and because *Bartók*, who died in poverty twenty-five years ago, would now be a rich man.

Since the war, 46 new composers have been added to the UE catalogue, ranging alphabetically from *Apostel* to *Wolkonsky*. One of them will have to stump up for the rent in the *Musikverein* building when the company reaches its 200th anniversary.

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was an Austrian-American music publisher, author and journalist. He assumed responsibility for the opera department at Universal-Edition in Vienna when he was 23 years of age. He supported Alban Berg and Leo Janáček and wrote many articles for the music journal *Anbruch* covering a range of topics concerning the music business and music sociology. Heinsheimer, who was in New York for professional reasons when Austria was annexed to the Third Reich in 1938, never returned to Austria permanently. In the USA he worked for Boosey & Hawkes, which published the works of Béla Bartók after the composer emigrated in 1940. He also took care of Bartók in America until his untimely death.