Bauer-Lechner, Natalie

Natalie Bauer-Lechner
Birth name: Natalie Anna Juliane Lechner

* 9 May 1858 in Wien,
† 8 June 1921 in Wien,

“The only way to put an end to the often outrageously brutal and scornful manner in which husbands treat their wives—as if they were lesser beings—to the painful debasement and degradation of both, is through the pecu-
niary independence of the woman and for her to have a profession as every man that demands respect and recog-
nition from him, as one of his most capable peers.”

(Natalie Bauer-Lechner, “Fragmente. Gelerntes und Ge-
lebtes”, Vienna 1907, p. 74.)

Profile

Natalie Bauer-Lechner was an Austrian violist and violin teacher, and as violist a member of the Soldat-Roeger Quartet from 1895 to 1913. She went on numerous concert tours domestically and internationally. She is known today especially for her book “Recollections of Gustav Mahler” published two years after her death in 1923 by the husband of her niece, Johann Killian, and which is of great significance for the research on Mahler as well as for understanding the music culture of her time.

Natalie Bauer-Lechner came from a middle-class Viennese family and received violin lessons from the age of five. From 1866 to 1872 she studied violin and piano at the Viennese Music Conservatory where she met Gustav Mahler, with whom she was close friends from 1891 onwards up until his engagement to Alma Schindler in 1901. Besides her writings on Gustav Mahler she also wrote several texts in which she laid out her spirit of independence and emancipation. Only two texts were published in her lifeti-
me: “Fragmente. Gelerntes und Gelebtes” (Fragments. Things Learned and Lived) (1907) and “Schrift über den Krieg” (Writing on the War) (1918) for which according to her family she was charged with high treason in Vienna and served a longer jail term. Until her death in 1921, Natalie Bauer-Lechner lived and taught as violist, author and music teacher in Vienna.

Cities an countries

Natalie Bauer-Lechner was born on 9th May 1858 in Vi-
enna, from where she went on many trips and concert tours within Europe. She died on 8th June 1921 in Vien-
na.

Biography

Natalie Bauer-Lechner was born on 9th May 1858 in Vi-
enna as the eldest daughter to the university bookseller and publisher Rudolf Lechner (1822 to 16th August 1895) and his wife Julie von Winiwarter (1831 to 6th Dec-
ember 1905), daughter of the jurist and university pro-
fessor Josef Ritter von Winiwarter. She grew up with a younger sister and brother in Vienna.

Both parents enjoyed playing music. The girls took piano lessons beginning at the age of five. When Natalie was eight years old she was accepted to the conservatory where she studied from 1866 until 1872 with a major in violin and a minor in piano.

The sisters, for whom there were no schooling or exam re-
quirements, were taught by frequently changing private instructors at home. Their education was extremely spotty, which Natalie, in view of her brother’s options, perceived as “nameless injustice” (Bauer-Lechner: 1907, p. 84).

She describes herself as a pupil for whom it was hard to learn and remember (ibid. p. 4ff.), but who therefore studied all the more thoroughly. Thanks to her great thirst
for knowledge and an “insatiable drive to read” which accompanied her throughout her life, she compensated for her deficient instruction over time. “The happiest hours of my early youth were the evenings in my father’s bookshop when after completing a day’s work I could take in the content of the most wonderful books to my heart’s desire. This reading was admittedly random and neither purposeful nor topical, rushing from fiction and novels to all kinds of scientific writings, from which, however, lacking instruction and a solid basis, I did not gain much that was helpful or lasting. Not until later, by divine guidance, did order, context and fruitfulness affect all that my mind took in.” (ibid. p. 9).

