

Michael Haas' address
In response to winning the
Theodor Körner prize from the City of Vienna
For the Hanns Eisler Exhibition at the Jewish Museum
Presented by Dr Karl Weinberger of the Jewish Museum, Vienna
At an event at the home of Lady Solti, 19 May 2009.
The Spoli Fund was launched by
Dr Barry Humphries, AO CBE

The award of the Körner Preis by the City of Vienna for the exhibition *Hanns Eisler, Individualist and Collectivist* validates the view that the effects of banning music by the National Socialists more than 75 years ago resonate to the present. I heard a quote yesterday on Radio Four: "It takes three minutes to put a land mine in place and a generation to remove it". It took Hitler twelve years to remove some of Europe's most important composers and generations to try and put them back into place. And not only during the twelve years of enforced exile: in the years that followed the arts were still being manipulated for political expediency: the loss of music banned by the Nazis was seamlessly continued by policies that perpetuated the cultural climate of the Cold War.



Karl Weinberger, Director of the Jewish Museum in Vienna giving Michael Haas the award.

Perhaps no composer personified the isolation that threatened music in the interest of politics more than Hanns Eisler. In East Germany he lived in a world dominated by the policies of 'Socialist Realism' that decreed that music was for the people and the betterment of the people: it demanded listener-friendly works that could be used for propaganda purposes. But looking over the border, he saw new music developing in the West and in an unpublished essay called *Comments on the Crisis of Culture* in 1950, he made the following observation: 'If serious music distances itself progressively from the broader masses, than it becomes progressively

more cynical, decadent, nihilistic and formalistically isolated' (his use of Nazi terminology seems alarmingly un-selfconscious!). He goes on to write: 'Monopoly-capitalism's cultural dominance has always understood the masses, meaning that real art will never be able to compete against easy to sell-art' ('Wahre Kunst gegen Ware Kunst'). In short, the post-war developments he saw in the West and experienced in the East were as destructive to music's natural cultural position as the Hitler years.

This realisation has been recognised over the years as a genre that in German is referred to as *Exilmusik*, which is translated into English as 'music of exile'. In it we experience at first hand the continuum of events and come face to face with a past that most of us were too young to have experienced. What is the 'music of exile'? It is music by the composers forced out of Germany and Austria by Hitler. If one takes the symphonies of Egon Wellesz or Ernst Toch we are confronted with works that could not have been written by an Austrian in Austria, a Briton in Britain or an American in America. We encounter works where the physical location itself – the displacement between a composer's inner voice and his foreign environment – generates the creative energy. Most of this music has landed on the margins. The song we heard by Walter Arlen is the music of exile *par excellence*, though in this particular instance, he has set a Shakespeare sonnet. It is in his songs with texts by Rilke, Cavafi and even St John of the Cross where one encounters the forcibly uprooted Central European writing music in America and sifting it away every evening into a desk drawer. Clearly Toch, Wellesz, Goldschmidt and even Korngold with his Symphony in F Sharp did not compose for the desk drawer. Yet time and political expedience poisoned their reception and works that sprang from a rich variety of different countries and experiences resonated with utter hollowness as home-grown American, British and even Austrian and German composers overtook the exiles. It was in fact what Ernst Krenek called the 'lack of echo in exile'.

Who is to mend the rip in the material and reunite the past to the present? In Austria, Germany and France funding exist to support groups similar to the Jewish Music Institute's own International Centre for Suppressed Music. In America, a new and well funded organisation has also been founded, the Orel Foundation. To the casual observer, it would seem perfectly logical that Germany and Austria should fund efforts to repair the damage caused by a previous German government. Yet in most cases Hitler's actions only give us half of the story. Of course many important composers were lost in the camps or died before being able to leave, but the larger majority escaped. It is the relocation of a country's entire musical elite that supplies us with the other half of the story. This is why Les Voix Etouffées exists in France and the Orel Foundation exists in America; it is why the ICSM exists in Great Britain. Today's musical life would be unthinkable without the contributions of Britain's musical émigrés yet bizarrely the post-war contributions of a Gál, a Goldschmidt or a Rankl remain unclaimed by Britain, Germany or Austria, just as the post-war works of Toch, Weigl and Korngold remain unclaimed by America, Germany and Austria. There is a pride of ownership of that which the composer wrote before 1933 or 1938 and only a hollow resonance for everything afterwards.

