Eduard Hanslick

Birth name: Eduard Hanslik

* 11 September 1825 in Prag, Königreich Böhmen, heutige Tschechische Republik
† 6 August 1904 in Baden nahe Wien, Österreich

Music aesthetician, music historian, music critic, musicologist, jurist, civil servant, Hofrat (honorary title for senior civil servants)

“The autobiographer has to combat a powerful temptation: he should spare his readers those things that do not interest them even if for him they are valuable and unforgettable. To omit painful battles and sad events is less difficult; it is, I would even say, a commandment of good manners, a natural thoughtfulness. However, so much that is dear, jovial and good which we experience, the absolute best that life has to offer – friendship between men! I had the good fortune of having excellent friends in Vienna.”

(Eduard Hanslick, Aus meinem Leben (From my Life), Berlin 1894. New edition by Peter Wapnewski, Kassel 1987, p.130)

Profile

With regard to gender issues, it is the variety of close friendships with men that characterize Eduard Hanslick’s biography and career. This focus also meant the almost total exclusion of women – with the exception of singers – from all of his professional activities. Among other factors, Hanslick himself attributes his career as music critic and writer, as well as the creation of the first professorship for musical aesthetics and music history at the University of Vienna, to his exceptionally good connections. They were based on longtime friendships with men from his days as a student and his career as ministry official and were deepened by encounters within the context of the Vienna salon culture, travels undertaken together, and frequent private music-making constellations which made almost no concessions to social standing or professional hierarchies. Hanslick played piano well and possessed exceptional talent for communicating, both as orator and in conversation. The fact that he was well-known due to his writing on musical aesthetics, his public and academic lectures, and his work in the feuilleton press was another important factor in this network of relationships.

Cities an countries

Eduard Hanslick, born in Prague, studied law in Prague and Leipzig and worked as civil servant in various ministries in Klagenfurt and Vienna until 1861. Beginning in 1861 he taught as professor for musical aesthetics and the history of music at the University of Vienna. He died in Baden near Vienna in 1904.

Biography

Law student and civil servant

Eduard Hanslick was born in Prague on 11 September, 1825. His father, the library official and private scholar Josef Adolf Hanslik, was of Czech-Catholic descent. His mother’s parents were Jewish, but she was baptized before being married. They spoke German, and because of the lack of public schools, Eduard and his two brothers, and to some extent his two sisters as well, were instructed by his father himself in all subjects including piano. Later he received instruction in piano, theory and composition from the Czech composer Wenzel Johann Tomaschek. In spite of his musical talent and passion, Hanslick studied law in Prague and Vienna from 1843 to 1848. He passed doctoral and judicial office exams and for the next 13 years he carried out his function as an official in the fiscal offices of Vienna and Klagenfurt, as well as in the Ministry of Education in Vienna starting in 1852.

Music journalist and music researcher

While still in Prague, Hanslick wrote concert reviews, first for the Prague journal “Ost und West” (East and West), and as a correspondent in Vienna starting in 1846 – purely as a passion without remuneration. In doing so he made his first contacts to other newspapers and authors, to editorial journalists and also to musicians – such as Robert Schumann – who wrote to him in response to his articles. In Vienna he worked for Frankel’s “Sonntagsblätter” (Sunday Pages) and for the “Kaiserliche Wiener Zeitung” (Imperial Viennese Newspaper) and eventually he became music editor for the “Wiener Zeitung” (Viennese Newspaper) (1848-53, with an interruption during the time he spent in Klagenfurt). From 1853 until 1864 he wrote musical reviews for the “Presse” until some of the staff founded the “Neue freie Presse” (New Free Press) and took him along with them.
Socializing and salons

