



Jernej Weiss

Pedagoška fakulteta Univerze v Mariboru
Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Maribor

“Even Amidst the Clash of Conflict, the Sweet Sounds of the Muses did not Fade Away Completely”: The Concert Life of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana in the Period of its Last Music Director Hans Gerstner

»Tudi v jeku orožja sladki zvoki muz vendarle niso docela izzveneli«: koncertno življenje ljubljanske Filharmonične družbe v obdobju zadnjega glasbenega ravnatelja Hansa Gerstnerja

Prejeto: 2. oktober 2017
Sprejeto: 13. oktober 2017

Received: 2nd October 2017
Accepted: 13th October 2017

Ključne besede: Hans Gerstner, Filharmonična družba, Ljubljana, dnevnik

Keywords: Hans Gerstner, Philharmonic Society, Ljubljana, diary

IZVLEČEK

ABSTRACT

Pričujoči prispevek skuša na primeru koncertnega življenja tedaj osrednje poustvarjalne ustanove na Slovenskem, Filharmonične družbe v Ljubljani, prikazati razmerje med umetniškimi in izven-glasbenim pomenom v obdobju štirih vojnih koncertnih sezon od 1914 do 1918.

The purpose of this paper is to present, using the example of the concert life of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana, the central institution for the reproduction of music in Slovenia, the relation between artistic and extramusical significance in the period of four war concert seasons, i.e., from 1914 to 1918.

At the turn of the century and up until the beginning of World War I, the musical pulse of the capital of Carniola was beating stronger than ever. The unique rivalry between its two central musical institutions resulted in new achievements, and the circumstances of that time allowed them both to shine in their own way: the Glasbena matica excelled in the choral field, while the Philharmonic Society led the way in the performance of chamber and symphonic music.¹

However, it was the conflicts and the increasingly apparent divisions between the two key political perspectives in Slovenia, the liberals and the clericalists, that had already begun to interfere with the lives of these cultural institutions a few years prior to WWI, and brought about disastrous consequences in 1913. It is alleged that the various scandals on the clericalist side, which the liberals made thorough use of, led the conservatives to take their revenge on the “liberal institutions”, which needed the support of the provincial government, where the conservatives had a majority.² As a result, they withdrew their support from the Glasbena matica, after having already done the same to the Slovenian Philharmonic and the Slovenian Provincial Theatre. Despite emphasising that the issue of cultural institutions should be a cultural rather than political issue for all Slovenians, the Provincial Council maintained its views.

The Glasbena matica managed to survive and strove to follow a non-party policy,³ but neither side was happy with this. The negative views held towards the Glasbena matica are also evident from numerous newspaper reports of the time. Ivan Štefe, a journalist at *Slovenec*, the then leading newspaper of political Catholicism in Slovenia, wrote these harsh words: “Although we will not attack the Glasbena matica outright, our ultimate aim is to destroy it.”⁴ Naturally, such circumstances could not have had a favourable impact on the growth and development of Slovenian musical culture. The result was frightening: the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra was no more, the Slovenian Provincial Theatre and the opera ceased their activities, and the *Novi akordi* magazine, the final issues of which began dealing with certain critical concerns regarding Slovenian music, ceased publication.⁵ It can therefore be said that, rather than a lack of understanding and the so called German opposition, Slovenians were their own greatest adversary since discord, factiousness and mutual opposition were what caused the most damage to musical development and progress in Slovenia.

On the eve of World War I

The venerable Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana faced no such problems, at least not to an extent that would seriously jeopardize its normal operations. Despite the

1 Darja Koter, *Slovenska glasba 1848–1918* (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2012), 267.

2 Primož Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba 1794–1919: kronika ljubljanskega glasbenega življenja v stoletju meščanov in revolucij* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2005), 442.

3 Nataša Cigoj Krstulovič, *Zgodovina, spomin, dediščina: ljubljanska Glasbena matica do konca druge svetovne vojne* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015), 85–92.

4 Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba*, 406.

5 This is how its editor, Gojmir Krek, fought his battle against these “rotten circumstances”. Gojmir Krek, “Dostavek uredništva,” *Novi akordi: glasbeno-književna priloga* 13, no. 1 (1914): 23.

increasingly menacing maelstrom of war, its membership continued to grow,⁶ and the philharmonic concerts were conducted more or less undisturbed. They established the *Singverein der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft* and began preparing for the centenary of the establishment of the Philharmonic Society's music school, which was to be celebrated in 1915. In this regard, the testimony of a German living in Celje, Fritz Zangger, is worthy of note; Zangger wrote that "the social and cultural life of Ljubljana [right] before WWI was at an enviable level".⁷ He even believed that no other similar-sized city in the Monarchy could compare with Ljubljana in this regard, which would appear to be a slight exaggeration given the diverse cultural life of some of the other cities in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. More objective and extensive presentation of the concert life of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana during the WWI in light of the responses of critics was first given by Primož Kuret.⁸



Figure 1: The concertmaster and the last music director of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana, Hans Gerstner.

6 As an example, nearly the entire officers' choir of the 27th Infantry Regiment in Ljubljana was said to also have joined the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society. *Bericht der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach über ihr 213. und 214. Vereinsjahr 1914/15 und 1915/16* (Laibach: Philharmonische Gesellschaft, 1917), 74–79.

7 Fritz Zangger, *Das ewige Feuer im fernen Land: Ein deutsches Heimatbuch aus dem Südosten* (Celje: Druckerei u. Verlags AG, 1937), 98.

8 To view the programme listings of the Philharmonic Society, go to: Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba, 758–70* and Kuret, *Glasbena Ljubljana* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1985), 162–201, 272–80.

The work of the Philharmonic Society was influenced more heavily by certain management-related changes as the conclusion of the 1911/12 season saw the long-time music director of the Philharmonic Society, Josef Zöhrer, announce his retirement.⁹ The running of orchestra concerts was temporarily taken over by the military *Kapellmeister* Theodor Christoph, while Hans Gerstner, the concertmaster, became the provisional director of the music school.¹⁰



Figure 2: Gerstner's card with the portrait of Emperor Franz Josef and the emblem (the lyre) of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana.

In the autumn years of his life, Gerstner was not initially inclined to assume this responsibility, arguing that he was “much too old”¹¹ to take on such a demanding position, and therefore rejected the offer at first. The situation changed, however, when Christoph got a job as *Kapellmeister* in an infantry regiment in Vienna and was replaced, in January 1913, by the conductor, tenor and composer Rudolf von Weiss-Ostborn,¹²

9 His retirement from the Philharmonic Society was also regretted by the *Novi akordi* magazine, which wrote that “his departure means a great loss for the Philharmonic Society”. “Umetnikovo življenje in stremljenje,” *Novi akordi: glasbeno-književna priloga* 11, no. 1 (1912): 14.

