

## MUSICAL PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES OF JOSEF ZÖHRER AT THE LJUBLJANA PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY

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**Izvilleček:** Prispevek proučuje glasbeno poustvarjalno delovanje pianista, učitelja, dirigenta in glasbenega direktorja ljubljanske Filharmonične družbe Josefa Zöhrerja (1841–1916), ene osrednjih osebnosti ljubljanskega glasbenega življenja druge polovice 19. in začetka 20. stoletja. V domala pol stoletja svojega poustvarjalnega in pedagoškega delovanja je Zöhrer kar najmočnejše zaznamoval glasbeno kulturo na Slovenskem.

**Ključne besede:** Josef Zöhrer, Filharmonična družba, pianist, dirigent, glasbeni direktor

**Abstract:** The article examines the musical performance activities of the pianist, teacher, conductor and music director Josef Zöhrer (1841–1916), one of the central figures of Ljubljana's musical life in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, at the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society. Over the course of almost half a century of performing and teaching Zöhrer had an enormous impact on musical culture in present-day Slovenia.

**Keywords:** Josef Zöhrer, Ljubljana Philharmonic Society, pianist, conductor, music director

The dilemmas of contemporary music historiography in Slovenia are frequently the consequence of differences between two fundamental concepts: on the one hand the concept of a nationally conditioned musical culture, and on the other the bourgeois and therefore essentially transnational musical reality that characterized the long nineteenth century in the Slovenian lands. The original sin is probably to be found in certain interpretations of musical history in the recent past that during the period in question aimed to create a purely Slovenian musical culture, following the model of the great nations.

The period between the two world wars saw concerted efforts to establish a total sovereignty for Slovenian music, particularly on the part of the circle of composers around the journal *Novi akordi* (Gojmir Krek, Emil Adamič, Anton Lajovic, Janko Ravnik, etc.), who were seeking a place under what was already a predominantly Slavonic sky. It is by taking this kind of increasingly evident national polarization into account that it becomes possible to understand the reference by one of the protagonists of the young wave of composers in the *Novi akordi* orbit, Anton Lajovic, to “eternal splendours and the poison of the works of Beethoven, Bach and Wagner”.<sup>1</sup> In the new cultural and political reality of the common state of the South Slavs established in the immediate aftermath

<sup>1</sup> Lajovic, “O večnih krasotah in o strupu Beethovnovih, Bachovih in Wagnerjevih del”, *Slovenec*, 6 April 1924, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-9B4V58BE>.

of the First World War it seemed necessary to form, as quickly as possible, a genuinely Slovenian musical consciousness from the transnational musical culture that existed in the Slovenian lands, and thus at least partially to adapt music-historical memory. There was therefore a pressing need to break with the past and rely exclusively on Slovenian achievements. Yet praiseworthy though this endeavour may have been in a period during which efforts were underway to achieve a Slovenian national identity, it had quite a number of ramifications that appear to have had a baleful effect on the music-historiographical narrative of the recent past.

After the Second World War the concept of a nationally conditioned musical culture was also adopted more or less uncritically by Slovenian music historiography. The consequence of this was not only the appearance of numerous “forgotten” names, but also the fact that musicians were judged not so much in terms of their importance to musical culture as for their loyalty to the national idea. Bearing in mind the predominance of this concept, it is no surprise that the treatment of musical immigrants working in the Slovenian lands was to a large extent subordinated to a nationally conditioned view of music history. Among these immigrants, the more successful musicians who, through their activities, fitted into the concept of a nationally determined musical culture were for the most part tacitly “naturalized” and treated as “Slovenes”. Meanwhile, their less successful or nationally less than impeccable colleagues were frequently the target of chauvinistic attacks in the media during their lifetime and have posthumously suffered a form of *damnatio memoriae* at the hands of music historians.

The latter group includes the Vienna-born pianist, teacher and conductor Josef Zöhrer (1841–1916), who was also one of the most important music directors of what was then the principal concert-giving institution in the Slovenian lands, the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society (Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach). It was not, in fact, until a symposium held at the Slovenian Philharmonic Hall on 6 December 2016 to mark the centenary of the musician’s death that a comprehensive light was thrown on various areas of Zöhrer’s work over more than half a century of musical activity in Ljubljana by some of the papers presented.<sup>2</sup>

### **Outline of Zöhrer’s Activities as Composer and Teacher**

Information on Zöhrer’s musical training in Vienna is incomplete because the relevant material is missing. Zöhrer appears on the list of students of the Conservatory of the Society of the Friends of Music (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde) in Vienna for the academic year 1856/1857 as a second-level piano student of Eduard Maximilian Pirkhert. This is the only official record of his training as a pianist, since he is not listed among the Conservatory’s piano students either before or after this date. He is, however, listed in the same academic year as a cello student of Carl Schlesinger (replaced by Josef Hartinger), and in the following year as well. He is believed to have studied composition with Simon

<sup>2</sup> Program sheet of the scientific symposium, *Josef Zöhrer (1841–1916) ob 100. obletnici smrti*, Slovenska filharmonija, 6 December 2016.