In 1875, when she was seventeen years old, she married the widowed “Hofrat” and professor for chemical technology at the “Technische Hochschule” (Technical Academy) of Vienna, Dr. Alexander Bauer, who brought three minor daughters (aged eleven, eight and one) into the marriage. Ten years later, in 1885, the marriage ended in divorce by mutual agreement (see the letter of the “Technische Hochschule” in Vienna in the matter of Professor “Hofrat” Dr. Bauer (1836 to 12th April 1921), retirement, on the “k.k. Ministerium für Kultus und Unterricht” (Ministry for Culture and Education) Vienna, documented in Herbert Killian (ed.), “Gustav Mahler in den Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner” [Gustav Mahler in Natalie Bauer-Lechner’s Recollections]. Hamburg, 1984, p. 209; the divorce year given here as 1892 is, however, incorrect according to Killian). From now on until her death, Natalie Bauer-Lechner worked as violinist and violin teacher in Vienna. From 1895 until 1913 she played the viola in the women’s string quartet of Marie Soldat-Roeger (first violin), together with Elly Finger-Bailleti (second violin, from 1898 Elsa von Plank) and Lucy Herbert-Campbell (violoncello, from 1903 Leontine Görtner). The quartet, under the conductorship of the Joachim student Marie Soldat-Roeger, debuted on 11th March 1895 in the Viennese Bösendorfer-Saal, with, among other things, the string quartet in C major op. 75 no. 1 by Joseph Haydn and the string quartet no. 5 in E-flat major, op. 44,3 by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. From then until 1913 the quartet gave regular concerts both domestically and abroad (see also Silke Wenzel’s article on Marie Soldat-Roeger at http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/grundseite/grundseite.php?id=sold1863; on the Soldat-Roeger String Quartet see Kühnen 2000, p. 58-93). At first, predominantly works of the Viennese classics Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven, as well as Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Felix Men-
Bauer-Lechner recorded the time spent together with her highly esteemed friend and the results of numerous conversations on music or the music business in an extensive diary (ca. 30 notebooks). Her visit to Gustav Mahler in Budapest took place in 1890, where he was the opera director from 1888 to 1891. From then on she regularly attended rehearsals and premieres of his works, especially the first four symphonies, in Hamburg, Munich, Vienna or Berlin. She frequently made a side trip to visit her friend during her own concert tours. Between 1892 and 1901 she spent almost every summer with him and his sisters Justine, with whom he shared a household, and Emma in their vacation residences in, among other places, Berchtesgaden, Steinbach on Attersee, Tyrol and Maiernigg on Wörthersee. While Mahler composed, she “fiddled” (Natalie Bauer-Lechner, quoted in Killian 1984, p. 61) in a separate cottage so as not to bother Mahler, to whom even birdsong and the shouts of playing children were a disturbance.

Natalie Bauer-Lechner makes the nature of their relationship perfectly clear in her writing: “And so the days flew by in which we came to know and care for each other as if we had always known each other and lived as brother and sister. And this feeling is perhaps all the more secure as it was not illuminated, but also not overheated or blinded by passion” (Natalie Bauer-Lechner, quoted in Killian, p. 22). In the literature on Mahler however, Natalie Bauer-Lechner is not only often omitted from the long lists of Mahler’s friends and correspondents (see, e.g., Constantin Floros, “Gustav Mahler. Visionär und Despot. Portrait einer Persönlichkeit”, [Gustav Mahler, Visionary and Despot. Portrait of a Personality], Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1998, pp. 20/21) but her relationship to Mahler is insultingly reduced to the caricature of unrequited love. On the one hand, the reason for this is presumably an account by Alma Mahler-Werfel in her “Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler” (Recollections of Gustav Mahler) which first came out in 1940, in which she describes a woman “friend” not mentioned by name, “who, although old and ugly, was in love with Mahler and waited for him to return her love” (Mahler-Werfel, First Edition, Amsterdam 1940, quoted here in Frankfurt/Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1971, p. 37). In Gustav Mahler’s letters to his sister Justine there is also a letter from Mahler dated mid-February 1893 about Natalie Bauer-Lechner, which certainly is not meant to reflect the entire spectrum of this friendship of many years, but was rather written during an acute conflict: “Dearest Justi! It seems as if you were unfortunately right about Natalie: the fact that even after so many most serious tests she still has not become ‘rational’ has to do with the very one-sided formation of her character, in which an unhappy predominance of her emotions over her reason can be recognized in all of her actions. – I already made it perfectly clear to her in the summer in what sense alone a friendly-companionable co-existence could be conceived. – But unfortunately she did not draw the right conclusions at that time; she lacks the tactfulness; and as this has exacted bitter vengeance at all steps, so it seems to again have led to a ‘catastrophe’, for she has stopped writing to me for a week. – I would have thought a woman capable of more sensitivity.” (Gustav Mahler, “Liebste Justi. Briefe an die Familie”, [Dearest Justi, Letters to the Family], Stephen McClatchie, Ed., Bonn: Weidle Verlag 2006, p. 303).

