

“Women’s Agency in Schubert’s Vienna”

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The second annual conference of the Schubert Research Center took place at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which is where the Research Center is located. In the heart of Vienna's first district, you can very well imagine yourself in Schubert's time, because these are the same streets and alleys that he and many other composers walked. The organizers, who all are members of the board (Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl, Melanie Unseld, Birgit Lodes and Franz Fillafer), did an outstanding job at creating a comfortable atmosphere where a group of students from the University of Vienna and from the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna felt welcome and were encouraged to actively take part in the academic discourse. With a Schubert tour through Vienna and an evening event that focused on practising dances from this period, the organizers were able to provide the participants with extra input to further their understanding the time and place under discussion at the conference. This report was produced by students of the University of Vienna as part of a course offered by the Department of Musicology taught by Brigit Lodes.

In the opening session, the welcome speech by Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl (Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg) was followed by Melanie Unseld (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) who introduced the topic of the conference by giving an outlook on its different aspects. One of the central topics that was broadly highlighted was the definition of the word “agency,” which varies remarkably among the disciplines.

Natasha Loges (University of Music Freiburg) approached this term more closely in her paper in which she stated that agency is processual, interdependent, contextual, selfdefined, and arises from inequality. She further argued that agency is self-obliterating, since true agency results in the shift of power, meaning as soon as a group obtains power through agency one would no longer speak of agency referring to their actions as the actions would render themselves redundant. She then proceeded to portray Barbara Auernhammer as an example, to make a point that agency can be exercised in many different ways, as well as emphasising that one needs to be careful with the use of sources from that time as most of them are shadowed by an unfeminist image of women.

Nancy November (University of Auckland) went on showing ways in which women’s agency took place in the domestic sphere. Using Fanny von Arnstein as an example, she outlined ways in which the private musical salon would become a place for political discussion by choosing a certain musical programme and how musical salons became arenas for women to demonstrate leadership and various abilities such as organization, arrangements, and networking. She also made a point of stating that women were the models of “attentive listening” while men would rather leave the room in order to discuss politics, but it still was men’s music that was being promoted with a focus on arrangements, only rarely one would find works by female composers on the program.

An insight into what kinds of restrictions Jewish women suffered from in their attempts at agency was explained by Tina Muxfeldt (Indiana University Bloomington). It became very clear how much harder it was for members of the Jewish community to execute agency as a lot of the regulations they were subjected to especially affected the possibilities of forming some social network, which is critical to the execution of agency.

Apart from the topic of agency and its definition, some papers dealt with women who were especially remarkable in this period of time and their specific “*musikkulturelles Handeln*,” a term introduced to the discussion by Susanne Rode-Breymann.

Eva Neumayr (International Mozarteum Foundation) discussed the collection of music by Nanette Fröhlich which was donated to the Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg and which she recently started to research. Based on historical archive documents she proved that Fröhlich was connected to Schubert and pointed out ways in which she was active in the musical sphere of Vienna (and later Salzburg), not only as a collector but also as a teacher at the conservatory, an organizer of concerts, and a patroness of musicians.

Another so-called patroness of musicians was presented by Birgit Lodes (University of Vienna). Princess Charlotte Kinsky has been known as the wife of a patron to Beethoven. In her paper, Lodes proceeded to show how Princess Kinsky was also a powerful agent herself, both to Beethoven and to Schubert. Being “*Oberhofmeisterin*” to the Arch Duchess Sophie, Kinsky was very well connected with the highest society and was certainly instrumental in placing Schubert in these circles. Kinsky's relationship to Beethoven and Schubert was not only of a business nature but sustained as well by a common love of music. Schubert in turn handpicked the four songs of Op. 96 dedicated to her. The opening song “*Die Sterne*” (D 939) specifically can be perceived to express the admiration for Beethoven they both shared.