Sechter during the same period.<sup>3</sup> He nevertheless appears not to have sat the final cello examination.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore likely that Zöhrer also had piano lessons with private teachers. Although he first made his mark in Ljubljana as a cellist, the greater part of his activity from the mid-1860s until the eve of the First World War was as a pianist and conductor, and it is these areas to which the central part of the present paper will be dedicated. It is, however, also worth mentioning Zöhrer's teaching work at the Philharmonic Society school, where he was one of the few members of staff to teach the cello. He first appears on the list of members of the Philharmonic Society in 1863<sup>5</sup> and was appointed one of the Society's piano teachers on 3 October 1865.<sup>6</sup> His teaching activities were not limited to the cello and piano, however, and Philharmonic Society reports mention him also as a teacher of singing and harmony. In due course he also took over as director of the choir. Zöhrer later established himself as an excellent music teacher and took his place alongside Hans Gerstner and Gustav Moravec as the "third pillar"<sup>7</sup> of the triumvirate of teachers who worked at the Philharmonic Society school for over forty years and created favourable conditions for its development. It was with these three teachers that the music school of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society truly began to flourish.

Zöhrer is also known to have been active as a composer, but the fate of his compositional legacy is not entirely clear. On the basis of an entry in the Philharmonic Society's annual report, we are able to conclude that Zöhrer's widow bequeathed her late husband's musical manuscripts to the Society following his death, but not all of them are preserved among the material of the Philharmonic Society held at the National and University Library (Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica) in Ljubljana.<sup>8</sup> This library's collection includes the manuscripts (autographs or copies) of a total of eighteen choral compositions, a *Romanze* for cello and piano and five printed volumes of piano pieces.<sup>9</sup> These musical sources, combined with other available historical material (concert programmes, newspaper reviews, annual reports of the Philharmonic Society) in which performances of other lost or destroyed compositions are documented, lead to a conclusion that Zöhrer's compositional *oeuvre* was modest in terms of quantity. Most of his compositions were of an occasional nature and closely connected to his activities as a performer. For this reason, researchers have not before now devoted much attention to Zöhrer's compositional legacy. The sole scholarly analysis of Zöhrer's achievements as a composer is an article by Nataša Cigoj Krstulović published in this journal in 2018.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that Zöhrer was one of the few composers working in Ljubljana whose works can be found with reasonable frequency in the concert programmes of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 235.

<sup>4</sup> Conservatorium der Musik in Wien, *Verzeichniß und Classification der Schüler*, nos. 6, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach, *Erster Jahres-Bericht*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach, *Dritter Jahres-Bericht*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Budkovič, *Razvoj glasbenega šolstva na Slovenskem*, 1:67.

<sup>8</sup> Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach, *Bericht der philharmonischen Gesellschaft*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ljubljana, Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica (NUK), Glasbena zbirka (SI-Lng), fasc. Josef Zöhrer.

<sup>10</sup> Cigoj Krstulović, "Aus vergangenen Tagen".

<sup>11</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 239, 330, 375, 377–379, 393, 424, 431. See also Weiss,

Evidence that his creative output did not pass as unobserved as might be assumed today is provided by Herbert Westerby in his book *The History of Pianoforte Music* (1924),<sup>12</sup> where, in a special chapter devoted to the works of Schumann's successors, the author mentions the piano compositions of Josef Zöhrer, whose name thus appears among those of some largely forgotten German composers (Albert Gortner, Hubert-Ferdinand Kufferath, Rudolph Niemann) who, like him, composed piano miniatures in the Romantic manner then popular.

### Zöhrer's Beginnings as a Performer: Cellist and Chamber Musician

A far more exhaustive description of Zöhrer's life and work can be found in the diary of Hans Gerstner<sup>13</sup> – a unique document of the period and a priceless resource for researchers of musical culture in Slovenia. In his diary, Gerstner describes some of Zöhrer's early performances in detail. His first public performance in Ljubljana took place on 21 March 1862, when he appeared as a substitute cellist at one of the Philharmonic Society's chamber concerts. An unsigned review of the concert that appeared in the newspaper the next day noted that the cello was played “by the very capable cellist Herr Zöhrer”.<sup>14</sup> Other successful performances proved that Zöhrer was worthy of the role, and he was soon invited to become the cellist of the Philharmonic Society's string quartet.