In addition to networking through the music feuilleton press and though making music with musically enthusiastic colleagues and superiors at the ministries, the social, half-public daily routine also offered plenty of opportunities for men to make, deepen and cultivate friendships. “This small society was in the habit of coming together at the same restaurant not far from the ministry for lunch after office hours. In the evening our circle expanded significantly in the dining hall of the hotel ‘Ungarische Krone’ (Hungarian Crown). Not only did almost all Tiroleans of importance – especially the Reichstag members – go there as friends of Ehrhart and Walther, but musicians and writers often went there to see me. They knew it would be more convenient to talk to me in the evenings at the ‘Ungarische Krone’ than at the Ministry of Education or at my small apartment. There was many a jovial, stimulating evening spent there and often the big table was not sufficient for the unexpected additions. We saw excellent men at our table; I will name them randomly as they occur to me: Billroth, Brahms, Nicolaus Bumba, Ambros, the singers Sontheim and Niemann, Dingelstedt, Gounod (after the premiere of ‘Romeo and Juliet’), Mosenthal, Herbeck, Dessoff, Max Maria Weber, the governor of Styria Baron Kübek, Graf Albrecht Wickenburg, the provincial governor Graf Belrupt from Bregenz, the professors Wildauer, Adam, Wolf, Hlasiwetz, von Lützow, Josef Bayer, the Africa traveler Miani and more” (Hanslick, 1987, pp. 132-133).

Further encounters – in this case also with women – came about through the Viennese salons: “The women were the attraction, of course. Not only in Vienna has it been observed that in the families of large Jewish bankers the women and daughters are finely educated, of charming behavior and receptive to all things beautiful, while most of the men have trained their minds solely for the stock market and only use it there” (ibid., p.134). The husbands “did not bother them,” the wives were admired and idolized; the intellectuals and artists, however, used the social setting above all to socialize with each other, chat, perform literary and musical works, and to get impulses, inspiration or assignments – and, more often than not, to heartily polemicize against the upper social classes to which their hosts belonged.
interested in music, as well as being Hanslick's chamber music partners or occasional travel companions. On 1 October, 1861, Hanslick was relieved of his duties at the Ministry of Education and employed as tenured professor at the University of Vienna for the subject Aesthetics and History of Music. Regarding his later, rather ambivalent relationship to the University of Vienna, see Theophil Antoniček, "Eduard Hanslick und die Universität Wien" (in: Antoniček, 2010, p.195-203).

From then on he was consulted as representative for the subject of music in all important boards and cultural planning in Austria and internationally.

Hanslick and women

Hanslick grew up with two brothers and two sisters in Prague. Whereas his father lived in Prague until his death in 1859, his mother Karolina, born in 1795, daughter of the Prague Jewish banker and businessman Salomon Abraham Kisch and his wife Rebeka, died young at 48 or 49 years of age – her exact date of death is unknown – but presumably in 1843 or 1844. "I was attached to my mother with passionate tenderness. Unpretentious, active, and as kind-hearted as she was wise, she lived utterly and solely for her family. She knew only two pleasures once her daily work had been done: the theater and French literature. She inherited both inclinations from her father, and they were both decisively passed on to me. (...) A few years later, I had just taken up my study of law, my mother died in the jolliest of ages. I was attached to her with most tender of loves. How often did I suddenly jump up from my school work and rush to her room where I embraced and kissed her and then return to my tasks, in equal parts strengthened and uplifted. With her, the happiness of youth evaporated – actually the feeling of youth itself. Now the gravity of life was at my door." (Hanslick, 1987, pp. 12-14)

It is remarkable that Hanslick never mentions his mother's Jewish origins, and even expressly denies his own Jewish lineage, which he derives from her. "That fact that Wagner later, in 1869, smuggled me into his 'Judaism' – that could not offend me less. Wagner couldn't stand Jews; therefore he liked to think that everyone he couldn't stand was a Jew. It would flatter me to be burned by Father Arbuez Wagner at one and the same stack of logs as Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer; unfortunately I must refuse this honor, for my father and all of his forefathers were staunchly Catholic farmer's sons, and further-
merly, they also adhered to this tendency, granting piano playing a subordinate rank at most, usually relegating it to private instruction. Today this ratio threatens to be reversed; the number of piano students exceeds that of the violin or wind in most conservatories. Let us single out the next best annual report of the Vienna Conservatory. In 1875 it was attended by 316 piano hopefuls, of which 254 were girls; in 1876, 448 piano students of whom over 300 were girls; in 1880 it had about 400 piano students, of which 340 were girls! \(\ldots\) The reader will have noticed the disproportionate prevalence of female pianists in the figures given above. A terrible societal symptom! Indeed, in our current lament, female piano players deserve their own verse, and not the most cheerful one. Having acted as permanent music critic for the Viennese ‘Neue freie Presse’ for years, I can look far back and measure the steady accretion of female concert performers.