10 In a typescript dated as early as 20 October 1910, the management asked Gerstner to take over responsibility for the philharmonic orchestras, a task that was said to be of great artistic and national importance. *Die Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach*, 20 October 1910, Ljubljana, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, Archiv.

11 Jernej Weiss, *Hans Gerstner (1851–1939): življenje za glasbo* (Maribor: Litera, 2010), 63.

12 Later on, Weiss-Ostborn worked for several years as *Kapellmeister* in the Graz Cathedral. Wolfgang Suppan, “Rudolf von Weiss-Ostborn,” *Steirisches Musiklexikon* (Graz: Adeva, 1962–1964), 637–38.

whose arrival meant the beginning of a new era for the Society. Weiss-Ostborn, however, worked in Ljubljana only for a year, after which he was called up for military service.¹³ As a result, the management of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society turned to Gerstner, asking him to conduct symphonic orchestras in addition to running chamber evenings and the music school. Gerstner had no choice but to acquiesce and accept these new duties, which naturally meant he would have to completely abandon his career as a solo violinist. This was the only way he could devote himself entirely to the work of a director; from the autumn of 1914 to late June 1919, he was responsible for virtually everything connected with the work of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana.¹⁴

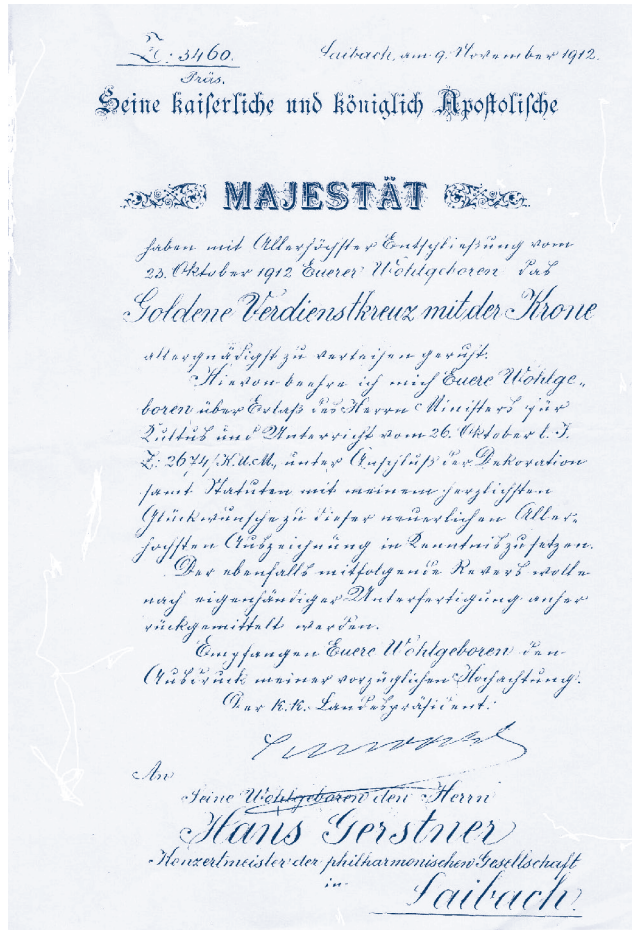


Figure 3: In 1912 the Emperor awarded Gerstner one of the highest state decorations of the time (the Golden Cross of Merit with the Crown).

13 Weiss, Hans Gerstner, 64.
14 Ibid.

The elderly concertmaster Gerstner, who had been working in Ljubljana for over 40 years at the time, did his best to maintain the continuity of the music school's work and organise concerts. He was supported in his efforts by the management, albeit in diminished numbers.¹⁵ The military orchestra also left Ljubljana and could not be replaced. Gerstner managed to cobble together a decimated string orchestra, which consisted of the school's students and friends of music, while most of the singers had to leave for the front. The annual reports could only be issued every two years and were again printed in the Gothic alphabet, despite the previous issues having been published in the Latin alphabet for several years. From then on, the philharmonic concerts were more social than artistic in nature.¹⁶ Although a certain level of variety was introduced to the programme with rare performances by solo singers and other solo artists, the artistic value of the concerts was generally inferior to similar pre-war events.¹⁷

Despite various difficulties, the concert season and teaching duties went on more or less smoothly. The lessons provided by the Philharmonic Society were mostly carried out in the side rooms of the *Tonhalle* concert hall, in the Kazina Hall and at the teachers' apartments.¹⁸ According to the 1914/15 school year report signed by Gerstner, there were 11 teachers working with 173 pupils at the Philharmonic Society's school.¹⁹ Since most of the young musicians had been called up and the older teachers at the Philharmonic Society were gradually retiring, more help was required from the female teachers at the school. Even the Society's sessions became increasingly rare, and all efforts to preserve the Philharmonic Society rested on Gerstner's shoulders.

The 1914/15 concert season

Organising concerts and running a music school was difficult, even in normal circumstances; during the war, it became a "genuine art form",²⁰ wrote Hans Gerstner in his diary, a unique document of that time and an invaluable source on musical culture in Slovenia. Although musical production and reproduction diminished significantly during and after the war,²¹ it never died out completely. It is important to stress that the income from the concerts was primarily charitable. As a result, even during the war, the philharmonic concerts were surprisingly well-attended.²²

15 Four of its members had to leave for the front. Ibid. 160. See also *Bericht der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach über ihr 213. und 214. Vereinsjahr 1914/15 und 1915/16*, 70 and *Bericht der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach über ihr 215. und 216. Vereinsjahr 1916/17 und 1917/18* (Laibach: Philharmonische Gesellschaft, 1918), 42.

16 The philharmonic concerts usually involved 40 to 45 musicians, most of whom were amateurs. Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 64.

17 Ibid., 65.

18 Ibid., 64.

19 Hans Gerstner, *Bericht über das Schuljahr 1914/15*, 11 July 1915, Laibach, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, Archiv.

20 Hans Gerstner, "Ein Leben für die Musik. Hans Gerstner, 17.08.1851, Luditz - 09.01.1939, Laibach," unpublished manuscript, Archive, Sudetendeutsches Musikinstitut, Regensburg, 92.

21 Dragan Matić explains that in comparison with the previous season, "the cultural pulse of Ljubljana in the first war season was barely perceptible", which he also attributed to the cessation of theatrical activities. According to Matić, 89 concerts were organized in the pre-war season, and only 26 in the 1914/15 season. Ten concerts were organized by the Philharmonic Society, 3 by the Music Society, 1 by the Cecilian Society, and 12 performances were given by the Military Band. Dragan Matić, *Kulturni utrip Ljubljane med prvo svetovno vojno: kulturne in družabne prireditve v sezonah 1913/14–1917/18* (Ljubljana: Zgodovinski arhiv Ljubljana, 1995), 245, 296.