Over the seasons that followed Zöhrer performed as cellist, pianist or piano accompanist in numerous chamber ensembles at concerts of the Philharmonic Society. As Gerstner notes in his diary: “In the 1873/74 season Zöhrer, Gerstner and Peer formed a chamber trio and on three evenings we performed Schumann's piano quintet as a one-off collaboration with Nedvėd (viola) and Moravec (second violin).”<sup>15</sup> In this period young musicians in Ljubljana, particularly those employed as teachers at the Philharmonic Society school, such as Hans Gerstner, Gustav Moravec, Anton Nedvėd and Josef Zöhrer, put on regular chamber concerts featuring the works of the great Viennese composers, something that demonstrates the close connection between some of the teachers at the Philharmonic Society school and the Society's concert activities. Although the composition of the ensembles changed frequently as a result of changes of staff at the music school, Zöhrer and Gerstner remained a constant of these chamber concerts. They enjoyed a notable success on 22 April 1880 with an evening of Wagner's music in an almost sold-out hall. The programme consisted of just two pieces: to begin with, violinist Hans Gerstner and pianist Josef Zöhrer played Wagner's *Albumblatt*. Then came a performance of the first

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*Hans Gerstner*, 155, 159, 160, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Westerby, *History of Pianoforte Music*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Weiss, *Hans Gerstner* (translation of the diary); Hans Gerstner, “Ein Leben für die Musik”, typescript, Sudetendeutsches Musikinstitut, Regensburg.

<sup>14</sup> “Gestern Abend hatten wir endlich wieder Gelegenheit, einer Quartett-Produktion beizuwohnen [...] das Cello an Herrn Zöhrer vom Theaterorchester abgetreten. Die Zusammensetzung ist keine schlechtere, indem Herr Zöhrer ein sehr tüchtiger Cellist ist.” “Laibacher Plaudereien”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 22 March 1862, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-PZJUP30F>.

<sup>15</sup> Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 110.

act of Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*. The critic reviewing the concert felt that it was risky to perform Wagner's music drama with piano alone. Yet if smaller cities also wished to acquaint themselves with Wagner's music, this was almost inevitable. For Ljubljana, the encounter with Wagner's music was a first-rate event at which the singers shone, as did the pianist Josef Zöhrer, who provided an excellent accompaniment.<sup>16</sup>

As concertmaster at the symphonic concerts of the Philharmonic Society and an indispensable soloist, Gerstner took over the direction of the Society's chamber concerts in the 1882/83 season. It was in this season, in other words immediately after Zöhrer had taken up the post of music director, that the management of the Philharmonic Society took the important decision that the Society would begin organizing four regular chamber concerts each season. The nucleus of these concerts was represented by the Society's string quartet, which was almost always joined by Josef Zöhrer as pianist. The latter acquitted himself extremely creditably even in performances of some of the more difficult piano parts. At a chamber concert on 4 December 1897, where the programme consisted mainly of works by Haydn and Beethoven, the Ljubljana audience had the opportunity to hear for the first time "a creation by a representative of the ultra-radical trend in music, one of the most gifted German composers of the younger generation".<sup>17</sup> The reference is to Richard Strauss, and the work was his Piano Quartet in C minor. Reviewing the concert, Julius Ohm Januschowsky,<sup>18</sup> one of the most competent critics of Ljubljana concert life, wrote the following: "Some time ago we talked in detail about the extremely interesting quartet by Richard Strauss. Thanks to a magnificent rendition which admirably overcame the great technical and rhythmic difficulties of the piece, with Herr Musikdirector Zöhrer deserving particular praise for his brilliant performance of the extraordinarily difficult piano part, it met with an enthusiastic reception."<sup>19</sup>

### Josef Zöhrer as Piano Soloist

Zöhrer first appeared as a pianist at a concert of the Philharmonic Society on 26 April 1862, when he played a polonaise by Hummel.<sup>20</sup> On 14 November of the same year he

<sup>16</sup> "Wagner-Abend", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 24 April 1880, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-VC2TT7DE.771>.

<sup>17</sup> "Dem abgeklärten, classischen Werke folgte eine Schöpfung eines Vertreters der ultraradicalen Richtung in der Musik, eines der begabtesten Componisten des musikalischen Jungdeutschland." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Philharmonische Gesellschaft. III", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 17 December 1897, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-RG56FN25>.