With regard to piano virtuosity in Germany it is currently very much like the situation in England with regard to novel writing – both are almost completely in the hands of women. If we look through English bookseller advertisements, there is one novel of male origin for approximately a dozen novels of female origin; a review of our concert tickets results in approximately the same ratio between male and female pianists. Yes, in some seasons male piano virtuosos are already disappearing beneath the dominance of their ‘ivory tickling’ sisters. Any expert would admit that the reign of damsels over the piano that has currently established itself everywhere does not greatly benefit either the damsel or the piano. The analogy with the novel authors does not quite end with regard to quality; we have many competent woman pianists, a few that are first-rate, but only here and there does one ever achieve the heights of accomplished masculine artistry. This remains the exception that confirms the rule – the rule that women, due to their more delicate physical and mental organization ought to restrict themselves to a more narrow artistic field, usually that of delicate or miniature painting and that even in their most lustrous representations their art lacks something ultimate and decisive. I would prefer to say absolutely nothing about the practical and social disadvantages of the alarming increase in the virtuosity of young ladies. Who does not feel the most heartfelt pity for all these young girls who choose piano playing as their life’s purpose and seek to make a living on that bit of virtuosity! The regret is all too sure to come for having invested such endless amounts of effort and work into a skill that is no longer worth public production and which is of almost no interest anymore.\(\ldots\)

Hanslick subsequently quotes Dr. Otto Gumprecht who also denounces feminine virtuosity and expressly warns parents “to train their daughter as artists or only as music teachers.” The “regrettable creatures”, whose “talents are shared by hundreds” are later “nothing but a lifelong burden to themselves and others,” while the world “is only served by the extraordinary”.

Reflecting on his role as music critic, Hanslick described his estimation of female musicians as follows: “Especially the army of woman pianists, the little singers, violin fairies and violin witches! They all wanted to be heard and evaluated. The more modestly some of them may have considered their art, the more articulately they appealed to our pure human feeling. One was seized by pity. Out of pure pity, irreplaceable evenings were sacrificed, the same rhapsodies by Liszt, nocturnes by Chopin, fantasies by Wieniawsky were endured a thousand times, simply because the ‘virtuoso’ supported a sister or mother with her art. She wants to give lessons, or put on concerts out in the provinces, both of which can only be accomplished if she has a favorable concert review from Vienna. And so it is always the plagued critic who helps out and must write about performances that are completely irrelevant to him and his life.” (Hanslick, 1987, p.399)

Widespread gender stereotypes and Hanslick’s inclination for misogynist polemics also reveal themselves mercilessly in his review of the first volume of the Liszt biography “Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch (Franz Liszt as Artist and Man)” (Leipzig 1889) by the music writer Lina Ramann, which appeared in the “Neue Freie Presse” in Vienna on 22 December, 1889: “This kind of grandly conceived biography (570 pages) of persons still living always have something awkward about them and automatically arouse mistrust in the objectivity of the biographer, especially when, on top of it all, they are dictated by passionate admiration.\(\ldots\) Just paging through the first chapter we were convinced that the author of this Liszt biography must be a novel writer or a woman.” (Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Goethe and Schiller Archive, Sign. GSA 59/378,2-860) Hanslick allows that Lina Ramann endeavors to be “true”: “her book does give the impression of sincere feeling.” In his opinion however, she did not write like a serious biographer, but rather like a “novel writer”, who had fallen in love with her own hero unawares. He attests to her “sentimental garrulity” that transforms insignificant events into novel scenes and quotes long passages as evidence. He also deems Ramann’s publication of the second volume of the “Gesammelten Schriften von Franz Liszt” (Collected Writings of Franz Liszt) mere-
ly as “spoutings of the exaggerated Liszt cult”. The effects of his polarizing gender image on his aesthetic theory of music, as set forth in his dissertation, “The Beautiful in Music” (1854) was investigated by Inge Kovács and Andreas Meyer in their essay, “Nichts für ‘schöne Seelen’? Aus den Anfängen der akademischen Musikforschung [Nothing for ‘Beautiful Souls’? From the Beginnings of Academic Music Research]”: “And for Hanslick, following Hegel and in complete opposition to the beginnings of philosophical aesthetics in the eighteenth century, aesthetics means ‘investigating the beautiful object and not the perceiving subject’. This decision, however, is not neutral with regard to gender politics. For it is women, as Hanslick knows, who, ‘by nature are more dependent on feeling,’” (Kovács, 2010, p.72). By categorizing feeling, sentiment and passion as typically feminine, women are automatically excluded from his understanding of art, which is based solely on schooling in music theory and reason.