22 Gerstner, "Ein Leben für die Musik.", 92.

The first concert in the new, wartime conditions took place on 8 November 1914 in a crowded hall. In place of the previous music director Weiss-Ostborn, Hans Gerstner conducted the orchestra. The concert began with Haydn's *Variations on the theme Gott erhalte den Kaiser* adapted for the string quartet, which left the audience spellbound.²³ Ottmar Hagemann, one of the critics for the *Laibacher Zeitung*,²⁴ concluded in his account that the Philharmonic Society "even in these times fraught with maelstroms of war, and despite all of the problems, did not lower its flag [...]. Now that art has fallen almost completely silent in Ljubljana, it should be thanked for helping to realise the poet's following words: 'You must take shelter from life's problems in the holy, silent regions of your heart, freedom reigns only in the kingdom of dreams and beauty blossoms only in singing.'"²⁵ The concert was repeated a week later (on 15 November) for wounded soldiers. Gerstner managed to assemble a string orchestra of 40 instrumentalists, who performed with pianist Julius Varga in a hall filled with wounded people, high-ranking officers and doctors. Julius Ohm-Januschowsky, the leading music critic of the time, reported in the *Laibacher Zeitung* of another success achieved by the charity concert: "Music is a language anyone can understand, and the audience, who have had only the dark musicality of thundering cannons in battle to listen to for three months, was now enveloped by the gentle, pleasant melodies of peace and joy."²⁶ For the celebration of the 66th anniversary of Emperor Franz Josef's rule on 1 December 1914, only the string orchestra was able to perform, along with the united choirs.²⁷ "Beethoven's Evening" on 15 December 1914 was celebrated with a concert by Gerstner's string quartet (Gerstner, Hüttl, Wettach, Paulus), pianist Julius Varga and concert singer Lilly Claus-Neuroth from Vienna. The performance of the string orchestra, conducted by Gerstner, was said to be "full of precise sound effect and of strong tone".²⁸ At Christmas, the Philharmonic Society again organised a concert for wounded soldiers and officers, featuring Josef Zöhrer, who performed improvisations on the harmonium, and singer Berta Schweiger from Innsbruck. The third regular concert of the Philharmonic Society on 24 January 1915 included a performance by an already well-known guest, the cellist Paul Grümmer from Vienna, who premièred Bach's *Cello Suite No. 1 in G major* in Ljubljana. Critic Ottmar Hagemann took the opportunity to praise the Society's management for holding regular concerts despite the problems caused by the war, as these concerts made it possible "to forget, at least for a little while, that we are living in the midst of the most terrible world war of all times".²⁹ Grümmer played his Stradivari instrument and was accompanied by Julius Varga. The concert helped establish another young local artist, Maridl Gatsch, a pianist from Zöhrer's school, who had already performed at school concerts. By performing *Nachtmusik in B major* in four movements for the string orchestra by Richard Heuberger (who passed

23 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 160.

24 The subject of music criticism in the *Laibacher Zeitung* is covered more extensively by Primož Kuret. Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba*, 416–17.

25 Dr. O. H. [Ottmar Hagemann], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 11 November 1914, 2267.

26 J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 19 November 1914, 2323.

27 *Bericht der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach über ihr 213. und 214. Vereinsjahr 1914/15 und 1915/16*, 7–8, 49.

28 J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 19 December 1914, 2571.

29 Dr. O. H. [Ottmar Hagemann], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 26 January 1915, 149.

away on 28 October 1914),³⁰ Gerstner paid homage to the recently deceased honorary member of the Society.

The fourth concert on 21 February was again a chamber concert, in which Gerstner included the *Suite for Violin and Piano in E-Flat Major* by Karl Goldmark (who passed away on 2 January 1915). The piece was performed by Hans Gerstner and Julius Varga, while other performers included a string quartet and, for the first time, Hilda Mahr, a singing teacher at the music school and daughter of a distinguished member of the Society's management, Dr Alfred Mahr. In a similar fashion to other concerts that marked the inter-war period, the event's proceeds went towards the war effort.

Ljubljana experienced a genuine symphonic concert under war conditions on 28 February, when the military orchestras of the 17th and the 97th Infantry Regiments joined forces to perform at the Slovenian Philharmonic to raise funds for the Red Cross. The concert was conducted by both *Kapellmeisters*, "hot-blooded musicians of high musical intelligence"³¹ – Franc Zitta and Anton Wolf. Performed to a packed audience, Ljubljana's hunger for symphonic music meant that the showcased event and its intriguing programme were extremely successful. Together, the orchestras comprised 70 musicians. The concert concluded with the Austrian and German anthems. After the concert, Gerstner was required to appear before the provincial authorities of the time to explain himself; headed by Count Chorinsky, Court Councillor, they had taken great offence at the performance of the German anthem.³² This incident is proof that, at the provincial level, there were cracks in the German-Habsburg alliance during the Great War. Both orchestras performed again on 6 March at Julius Varga's piano evening, which was also held to raise funds for the Red Cross. Varga was becoming an increasingly popular musical personality and "every friend of music followed the birth and growth of this talent with interest, rejoicing in his progress".³³ Together with the orchestra, Varga played *Fantasia on Hungarian Folk Themes* for piano and orchestra.³³ The military orchestras then delivered a third charity performance at the Provincial Theatre. On 19 March Anton Wolf also held the baton for the prelude to the ballad entitled *Schöne Adelaide (Wildenbruch)* by Viktor Parma. The critic paid special attention to Parma's musical work, described the story of the beautiful Adelaide, and described the music as being "distinguished by typical motifs, fluid rhythms and the pleasing language of tones. Although everything is simple in structure, the instrumental parts excel in their masterful use of the specific sound colours of instruments, which cannot be matched by any local composer."³⁴ The critic expressed his desire for the piece to be heard soon in its entirety. Due to great interest, the concert had to be repeated, with a partly altered programme.

As Italy entered the war in May 1915, wartime conditions deteriorated further. The front edged closer to Ljubljana. Increasing numbers of refugees arrived from the Littoral region and the Philharmonic Society had to vacate its premises for military use. Initially, the premises served as an army hospital ward, where food supplies were also

30 In his diary, Gerstner incorrectly stated that his colleague had passed away on 28 February. Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 160.

31 J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 2 March 1915, 375.

32 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 161.

33 J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 9 March 1915, 418.

34 K. [Pavel Kozina], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 23 March 1915, 503.

occasionally stored;³⁵ in September, certain offices of the Trieste Postal Directorate set up base there. As a result, the Philharmonic Society had to move its concerts to the Kazina Hall, a former venue. The Philharmonic Society's music school had to find new, provisional premises elsewhere as well. The new year witnessed a significant drop in the number of concerts held, and the planned celebration of the school's centenary was postponed to a more suitable time. However, an increase in student numbers led to an opening of a branch of the music school in Šiška, which was run by Robert Hüttl. The subsidies provided by the province and the city of Ljubljana were slashed.