<sup>18</sup> Lah, "Julius Ohm-Januschowsky".

<sup>19</sup> "Wir haben seinerzeit das hochfesselnde Quartett von Richard Strauß eingehender gewürdigt. Es fand dank der ausgezeichneten Wiedergabe, welche die großen Schwierigkeiten in technischer und rhythmischer Beziehung bewundernswert überwand, wobei Herrn Musicdirector Zöhrer in der geistvollen Ausführung des ungemein schweren Clavierpartes ein Hauptverdienst zukommt, die beifälligste Aufnahme." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Philharmonische Gesellschaft. III", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 17 December 1897, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-RG56FN25>.

<sup>20</sup> The anonymous reviewer once again mentions that the performer is otherwise known as a capable cellist, from which it may be concluded that the same reviewer was the author of the

apparently gave an excellent performance of the solo part in the first movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor.<sup>21</sup> In the years that followed the young pianist played an increasingly important role as a performer in Ljubljana.

On 8 January 1864 he gave a successful performance of Weber's Piano Concerto No. 2 in E-flat major. The review by an anonymous critic in the *Laibacher Zeitung* particularly highlighted Zöhrer's progress as a pianist: "The remarkably brilliant composition was played with such precision, such confidence and such expressiveness as to exceed all our expectations. The progress that Herr Zöhrer has made since his last concert appearance is unmistakable and justifies the assumption that he is capable of achieving a high degree of virtuosity. The audience rewarded him with tumultuous applause."<sup>22</sup>

One of the most important events that the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society dedicated to Beethoven's memory was the celebration of the centenary of the great composer's birth in 1870. The Ljubljana Philharmonic Society celebrated the memory of its most important honorary member with two concerts, on 12 and 13 November 1870.<sup>23</sup> The Society spent a long time on preparations for the event and engaged all its best performers. These included Zöhrer, who appeared as the piano soloist in a performance of Beethoven's Fantasy for Piano, Choir and Orchestra in C minor (also known as the Choral Fantasy). With this two-day Beethoven celebration the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society proved that it was also capable of organizing large-scale musical events, with the result that Beethoven's centenary represented a turning point for Ljubljana (in a musical sense) that would resonate for a long time.

Zöhrer continued to shine as a pianist in the season that followed (1871/72). The principal item on the programme of the second concert of the season, on 3 December 1871, was Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor, performed by the Society's own virtuoso pianist Josef Zöhrer and extremely well received by both audience and critics.<sup>24</sup> Zöhrer gave a "masterful"<sup>25</sup> second performance of this concerto on 14 March 1875 in the

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unsigned review that appeared on 22 March 1862. See footnote 13. The review of 29 April 1862 states that "Herr Zöhrer, den wir als tüchtigen Cellisten kennen gelernt haben, zeigte sich auch als sehr gewandter Pianofortespieler. Sein Vortrag der Hummel'schen 'Polonaise' war im jeder Beziehung korrekt. In den Läufen entwickelte Herr Zöhrer eine große Fertigkeit." "Konzert", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 29 April 1862, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-J6U62QC9>.

<sup>21</sup> "Herr Zöhrer bewährte sich dabei wieder als der wackere Pianist, als welcher hier schon bekannt ist [...]." "Konzert", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 15 November 1862, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-KY5JIOG>.

<sup>22</sup> "Das äußerst brillante Tonstück wurde von dem Vortragenden so exakt, so sicher, so ausdrucksvoll gespielt, wie wir es kaum erwartet hatten. Die Fortschritte, die Herr Zöhrer seit seinem letzten Concertiren gemacht hat, sind unverkennbar und berechtigen zu der Annahme, daß er es noch zu einem hohen Grad von Virtuosität bringen kann. Das Publikum spendete ihm rauschenden Beifall." "Concert", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 9 January 1864, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-Q963WXX2>.

<sup>23</sup> Weiss, "Symphony no. 6 in F major", 305–308. The article is also available in Slovenian on pages 243–257.

<sup>24</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 174.