Anja Bunzel (Czech Academy of Sciences) broadened the outlook and used Caroline Pichler and her agency in Prague to specify the differences between the Prague and Viennese salon culture. She made it clear that the Prague salon was more of a melancholic nature and was characterized by a close connection of literature, painting and music, creating cross-artistic inspiration.

Hester Bell Jordan (McGill University) extended this view in terms of professions that were executed by women. She presented Nanette Streicher-Stein as a businesswoman, pianist, and piano-maker. She proved how the connection of being a pianist and piano-maker at the same time, the “*maker-player*” concept, was crucial to Nanette Streicher-Stein's success as it was part of the marketing of her brand and shaped the image people would perceive of her long-term. Further, Jordan proceeded to show how the user manual which was handed to every buyer of a Streicher-Stein piano was meant to protect the brand and its reputation.

Anno Mungen (University of Bayreuth) talked about mother Sophie and daughter Wilhelmine Schröder, who were both successful actresses and singers. Known as the geniuses of the theater they appeared as powerful, strong and – for this period of time – unusual women. Besides their work on stage Sophie and Wilhelmine were both mothers, daughters, wives and perhaps lovers. In comparison to other professions, acting was understood as a profession for women as well.

Jonathan Kregor (College-Conservatory of Music Cincinnati) analysed Clara Wieck's appearances as a pianist during the 19th century. He proceeded to show – based on various citations from letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and critics – that Wieck's art of playing was described as a “*magical wound*” with a “*fine and understanding impression*.” It seems that most music lovers “*had never heard such a pianist before*.” Often, she was compared to Beethoven whose influence can well be recognized. Although she was amused by the confrontation, she was quite affected by it and retreated from the public into the domestic sphere.

Martin Eybl (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) started by highlighting the differences between virtuosos and dilettantes. Eybl went on to discuss the existing lists of musicians and actors in the middle class of the early 18th century. These sources provide information on music practice,

which was limited to singing and piano playing for women, and reveal more about salon culture and musical entertainment in private houses.

Christine Hoppe (Georg August University of Göttingen) analysed body (re-)presentations of music performance practice. Beginning with the existing norms of gender (males as dominant and powerful in contrast to women being angelic, sweet and innocent) Hoppe took up the point of musical discourse. In doing so she discussed the representation of the violin on stage, whereby the appearance of female violin performing captured imaginations. Schubert's „Ave Maria“ was used as an example here; Hoppe showed two different arrangements, in which she elaborated the divergent male and female interpretation regarding balance, harmonics, intensity, transpositions etc.

Gundela Bobeth's paper which was presented by Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl analysed Nikolaus von Krufft's composition of his sister Justine von Krufft's poem "Mädchenklage und Mädchentrost" and demonstrated how the male and their female counterparts were suggested in the music. For example, she went on to show that he used changes of mode and meter, as well as a C minor (tragic, heroic) key for the musical interpretation of the male strophes and a cheerful C major key representing the female ones.

A new topic was introduced by Henrike Rost (Humboldt University of Berlin) who dealt with "Musical memorabilia" and the study of material culture which comprised the main focus of her paper. Beginning with the drawing "Figure of Musical Instruments" by Moritz Gottlieb Saphir, in which the female counterpart, the "Kitchen Woman," is representing a stereotype of womanhood, Rost highlighted memory culture. She presented letters and varied illustrations of hair souvenirs from famous composers as well as leaves out of albums, to prove the importance of material culture.

In conclusion, all of the speakers managed to give a broad and stimulating outlook on a variety of types of women's agency among the participants. Conference contributions encouraged lively debates and by the discovery of all kinds of documents it became apparent that one should be careful with the use of sources such as letters, reviews etc. as these are heavily shadowed by the image of women held by most people at the time. For further research, it would be interesting to explore the role of women in institutions such as the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde which was mentioned time and again. Also, one must pose the question about other women who were active in this field but might not have been discovered yet. Many of the papers dealt with the "superstars" of women's agency such as the Fröhlich sisters, Fanny von Arnstein and Charlotte Kinsky, a more interdisciplinary approach might be helpful with this.