In Relation to

As in his music reviews, Eduard Hanslick also recorded numerous encounters with artists and portraits of composers, performers, singers, writers, music writers, famous contemporaries and friends in his autobiography “Aus meinem Leben, Berlin 1894,” quoted here from the new edition by Peter Wapnewski, Kassel 1987. Extensive descriptions can be found here; In addition to the description of his father, they include encounters and friendships with Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, to whom he had an intimate friendship – Brahms dedicated the Sixteen Waltzes op. 39 to him –, Hector Berlioz, Antonín Dvořák, Johann Strauss (father and son), Julius Schulhoff, Joseph Hellmesberger, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Henri Vieuxtemps, August Wilhelm Ambros, Theodor Billroth, Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Joseph von Eichendorff, Gottfried Keller, Friedrich Hebbel, Adolph Bernhard Marx, and numerous other friends, colleagues, dignitaries and high officials of the Viennese administration.

In addition to rather short passages about his mother, his two sisters and his wife, the singer Sophie Wolhmut, notes on encounters and relationships with women include the pianists Clara Schumann and Wilhelmine Clauß-Szarvady, the singers Marie Wilt, Mathilde Wildauer, Jenny Lind, Pauline Lucca, Désirée Artôt, Christine Nielsen and Carlotta Patti, the Musician and poet Johanna Kinkel, the pianist and composer Ingeborg von Brønsart, the dancer Fanny Elsler and many others. Additional women singers were presented in his music reviews and portraits.

Appreciation

As music critic and one of the first professors on a musicology faculty at a German-speaking university, Eduard Hanslick played a decisive part in the construction of the heroic tale in music at the almost complete exclusion of women. His reviews were always amusing to read, and their descriptions of people were apt and written with a sharp wit. But the wit often turned into polemics and these were not seldom at the expense of women. Hanslick’s extraordinarily good connections among men from the educated classes and government circles gave a particular emphasis to his aesthetic convictions – which also, by the way, led him to a number of grave misjudgments – and made him the most influential and feared Viennese “Pope of Music.”

Research

The status on the latest research on Eduard Hanslick with regard to gender is currently represented by the essay by Marion Gerards, “Faust und Hamlet in Einer Person” (Faust and Hamlet in One Person): The Musical Writings of Eduard Hanslick as Part of the Gender Discourse in the Late Nineteenth Century", which was published in the conference papers “Rethinking Hanslick. Music, Formalism, and Expression” (Grimes, 2013, pp. 212-235) and came about in connection with the conference “Eduard Hanslick: Aesthetic, Critical, and Cultural Contexts” on 24 and 25 June, 2009 at University College in Dublin. In it, Marion Gerards thoroughly examines Hanslick’s music reviews (as well as some texts by the music historians Max Kalbeck and Hermann Kretzschmar) with regard to gender images. She documents that in general, the music descriptions of these authors are firmly anchored in the gender discourse of their time and – particularly regarding the description of instrumental music – fall back on the contemporaneous concepts of masculinity and femininity when attributing value and significance to musical works.

Need for Research

There is no gender critical examination of Hanslick’s reviews, descriptions of works and portraits regarding the treatment of male and female roles in the opera, the descriptions of women singers and other women musicians,
etc. in the German-speaking realm. In addition, Hanslick’s role in the creation of the musical canon in the nineteenth century, along with the reception and effects of his critical music publications – which to some extent still need to be gathered together in the newspaper archives – should be examined more closely.

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