Smaller excerpts from Natalie Bauer-Lechner’s diaries appeared anonymously in 1912 in “Merkur” No. 3, pp. 184-188, and in 1920 in “Musikblätter des Anbruch” no. 2, Special Issue on Gustav Mahler, pp. 306-309. Up until shortly before her death she was working on publishing the whole text, but it was not until two years after her death that Johann Killian, the husband of her niece and heir, Friederike Killian in Leipzig, published it under the title “Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler”. Autobiographical details were deleted from the text by the author herself to a large extent; what remained was removed from the first edition by the publisher. In an afterward to the first edition, the editor wrote: “The author, by the way, lived and shaped her life completely as she saw fit, unperturbed by convention or the attitudes of her surroundings. She came from a middle-class Viennese family; through restless striving and intercourse with people in whom she sensed deeper springs she acquired knowledge that raised her above the quotidian, educated herself especially in music and as a member of the Soldat-Roe ger Quartet went on concert tours not only through Austria and Germany, but many times abroad as well. Her true profession, however was this: the ability to gather the intellectual and spiritual values in the best of those with whom she came into contact and pass them on to others, above all to the benefit of the youth of the coming generation, whose interests she took on with particular zeallessness.”

Besides Gustav Mahler, “the best” with whom Natalie Bauer-Lechner came into contact included the poet und Mickiewicz translator Siegfried Lipiner, the conductor Bruno Walter, the opera singer Anna von Mildenburg, Jo-
hannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf. She is thought to have exchanged thoughts with other prominent contemporaries mostly by letter.

In 1907 Natalie Bauer-Lechner published the book “Fragmente: Velerntes und Gelebtes” with the publisher Rudolf Lechner and son in Vienna (the publishing company was managed by her father since 1877 and by her brother Oscar Lechner since 1894). It is a 236 page-long collection of aphorisms and short essays on artistic, political and philosophical or psychological topics. The question of women’s rights is the common thread woven through all subjects, expressly treated in chapters such as “Career and Love,” “Socialism and the Question of Women’s Rights”, “The Upbringing of Children,” “Women—Sexual Issues”, “Women’s Clothing”, etc.

It is preceded by 35 pages of a reflective “self-biographical” account of her childhood and education, as well as of her personality, which is characterized by its unusual frankness. The author describes herself on one hand as a not-so talented, strongly emotional “typically feminine” person who lives in dependence on greater intellects: “In accord with my modest knowledge and in view of my greatest and deepest feminine receptivity I was made to listen and absorb and there was no greater pleasure or profit for me than to be able to listen to a brilliant person and to cling to and internalize what I could.” (Bauer-Lechner 1907, p. 23). On the other hand, she ascribed masculine qualities to herself as well—of which she counted perseverance along with seriousness and industriousness when working: “Masculine, however, more so than with many men—I can say this of myself since I was born with it—my desire and actions, the firm, bold pace of my life.” (ibid., p. 7). The ambivalent handling of the dominant role models is followed by this highly contemporary insight: “The fairy tale of absolute femininity and masculinity is defeated by me—as it is by most strong individuals. (These are, however, probably concepts taken only from humankind’s limited development, and have no correspondence with divine will or the real-original nature of being.)” (ibid. p. 6).

Natalie Bauer-Lechner took up the cause of women’s emancipation and repeatedly condemned the traditional upbringing of girls, especially of the upper classes. She describes with great compassion the miserable fate of women, friends, and acquaintances who due to “the disastrous custom of earlier times were not raised to any specific activity or profession.” Their life concept was left solely up to them and included loneliness as a by-product. Reading and writing had an existential, personality-con-sstituting meaning for her and preferably took place “outside her home”. Music, on the other hand, and the making of music took place at home and played a completely different role: “At home, however, I was not allowed to enjoy intellectual endeavours because, as it was said, the first and main duty was to be fulfilled: making music.”

Bauer-Lechner’s other writings have not survived. A piece published in 1918 “Über den Krieg”, of which handwritten fragments were earlier kept in the family archive of her great nephew Herbert Killian but which no longer exist, led to her being charged with high treason and a longer jail sentence in Vienna. This information has not been able to be verified to date. Following Brenner and Kubik, it is a case of “biographical legend”, since there are no entries concerning an incarceration of Bauer-Lechner in the Vienna archives. Moreover, taking into account the “prominence” that Bauer-Lechner enjoyed, it could “be assumed that there would have been an intervention, and that that or those people would later have prided themselves in ‘having helped NBL’, and that a known defence attorney would have taken up her case.” (Brenner, Kubik 2014, p. 20). Shortly thereafter, on June 8th, 1921. Natalie Bauer-Lechner died in poverty at only 63 years, of “frailty of age and melancholy” in Vienna (Killian 1984, p. 12). Brenner and Kubik maintain that she died in the house of her brother Oscar, who took care of her in her last weeks for a per diem charge of 300 Kronen. Since her estate had been set at 77,000 Kronen, one would not be be able to talk of poverty (ibid., p. 18).