So the work of the ICSM is two-fold and can be expressed simply as a) establishing an awareness of the music of many composers before Hitler's banning, and b) re-establishing a sense of ownership for what came afterwards.

The establishment of ownership for the works of exile links the past to the present and the foreign to home-grown. We don't have large or even significant funds. Of all of the organisations, we are the least well off, yet we compensate by having a committee that is the equal to some and stands above others in both scholarship and experience. We have respected historians and university lecturers, writers and publishers and, I don't need to add, recording executives. We even have a composer. We all double up: the publisher makes CDs and writes, the university lecturer is an excellent pianist, the composer and the historian help administrate and organise events, meetings and conferences. And I, as an erstwhile recording producer, work as a curator

at the Jewish Museum in Vienna. And none of it would happen at all if Geraldine and Betty were not constantly looking out for us.

Each organisation does what it can and we have to be realistic and acknowledge that we haven't the wherewithal to pay a permanent employee or put on a series of high-profile concerts. I do not see the point of adding yet another website since I believe this area is now well and truly covered by efforts from ORT, the University of Hamburg, the Music Information Centre of Austria, the University of Vienna and the Orel Foundation. Our agenda is to facilitate the flow of information. This we can do, for example, by translating material not available in English. Yet every book translation costs between £5,000 and £10,000. We need to subsidise or encourage recordings; but even a small-scale recording comes in at between £10,000 and £20,000. To mount conferences and disseminate information costs a good deal less but demands a good deal more time. All of us contribute a number of hours and none of us is paid – nor has to date anyone asked to be paid, though being able to remunerate someone for their time and expertise opens up greater possibilities; for example, meeting artists, organising scores for perusal, editing or even writing publications and books and supplying concert, documentary or festival concepts. At the moment, we all run in order to stand still in order to meet the weekly flow of correspondence and inquiries. Our work-load makes our once-regular meetings a quarterly rather than a monthly event.

Most importantly, we need partners who can finance and take us to the next stage. This is surely the case with the co-operation we have with the Jewish Museum in Vienna and support from Dr Weinberger. The effects on musical life in Vienna over the last eight years have been surprising for everyone. Gál, Wellesz, Zeisl are now regular features in recitals, concerts and radio broadcasts. This never happened before our exhibitions. The success of the Korngold exhibition, with its tens of thousands of visitors, re-established him in Austria even if the British with recent performances have continued to remain aloof. Whether Schreker's re-emergence coincided with our exhibition or our exhibition coincided with the rediscovery of Schreker must remain an open question. At least two of his operas have started to regain some of their former popularity. But the costs of books, translations and even recordings pale beside the outlay the museum has made for each of the exhibitions and accompanying catalogues. This is why an organisation like the ICSM and the Spoli Fund need connections with people like Karl Weinberger. But it remains a vicious circle: we can make such connections only if we have the funds to follow through contacts with meetings, which can mean travelling.

Lastly, the ICSM is advantageously placed – more so even than our Austrian and German sister organisations – in building on what we have learned from the Nazi decade and examining the remnants of the Cold War. Of course we should not imply that one situation is the equivalent of another. The black-listed composers of Hollywood in the late 1940s were not sent to the Gulag, but many did land in American jails and some, like Eisler, faced deportation. Musical life in Spain and South America came to a near-halt during their decades of totalitarian governments and only last month, I helped present a two-week-long festival in Taipei of music by composers banned by Hitler where thousands of displaced mainland Chinese knew a thing or two about exile. In the following weeks, spent in Los Angeles working on my next exhibition, Ernst Toch, I made contact with an American organisation reviving and investigating the ruined musical life in Cambodia and Vietnam – Martin Anderson, our expert on all such things from the other side of the Iron Curtain, instantly followed it up. The Hitler period was cataclysmic yet sadly it was not unique. The work of the ICSM, the Jewish Museum in Vienna, the JMI and our committee have established ourselves as authorities in the field of banned music and one hopes that with the Spoli Fund we shall continue to make this resource available.