Among the foreign artists who visited Ljubljana despite the imminent threat of war was violinist Adolf Busch, a young artist who on 28 March performed with the Philharmonic Society's string orchestra, "for a ridiculously small fee",³⁶ Bach's *Violin Concerto in E Major*, accompanied on the piano by Julius Varga, as well as several other pieces unaccompanied. According to the correspondence preserved between Busch and Gerstner,³⁷ the former came to Ljubljana directly after his tour of the Netherlands and Germany. On 15 April, the "old master" Willy Burmester also visited Ljubljana again and gave a concert to aid the fund for "cigars and cigarettes for soldiers fighting on the front".³⁸ He was accompanied by the pianist Carl Frühling because Willy Klasna had been called up shortly before the concert. On 1 May 1915, Robert Hüttl, a music school teacher, was also called up.

The 1915/16 concert season

Despite the general situation having taken a considerable turn for the worse, the new season began. Ljubljana was brimming with refugees, wounded people and victims of war as the Italian attacks reached Slovenian territory.³⁹ All of the musical events were held to aid the victims of war.⁴⁰ In November 1915, the music critic Julius Ohm-Januschowsky, who had followed the music scene in Ljubljana for many years,⁴¹ left Ljubljana for Vienna. As one of the more prominent personalities in music journalism in the late 19th century in Slovenia, Ohm-Januschowsky published several contributions in the *Laibacher Zeitung*, which serve as a highly valuable source of information on musical life in Ljubljana at that time; although numerous artists' names have been lost, Januschowsky wrote sound appraisals on many of them and assessed their achievements, aware that he was evaluating the musical situation in a provincial town where the core of the orchestra consisted of musical amateurs.

The first event of the new season (on 4 October 1915) was a charity concert organized by the Glasbena matica, featuring violinist Zlatko Baloković. On 22 October it was

35 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 161.

36 Ibid.

37 Extensive correspondence to Hans Gerstner is kept in the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.

38 Kuret, *Glasbena Ljubljana*, 167.

39 Franc Rueh, *Moj dnevnik 1915–1918* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1999), 29–30. See also Franc Zupančič, *Dnevnik 1914–1918* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1998), 43–44 and Fran Miličinski, *Dnevnik 1914–1920* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2000), 144.

40 The Glasbena matica also organized its "1st charity concert" in the great Union Hall for "the benefit of the orphans of fallen Slovenian heroes". Kuret, *Glasbena Ljubljana*, 169.

41 Špela Lah, "Julius Ohm-Januschowsky in njegovo kritično delo v Ljubljani," *Muzikološki zbornik* 43, no. 1 (2007): 127–35.

followed by a concert by Willy Burmester, raising funds for war orphans. The *Laibacher Zeitung* published the following report on the concert: "Ljubljana, situated on the doorstep of Italy and next to the Balkans, faces the fighting directly, which takes place only a few hours away, on the borders of Italy and in the Balkans, where efforts are under way to subdue Serbia. While the thundering of the cannons on the Isonzo was louder than ever before, here, we were able to greet the great violin virtuoso Burmester, an esteemed guest of many years, proving that even amidst the clash of conflict, the sweet sounds of the muses did not fade away completely. Due to the wartime circumstances, the concert was held in the Kazina Hall, the acoustics of which are sadly inferior to those of the Philharmonic."⁴²

Since many musicians had to leave for the front, the Society's work was even more difficult than in the first year of the war. Even assembling a string orchestra provided a challenging task. Nevertheless, the Philharmonic Society, under the tireless leadership of Hans Gerstner, strove to organise all of the concerts as determined in its statute, no longer with an orchestra, but according to its capabilities. At the first regular concert on 24 November, they performed, for the first time, a new piece by an "old master", the retired music director Josef Zöhrer – a *String sextet in D minor*. "Even amidst the fierce tempests of war, the Philharmonic Society – about to celebrate its sestercentennial – has been the garden, and a sheltered island, dedicated to cultivating the delicate bloom of divine art," an anonymous critic for the *Laibacher Zeitung*, concluded his report on this concert.⁴³

The Society's fourth concert, held on 17 March 1916, was dedicated, as many a time before, to Beethoven. This was the 150th event to feature chamber music and it was thus a jubilee concert as well.⁴⁴ The concert included only local artists: pianist Edita Bock, violinist Hans Gerstner and cellist Rudolf Paulus. The critic praised the "hard work of the musicians, who, in addition to their other daily work commitments, sacrifice their precious leisure time to rehearse and dedicate themselves to the sublime duties of art amidst the nerve-racking effects of the world war."⁴⁵

Having encountered several problems, Gerstner wanted to resign after the concert,⁴⁶ but was dissuaded from doing so, and the final concert of the season on 12 April was said to be "a success in light of the difficult situation, and the conclusion to a concert season that had been carried out in the most trying of circumstances [...] The main credit is due to the artistic director of the Society, Hans Gerstner, who ensured there were five concerts, even during the second winter of war and despite having to contend with a great deal of other work. Few people fully understand how challenging a task this was!"⁴⁷ A new feature of this concert was a new composition by Anton Rojic from Celje, titled *Musical work in G major (Tonstück)*, a three-part fantasy in free form.⁴⁸ In this piece, the critic felt "the spirit of Anton Bruckner lingering over the

42 Dr. O. H. [Ottmar Hagemann], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 25 October 1915, 1762.

43 "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 26 November 1915, 1965.

44 *Bericht der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach über ihr 213. und 214. Vereinsjahr 1914/15 und 1915/16*, 19–20.

45 H. [Ottmar Hagemann], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 21 March 1916, 484.

46 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 160.

47 H. [Ottmar Hagemann], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur," *Laibacher Zeitung*, 14 April 1916, 619.

48 As early as November 1909, the Celje Musical Society invited Gerstner and a few other musicians to take part in a symphonic concert at the German House, where they performed a symphonic poem by Rojic, titled *It should be (Es muß sein)*, which was conducted by the composer himself. Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 61, 158.

flourishing fullness of the melodics, whose colourful orchestration dazzles this great symphonic work through the media of the string orchestra.”⁴⁹

Things were far from easy for Gerstner. In addition to an increasing number of problems caused by the war, he felt his advanced age to be a burden. At the session of the Philharmonic Society’s presidency, he pointed out he had been serving the Society for 45 years and asked to be allowed to retire. He was 65. The presidency declined his request and Gerstner was forced to continue running the Philharmonic society and its music school. To conclude the season, on 5 May a concert was organised to benefit the Red Cross, which was already the 15th event of this type since the beginning of the war. The performers included the German choir, with its choir director Viktor Ranth, the young pianist Greta Pribošič (Priboschitz), Hans Gerstner and the pianist Julius Varga. Similar concerts were organised by the Glasbena matica.⁵⁰