Appreciation

As a violist Natalie Bauer-Lechner was a member of the Soldat-Roeger Women’s String Quartet for almost twenty years, which “during the time it existed (1895-1913) ranked among the best of the established string quartets in Vienna” (see Reviews in Kühnen 2000, p. 58ff.) and was able to assert itself in European music life for decades. In particular, the women quartet’s “lofty artistic goals” provoked astonishment and admiration among contemporaries, and with it the women musicians represented “dangerous competition in the vestment of a feminine quartet (“Berliner Rezensionen” 1896, as cited in ibid., p. 64) in what was until then a purely masculine domain. Bauer-Lechner was praised by critics in particular for her “wonderfully soft, rich tone”, and her “great certainty with the tact” (“Berliner Rezensionen” 1896, as cited in ibid., p.64).

Chamber music and especially the quartet were for Natalie Bauer-Lechner the central expression of her musical
self-conception and the focal point of her aesthetics: "In a quartet it is like marriage: in spite of all dichotomies it all comes down to the greatest possible accord and most perfect completion. No component can be inferior, none may encroach and oppress the other; but woe if it is not the leading voice, but a secondary voice that is strongest! In rhythm, warmth, yielding to and flowing into each other it must come across as a pre-established harmony; and goal and task of the group may never be the lesser but always the most serious and the greatest. And as this is an unbelievably difficult problem to solve and fulfill, good quartets – and good marriages – are very rare!" (Natalie Bauer-Lechner, “Fragmente. Gelerntes und Gelebtes”, Vienna, 1907, p. 226).

Bauer-Lechner’s recorded recollections of Gustav Mahler are of great importance for the research on Mahler. Their value lies, however, not so much in the detailed notes of the composer’s utterances, but in the author’s ability, as a professional musician, to understand, evaluate and reflect Mahler’s works, and his thought and working processes, to present them understandably and concisely, as well as to describe Mahler as a three-dimensional person and bring him to life. In alternating between descriptive accounts, verbatim quotes and dramatic scenes, which presumably follow Mahler’s accounts or things experienced directly, the author accomplishes a kind of documentary diary of both musicological and literary significance. In some wordings, the structure of the conversations of the two musicians becomes comprehensible: "Mahler said to me today: ‘At its highest, as at its lowest, music becomes homophonic again. (…) When I asked him for an explanation and evidence for this, he said: (…)’" (Killian 1984, p.117). This reveals not only an attentive listener and note-taker but above all an analytically thinking theoretician, who demands explanations and evidence, and discusses questions relating to music in dialogue with the composer.

Bauer-Lechner’s "Recollections of Gustav Mahler” are an important component of the (re)construction of the middle-class music culture at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century to which the musician, author and dialogue partner Natalie Bauer-Lechner actively contributed.

Research

The handwritten manuscript of “Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler” is located today under the title „Mahleriana” in “Fonds Gustav Mahler” of the “Médiathèque Musicale Mahler” in Paris (founded by the Mahler biographer Henry-Louis de la Grange); the catalogue can be viewed at: http://www.bgm.org/ressources/pdf/fonds_mahler.pdf A typescript of a portion of the diaries as well as two letters to the Viennese composer and professor for music theory Richard Stöhr are located at the music collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Numerous letters from the year 1901 to 1919 by Natalie Bauer-Lechner to Anna Bahr-von-Mildenburg can be viewed in her estate in the archives of the “Theatermuseum” of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Further letters by Natalie Bauer-Lechner are located in the estate of Marie Soldat-Roeger in the archives of the “Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde/Musikverein” (Society of Friends of Music/Music Club) in Vienna.

Need for Research

The estates of well-known contemporaries with whom Natalie Bauer-Lechner was in contact all need to be loo-
ked through for correspondence with Natalie Bauer-Lechner (including Siegfried Lipiner, Bruno Walter, Anna Bahr-von-Mildenburg, Johannes Brahms, and Hugo Wolf).

Further research on the Soldat-Roeger Quartet, especially regarding its repertoire and the role Natalie Bauer-Lechner played in particular would be revealing. As far as is known, Natalie Bauer-Lechner did not participate in any other quartet or other professional chamber music ensemble.

To expand the image of Natalie Bauer-Lechner within the Mahler research, further research would be necessary. For example, further letters of Mahler’s should be re-read for accounts of her person.

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