The 1916/17 concert season

During the third wartime season, the acute lack of performers to interpret the musical works made it impossible for the Philharmonic Society to organise anything but chamber concerts. The Philharmonic Society therefore renamed its concerts as “evenings of chamber music”. The central institution for the reproduction of music became the string quartet, whose members alternated in view of the given possibilities, only the first violinist Gerstner persisted in its work throughout. The pianist Julius Varga, a Romanian citizen, was ordered to leave Ljubljana. Losing this young and extremely capable artist and teacher was a terrible blow to both the Philharmonic Society and Ljubljana generally. For the first concert of the season (on 6 November 1916), the decimated Philharmonic Society was forced to prepare programmes which were “far removed from any impressionism and expressionism, and where the simple art of the old times came to the forefront. The formal beauty and sound of the early classical period is represented by Mozart, while the classical period’s force can be heard in Beethoven and the enchantment of the romantic era in Schumann.”⁵¹ Only Gerstner’s string quartet was still available, along with some individual local and foreign artists whom the music director wanted to draw to Ljubljana. This is evident from the correspondence preserved between Gerstner and artists such as Antonín Bennewitz, Otakar Ševčík, Kamillo Horn, Emil von Sauer, Oskar Nedbal, Paul Grümmer, Robert Stolz, Adolf Busch, Leo Funtek etc.⁵² Despite a relatively modest number of performers, these events were still well-attended. The above-mentioned letters, after all, show how broad a circle of collaborators the Philharmonic Society had formed across the world in the past decades.

49 H. [Ottmar Hagemann], “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 14 April 1916, 619.

50 Kuret, *Glasbena Ljubljana*, 162–201, 272–80. See also Čigoj Krstulović, *Zgodovina, spomin, dediščina*, 108–09.

51 “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 7 November 1916, 1815.

52 Correspondence to Gerstner comprises only letters he received, and his entire legacy contains only one preserved letter addressed by Gerstner himself. This letter was sent to Richard Stöhr, a professor at the Vienna Conservatory. Hans Gerstner [Gerstner’s letter to Richard Stöhr], unpublished manuscript, 441–50, F 34, Musiksammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. See also Primož Kuret, “Einige erhaltene Briefe im Archiv der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach/Ljubljana,” in *Festschrift für Delf J. Gojowy, zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Axel Gojowy (Bad Honnef: Privatdruck, 2004), 220–23.

On 21 November 1916, Emperor Franz Josef passed away. The death of the “Iron Kaiser”, who had tirelessly ruled the Habsburg Monarchy for nearly seven decades, overshadowed the news that Josef Zöhrer, the former music director of the Philharmonic Society, had passed away only a day before, age 86.⁵³ Zöhrer was buried on 22 November at the Holy Cross Cemetery in Ljubljana, and an extensive memorial article was published in the *Laibacher Zeitung* a week later.⁵⁴ For decades, Zöhrer was the leading music personality in the social and musical life in Ljubljana. Nearly half a century of the Philharmonic Society’s history was buried along with Zöhrer that day, who embodied the institution in Ljubljana almost as much as Emperor Franz Josef personified the Habsburg Monarchy. The article in the *Laibacher Zeitung* reminded its readers that Zöhrer had lived in Ljubljana for 51 years, during which time the artist gained much respect.⁵⁵ It would certainly be necessary to devote more attention to his valuable work of reproducing, teaching and composing.

Hans Gerstner, the last of the great musicians from the most important period of the Philharmonic Society, however, pressed on, making sure the Society’s tradition did not decline despite the trials of war. Attracting foreign guests to perform at concerts was an especially challenging task. In this regard, the obstacles presented seemed insurmountable. Even old friendships and connections were of little use, while new links were almost impossible to forge. It was necessary to rely on one’s own resources, which is why the structure of the programmes changed; the third concert, for example, combined chamber music and choral singing. Other programmes were performed by members of the Philharmonic Society. On 2 April 1917 string orchestra performed once again, which the *Laibacher Zeitung* critic regarded as a “momentous success of indefatigable and methodically thorough work by concertmaster Gerstner”.⁵⁶

“The king of violinists”⁵⁷ Willy Burmester paid on 11 April another visit to Ljubljana. Here, he enjoyed “a dedicated community of admirers”, and his concert was “a musical experience that represented a culmination of what the waning winter season had to offer, and which seems starved of such powerful artistic characters. This hunger can only rarely be satisfied on account of the war raging nearby. Even in him, the celebrated virtuoso, one can detect the vestiges of war, with his head and Frisian-slim figure manifesting the use of bread-rationing coupons. His art, however, withstood all attacks.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Otto Jauker, a critic from Ljubljana, would have liked to hear him perform something else instead of his usual material.⁵⁹

After suffering much trouble and failure, the Glasbena matica managed to recover. In February, it even hosted three large “charity concerts to the benefit of the Isonzo fund of the 5th Army”. On 13 February 1917 “complete Royal Croatian Home Guard Music Orchestra from Zagreb” performed Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Glasbena matica soloists and choir at the Franciscan Church, led by Matej Hubad. The concert was held

53 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 165.

54 “Josef Zöhrer,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 29 November 1916, 1973–74.

55 Ibid.

56 H. [Ottmar Hagemann], “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 6 April 1917, 515.

57 Dr. Jauker [Otto Jauker], “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 14 April 1917, 554.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

to honour the memory of his dear departed Majesty, Emperor Franz Josef I. It once again became clear that, even the most insurmountable ideological conflicts lose their edge in wartime. Next evening, they performed “to the benefit of Gorizian refugees” Hugolin Sattner’s cantata *Ode to the Soča River* for the first time. Although Sattner’s cantata was only one of six items on the programme of this concert, it was the acme of the evening, and the composer received a thunderous ovation.⁶⁰

The 1917/18 and beginning of 1918/19 concert seasons

All five concerts of the 1917/18 season were organised to aid the war effort. Similarly to the previous season, the audiences had to content themselves with chamber music and solo performances. The concert season was opened by singer Gertrude Forstel and pianist Lissy Hammerl at the Provincial Theatre. The singer, a member of the Vienna Court Opera, took the stage in Ljubljana to perform solos composed by Mozart, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf. On the same day, 21 September, Ottmar Hagemann, who occasionally wrote musical reviews for the *Laibacher Zeitung* after Januschowski’s departure, was fatally injured in the mountains.⁶¹

On 6 February 1918 the second concert of the season featured violinist Nora Du-berg, soprano Franzi von Formacher and pianist Otto Wondraschek. The violinist, who had played a precious Guarneri violin years ago, this time playing an instrument by master Otto from Düsseldorf, was accompanied on the piano and performed the *Violin Concerto in D major* by P. I. Tchaikovsky, Bach’s *Chaconne* and several smaller pieces. Concert singer Franzi von Formacher, who was just beginning her career, stayed in Ljubljana for a while, teaching singing at the Philharmonic Society’s music school in the place of Hilda Mahr. She especially captivated the audience with her rendition of lieder by Hugo Wolf. The audience was on 8 February delighted by another performance at the German Provincial Theatre by the military symphonic orchestra of the 27th Infantry Regiment, which was led by Anton von Zanetti.⁶²

After three years, the Philharmonic Society was able to return to its premises since the successful military operations undertaken by the Austrian armada on Italian soil meant that the Trieste Postal Directorate could return to Trieste. On 16 April, the naval orchestra came to Ljubljana from Pula, which was regarded as one of the most elite military orchestras in the Monarchy. The naval orchestra (consisting of 65 to 70 musicians) led by Theodor Christoph gave a remarkable concert and enthralled with its performance and programme, at the centre of which was Strauss’s symphonic poem *Tod und Verklärung*.⁶³ The conductor was remembered fondly by the Ljubljana audience

60 The composition was also reviewed by Stanko Premrl, who highlighted as “its particular virtue the excellent, technically high-standing and colourful instrumentation”. But he did mention some technical shortcomings, which still “do not reduce its value on the whole”. In his view, the shortcomings were the orchestral overture, which he considered too long, and the inept finale, which “harms the effect of the composition”. Stanko Premrl, “Glasba,” *Dom in svet*, no. 3/4 (1 March 1917): 123–25.

61 Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmońska družba*, 416.

62 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 163–64.

63 *Ibid.*, 164.

as he had spent many years leading the orchestra of a regiment stationed in Ljubljana.⁶⁴

During this time, the *Glasbena matica* was also active; on 11 January 1918, it introduced a new, young, local singer Josip Križaj, and pianist Ciril Ličar, who had completed his studies at the Prague Conservatory. However, the *Laibacher Zeitung* critic took the opportunity to criticise the symphonic music policy of the *Glasbena matica*: “Ljubljana has no civilian orchestra. Had the *Glasbena matica* worked on this issue methodically throughout the decades of its work, the not inconsiderable musicality of its protégés would have made it fairly easy to form such an orchestra [...] Although the possibilities of creating an orchestra had existed, these plans went awry for quite unimportant reasons. Although most of the musicians would probably be serving in the army during this wartime period, many could stay and form a good ensemble together with the *Kino Central* orchestra. The *Glasbena matica* would not need to give up organising its own concerts, as is the case now, when the wartime circumstances have caused Ljubljana to be devoid of even its garrison military band, and major vocal and instrumental pieces can only be performed if a military orchestra can be found (wherever this can be managed) for occasional collaboration. Similarly, the *Glasbena matica* failed years ago in creating a chamber music association. Provided certain endeavours were made, it could have been preserved years ago, when a certain private circle cultivated chamber music [...] as it is, they let both deteriorate.”⁶⁵ This was of course a justified, though harsh, condemnation of the *Glasbena matica*, which had indeed neglected its orchestra and symphonic music all the time, giving preference to its choir.

As the political events unfolded at breakneck speed and the end of the four years of carnage was in sight, the Philharmonic Society prepared its final concerts. On 29 April, one of the best pianists of his generation, Alfred Hoehn from Frankfurt, performed in Ljubljana for the first time, “providing one of the most exquisite artistic pleasures of the past few years”⁶⁶, shining both in terms of his technique and musicality. On 4 May, the Society organised a concert for “those destitute and orphaned due to war”, which again featured, after an 18-month absence, the pianist Julius Varga, who lived in Vienna at that time and received “the warmest of welcomes”⁶⁷ by the Ljubljana audience. Most of the concert was performed by the German Singing Society’s Mixed Choir, while Beethoven’s *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major* (“*Emperor*”) was performed by Julius Varga. On 12 May, Ljubljana witnessed the return of music director Rudolf von Weiss-Ostborn, who sang a few lieder. The 154th chamber evening since Hans Gerstner had begun to organize regular chamber music concerts was also the last regular chamber concert of the Philharmonic Society.⁶⁸

The charity concert to be held at the German Provincial Theatre under the patronage of Countess Marie Attems, the wife of the provincial president, in collaboration with certain non-Society artists and the naval band, was cancelled for political reasons after

64 Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba*, 436.

65 “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 15 February 1918, 250–51.

66 Dr. J. [Otto Jauker], “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 2 May 1918, 676.

67 “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 8 May 1918, 711.

68 *Bericht der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach über ihr 215. und 216. Vereinsjahr 1916/17 und 1917/18*, 14.

multiple sessions in the provincial government building.⁶⁹ Although the event was sold out and the naval orchestra was on its way, the concert was cancelled and refunds were issued. This is one of the rare documented examples of the programme policy of the Philharmonic Society being affected.⁷⁰

A few months later, on 18 October 1918, as the first world bloodbath was coming to an end, the symphonic concert took place, featuring the military orchestra from Graz led by *Kapellmeister* Anton von Zanetti. It could be said that Ljubljana finally lived to see another symphonic concert, which was at the same time the last one. This concert was also a “charity event for the military”. It began with *Symphonie fantastique* by Berlioz and concluded with Liszt’s *Les préludes*. It was the last symphonic concert to be organised by the Philharmonic Society.⁷¹

Two days prior, Emperor Karl issued a manifesto which proclaimed that the Austrian half of the Monarchy was to become, in accordance with the will of its peoples, a federal state in which each nationality would form its own policy for its territory. Naturally, the newly-founded National Council, which worked for the unification of Southern Slavs into an independent country, refused to accept the manifesto. The Italians then broke through the front at the Piave river and began advancing rapidly towards the east. The collapse was imminent. During this time, on 25 October (in 1918/19 concert season), the venerable Philharmonic Society held its very last concert,⁷² a piano evening with Alfred Hoehn. The *Laibacher Zeitung* critic was enthusiastic about the evening: “Once again, the concert reached great artistic heights! We were at a loss as to what should be admired more: the level of technical execution, which is unrestricted by difficulty, the depth of expression, which yields to the specific features of various composers, the mighty force, which fills the hall with multitudes of tones, or the intoxicating sound, the tones of flutes and the organ, sounds which cannot come from a piano [...] We look forward to the artist’s next visit and hope that he plays before an even larger crowd than the one gathered on this remarkable evening.”⁷³ With these words, Otto Jauker, who followed musical events on the Slovenian and German “side” with almost equal degree of care, concluded his work as a critic at the then central newspaper in Slovenia.

The end of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society’s concert life

Just eight days after this concert, the new Slovenian provincial government issued a notification that these concert events could no longer be held. Immediately after the war, the venerable Philharmonic Society therefore found itself in completely new circumstances. Many of its members and supporters moved to German lands, including the former music director Rudolf von Weiss-Ostborn, who left in April 1919.

⁶⁹ Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 164.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba*, 770.

⁷³ Dr. Jauker [Otto Jauker], “Theater, Kunst und Literatur,” *Laibacher Zeitung*, 28 October 1918, 1647.



Figure 4: In 1919, Gerstner was granted citizenship of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. On the certificate of citizenship, his name was written as Ivan Gerstner for the first time, while the certificate was signed by the then mayor of Ljubljana Ivan Tavčar.

The fact that the Society was unable to comprehend the new era is evident from its appeal to the remaining members to stay loyal and for new members to join as it is a matter of “German honour to preserve the ancient society, which was bound only to the German part of the population since the establishment of the Glasbena matica (1872), in the spirit of the old tradition”.⁷⁴ Members were reminded of the past times of crisis from the establishment of *Academia philharmonicorum* on, of the Franco-German War and all other obstacles, which the Philharmonic Society had always been able to surmount. In a similar vein, the Society would be able to overcome the latest crisis and begin organising concerts again.

The appeal, however, came too late. A representative of the state, local court judge Anton Lajovic opposed all of the decisions and actions taken by the last general assembly of the Society held on 10 April 1919, and halted all its activities in June, discharging

⁷⁴ Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba*, 442.

the presidency and demanding that the entire property of the Society be handed over to him. Similarly, all the keys to the building, desks and archives had to be handed over to the Glasbena matica of Ljubljana. Even though the students had paid their tuition until 15 July, state supervisor Lajovic disregarded this fact. He even ordered that, should any of the students request a certificate, this document could only be presented if Lajovic himself signed it. In his capacity as the last music director, Gerstner was required to participate in taking the inventory of the Philharmonic Society's property. This included all the instruments, the archive and the hall's furnishings, as well as all the precious items kept by the Society: A letter written by Beethoven,⁷⁵ Bruckner's snuffbox, an engraved gold medal, Schubert's silver medal bestowed by the Vienna Men's Singing Society, Bach's medal given by the Vienna Singing Academy, and numerous other invaluable items, which Gerstner was forced to hand over to Lajovic.⁷⁶ The value of the mighty building, seven pianos, several string instruments, including antique pieces, an extensive archive containing hundreds of works, government bonds, and the complete furnishings of the hall and other rooms was estimated at a few million crowns⁷⁷ and was handed over to be managed by the Glasbena matica. Gerstner addressed several appeals to the ministry in Belgrade to prevent this "unjust robbery".⁷⁸ His efforts came to no avail, however, as Lajovic, a lawyer with excellent knowledge of judicial matters, was legally able to prevent any such requests from being granted every time.

On 21 June 1919, the music school ceased to exist as well. Gerstner was forced to hold a teaching staff meeting, where most of the teachers of the Philharmonic Society received three-months' severance pay. Rudolf Paulus was the only teacher of the group to be taken in by the Glasbena matica,⁷⁹ while Gerstner, after 48 years of service, retired with a pension of 333 crowns, a very modest sum even at that time and barely enough on which to survive. Moreover, a further clause was added to the pension agreement which stipulated that Gerstner would no longer be eligible to receive a pension should he ever leave Ljubljana. Although Gerstner put up quite a fight against the "brutal and unfounded closure of the music school",⁸⁰ Lajovic stubbornly insisted that it go ahead. What followed was the final step in the systematic termination of the Philharmonic Society. As of 30 June 1919, Gerstner was forbidden to enter the Society's *Tonhalle*.⁸¹

These events were also widely reported in the newspapers and, although the Philharmonic Society appealed against them, the altered political situation meant that this was of no help to the institution. Lajovic elaborated on his views extensively in the

75 Beethoven's letter of gratitude upon being made an honorary member of the Philharmonic Society, dated 4 May 1819. Hans Gerstner Jr., "Die Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach", in *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter*, Sonderdruck aus Heft Nr. 3, 1972, 168–69. After WWI, Beethoven's letter was sold to the Beethoven-Haus archives in Bonn. Jens Dufner, *Symphonien III*, Beethoven Werke (München: G. Henzle Verlag, 2013), 277.

76 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 67, 164. It is unclear whether some of these items had even been owned by the Philharmonic Society. As a result, their whereabouts have remained unknown to this very day.

77 Gerstner, "Ein Leben für die Musik," 96.

78 Ibid.

79 Paulus had taught at the Philharmonic Society's music school since 1914 and occasionally played in Gerstner's string quartet as a cellist. Jernej Weiss, *Češki glasbeniki v 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja na Slovenskem* (Maribor: Litera in Univerza v Mariboru, 2012), 179.

80 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 69, 72.

81 Gerstner Jr., "Die Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach," 172.

Slovenski narod publication.⁸² The president of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society August Schweiger later responded by accusing Lajovic of acting illegally and overstepping his powers. He rejected the allegation regarding the establishment of a joint orchestra, opposed Lajovic's interpretations for taking over the Society's property (as Lajovic claimed he wanted to use it to the benefit of German national interests), and reproached him for keeping quiet about the rule according to which the last general meeting was to have the property at its disposal in the event of the Society being disbanded.⁸³ From his position of power, Lajovic flatly and ruthlessly rejected all the accusations,⁸⁴ and the Philharmonic Society, which was renamed "The Philharmonic Club [Filharmonično društvo]", was annexed to the Glasbena matica as its subsidiary on 19 July 1921. It was instructed to adhere to new rules, while its activity was preserved only through officially registered management, president, board, financial plan and general meetings.⁸⁵ It was formally discontinued as late as 1945.

The legacy of the Philharmonic Society includes a lengthy record by Gerstner, documenting the last year of this institution, with his interpretation of the events leading up to the "abolition" of the Philharmonic Society.⁸⁶ This record and Gerstner's diary reflect his disappointment, especially regarding the behaviour of the new authorities, which had annexed the entire property and passed on all activities of the Society to the Glasbena matica, which until recently had been a competitive institution. Lajovic, of course, was keen to abolish the Society as soon as possible, and to transfer its property to the Glasbena matica. After the war, these efforts were also about showing power over all things German, which led Lajovic to utter his famous words about how poisonous German culture was to the Slovenian way of life.⁸⁷ It is worth noting that, upon take-over, the last part of the already diminished Society's archive had disappeared, leaving only a minor portion preserved.

Even though Lajovic's actions could partly be blamed on German nationalistic politics, especially from the late 1870s onwards, it is clear from Gerstner's work before and during the war that he had never been involved in any national disputes.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, Lajovic did not know how to utilise the international renown of the Philharmonic Society, its connections or its lengthy tradition of organising symphonic concerts. Although the Glasbena matica had a complete monopoly after WWI, concert life was at an all-time low. Foreign artists made only rare appearances, and foreign orchestras were almost never featured. It would be interesting to explore why Lajovic felt such an irrational hatred towards all things German, especially German culture, causing him, by his own admission, "veritable physical discomfort seeing so many Germans living in

82 Anton Lajovic, "Listek. Filharmonično društvo," *Slovenski narod*, 8 April 1919, 1.

83 Avgust Schweiger, "Poslano. »Philharmonische Gesellschaft« in gospod Lajovic," *Naprej* 4, 6 January 1920, 3.

84 Anton Lajovic, "Dnevne vesti. Družba »Philharmonische Gesellschaft« in njen »predsednik« dr. Schweiger," *Naprej* 4, 17 January 1920, 3.

85 During the period between the two world wars, activities could only be carried out to a severely restricted extent. In 1924, it organised four concerts featuring Yugoslav chamber music. Most of its property was lost. The main building became a storage facility, after which it was taken over by the cinematography company run by Pavla Jesih and Milan Kham, becoming *Kino Matica* (Matica Cinema).

86 Record in the archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.

87 Anton Lajovic, "O večnih krasotah in o strupu Beethovnovih, Bachovih in Wagnerjevih del," *Slovenec* 52, 6 April 1924, 5.

88 Weiss, *Hans Gerstner (1851–1939): življenje za glasbo* (Maribor: Litera, 2010).

Ljubljana and regularly performing at every Glasbena matica concert.”⁸⁹

Given the changed political situation, the magnificent history of the Philharmonic Society sank overnight and without a trace. Some of its most prominent personalities, such as Hans Gerstner, could do nothing but stand on the sidelines and witness its decline, ending the tradition they had so selflessly laboured to preserve over the years, even in the most trying of times. The fate of Hans Gerstner, the last music director of the Philharmonic Society, was similar to the fate suffered by the institution itself.

Virtually nothing remained of the society whose beginnings go back to 1794, save for the title of “the Philharmonic Society”, which “these fine people”⁹⁰ initially retained. Gerstner wrote: “Whenever I walk past the building or meet Lajovic on the street, I feel heartache and still ruminate upon this terrible loss.”⁹¹ After numerous humiliations, he was forced to plead with senior government officials on several occasions to be granted a pension that was at least close to what he actually deserved. He wrote: “The rabble surrounding Lajovic also took the Philharmonic Society’s rather significant pension fund”, which was said to be worth as much as three million crowns at the time.⁹² All was lost, and Gerstner was left only with the memories of extraordinary performances from the decades past.

Right after WWI ended, one of the most influential Slovenian composers of the time, Anton Lajovic, and his adherents strove very hard for the complete sovereignty of Slovenian music. That is why it seemed necessary to transform music from Slovenia into Slovenian music as quickly as possible, thus partially distorting the musical-historical memory. It was essential to cut ties with all things past and to build on Slovenian achievements only. Although the national movement in Slovenia always emphasised the nationally-affirmative and nationally-defensive significance of musical culture, it seems that today, the musical culture of that period cannot be judged in national-awakening terms only; instead, it is rightly subjected to autonomous music criteria as well. And its value, measured in autonomously musical terms, is – we must admit – rather low.

“Even though the Philharmonic Society operated as a German institution, especially during the war, an abolition of the kind that Lajovic carried out was an absurd act”⁹³ wrote one of the leading experts on the work of the Philharmonic Society, Primož Kuret. Namely, none of the occasional orchestral attempts between the two wars could replace a regular philharmonic society, rendering Ljubljana impoverished in the symphonic field, thus slowing down the development of Slovenian instrumental

89 Anton Lajovic, “Misli o kulturnem tipu germaniziranega Slovenca: (premišljevanje o priliki prve izvedbe Jurija Mihevca v Čerinovem koncertu.)”, *Slovenec* 52, 1 and 2 March 1924, 5. Therefore, the news on events relating to the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana reached the German speaking public as well. When the choir of Glasbena matica appeared in Vienna in 1928, some of the newspapers mounted a campaign against Lajovic, demanding that he dare not show his face in Vienna and that the choir should not sing his works. Lajovic was branded as “the destroyer of German culture”. Beatrice Dvorsky, “Die Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach (Ein Appell an die gesamte internationale Kunst- und Musikwelt)”, *Zeitschrift für Musik* 2, no. 18 (1920): 318–20.

90 Gerstner, “Ein Leben für die Musik.”, 96.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid. See also Primož Kuret, “Die Archivalienbestand der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach – Eine bedeutende Quelle zum slowenischen Musikleben im 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Musik-Sammlungen – Speicher interkultureller Prozesse*, ed. Erik Fischer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 263.

93 Kuret, *Ljubljanska filharmonična družba*, 450.

music. Despite this, based on the overview of the concert life of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana in the period of its last music director Hans Gerstner, it seems that even during the war, his national affiliations and opinions never radicalized. His diary thus provides abundant evidence that the cooperation between the so called Slovenian and German musicians or institutions was exemplary.

As a music reproducer, as well as concertmaster of the Philharmonic Society, as a soloist and conductor of philharmonic and chamber concerts as well as various charity events at 12 to 15 concerts yearly, hence in his entire, more than forty-year career as a music reproducer, at a total of almost 600 concerts, a large part of the Ljubljana concert life was connected to Gerstner's name. From the 1883/84 season onwards he was the concertmaster of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society, the organizer of chamber music, and as of 1914 he was the last director of the Philharmonic Society up to its dissolution after the end of WWI. Through all this time, he tried to attract to Ljubljana as many excellent Slovenian and foreign music reproducers as he could, which was especially difficult during the war years.

Although the level of the reproduction of music plummeted in the four war seasons (from the 1916/17 season, only chamber music concerts were held as part of the regular concert programme) and could not compare in quality to the rich concert life from the beginning of the 20th century, it never completely dwindled away. Thus, the attendance of philharmonic concerts, as well as the critical response to them, were surprisingly good during the war. Despite the circumstances of war, Gerstner succeeded in organizing 48 concerts, of which not only the humanitarian, but also the artistic value is not at all to be underestimated.

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POVZETEK

Obsežno podobo koncertnega življenja ljubljanske Filharmonične družbe za časa prve svetovne vojne je v luči kritičkih odmevov prvi podal Primož Kuret. Pričujoča študija na podlagi arhivskega gradiva, zbranega ob pisanju knjige o Hansu Gerstnerju, zadnjem glasbenem ravnatelju Filharmonične družbe v Ljubljani, dopolnjuje omenjeni oris s podrobnejšim vpogledom v organizacijo koncertov in koncertno politiko. Poseben poudarek namenja prvim izvedbam in njihovim kritičkim poročilom v tedaj osrednjem dnevnem časopisju. Prirejanje koncertov in vodenje glasbene šole je bilo težko že v normalnih razmerah, v vojnem času pa

je postalo »prava umetnost«, zapiše Hans Gerstner v svojem dnevniku, ki je kot edinstven dokument tedanjega časa neprecenljiv vir za glasbeno zgodovino na Slovenskem. Čeprav je raven glasbene poudarjalnosti v štirih vojnih sezonah močno upadla (od sezone 1916/17 so v sklopu rednih koncertov prirejali zgolj še koncerte komorne glasbe) in se kvalitativno ni mogla primerjati z nadvse bogatim koncertnim življenjem v začetku 20. stoletja, nikoli ni povsem usahnila. Tako je bil obisk filharmoničnih koncertov, kot tudi kritički odmevi nanje, v vojnem času presenetljivo dober. Gerstnerju pa je navkljub vojnim razmeram uspelo organizirati 48 koncertov, katerih ne le humanitarna temveč tudi umetniška vrednost nikakor ni zanemarljiva.