<sup>25</sup> "Das Programm des gestrigen Concertes der philharmonischen Gesellschaft entwickelte eine derartig günstig wirkende magnetische Kraft, daß der Concertsaal in allen Räumen überfüllt war.

course of the 1874/75 season. As a performer, Zöhrer had his own band of followers, so his piano performances were generally well attended. Thus the rooms of the concert hall were reported to be “overcrowded”<sup>26</sup> when he performed the aforementioned Mendelssohn piano concerto “with remarkable technique and gracefulness”.<sup>27</sup>

On several occasions Zöhrer was called upon to perform when a substitute needed to be found at short notice. In March 1876 the virtuoso pianist Rafael Joseffy, who had studied with Franz Liszt and was at that time a star pianist of Europe-wide fame, was engaged to perform at a gala concert organized to mark the seventieth birthday of the poet Anastasius Grün (Count Anton Alexander von Auersperg), following the latter’s nomination as an honorary member of the Philharmonic Society. On 11 April 1876 – the day of the concert – Joseffy cancelled his appearance at the last moment, so Josef Zöhrer was required to step in, which he did very successfully. According to the review that appeared in the newspaper the next day, “with the help of some local willing artists who took it upon themselves to fill the gaps left by Joseffy’s pieces, it proved possible to hold the concert without any significant disruption.”<sup>28</sup> Hans Gerstner recorded the incident in his diary as follows: “Since the famous pianist Joseffy, who was scheduled to perform at the concert, failed to arrive from Vienna, Zöhrer and I had to replace the missing numbers with sonatas and solo pieces.”<sup>29</sup>

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Herr J. Zöhrer spielte das Klavierconcert aus G-moll von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy meisterhaft. Der heimatliche Klaviervirtuose entfaltete immense Technik, namentlich gegen Schluß des ersten Satzes, ein so feines, graziöses, gefühlvolles Spiel, daß im Zuhörerzimmer nur ein Ruf, jener der Begeisterung und Bewunderung zum Ausdruck kam. Auch in kleinen Salonpièces [...] zeigte sich Herr Zöhrer als eminenter Klavierspieler.” “Locales”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 15 March 1875, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-GXMQIZ40>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “Das [...] Festconcert wurde dennoch abgehalten, obgleich der wesentliche Factor desselben, der Pianist Rudolf [*sic*] Joseffy sein Erscheinen in letzter Stunde, und zwar auch dies erst über eine infolge seines Nichteintreffens in Laibach gerstern vormittags an ihn gerichtete telegraphische Anfrage, unter dem Vorwande eines von ihm selbst als bereits tagsvorher eingetretenen zugegebenen Unwohlseins absagte. Wir überlassen es dem Publikum selbst, dieses unverantwortliche und rücksichtslose Benehmen eines Künstlers dem Concertpublikum einer ganzen Stadt und einem Vereine gegenüber, dem er sich – wie wir zur besseren Beurtheilung dieses Falles hinzufügen zu müßen glauben – selbst angeboten hatte, seinem wahren Verdienste nach zu würdigen. – Mit Hilfe einiger hiesiger gefälliger Kunstkräfte, die die Ausfüllung der entfallenen Joseffy’schen Nummern aus Gefälligkeit übernommen hatten, war es gelungen, das Concert ohne wesentliche Störung abzuhalten.” “Vom Festbanket”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 12 April 1876, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-SGGHV5M8>.

<sup>29</sup> Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 113.

**Drittes Concert**  
der  
**philharm. Gesellschaft in Laibach**  
unter der Leitung ihres Musikdirectors Herrn  
**Anton Nedvêd**  
Sonntag den 10. Dezember 1876  
im landschaftl. Redoutensaale.  
Anfang halb 5 Uhr abends.

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PROGRAMM.

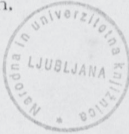
1. **W. St. Bennet** : *Die Najaden*,<sup>6</sup> Ouverture für grosses Orchester.
2. **Ferd. Chopin** : Concert aus E-moll für das Klavier und Orchester.  
Herr Zöhrer.
3. **M. J. Glinka** : *Komarinskaja*,<sup>6</sup> Fantasie für Orchester über zwei russische Volkslieder (Hochzeitslied und Tanzlied).
4. **R. Schumann** : *Stille Liebe*, } Lieder, vorgetragen  
**A. Jensen** : *Frühlingsnacht*, } von Frau Ant. v. Wurzbach.
5. **L. v. Beethoven** : Symphonie aus D-dur für Orchester.

**Der Saal wird um halb 4 Uhr geöffnet.**

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Der Eintritt ist nur den Vereinsmitgliedern gegen Abgabe der auf Namen lautenden Eintrittskarten gestattet. — Da nach Paragraph 16 der neuen Statuten Familien das Recht zum Eintritte für drei in gemeinschaftlicher Haushaltung lebende nicht selbständige Angehörige zusteht, so wolle für jedes weitere an den statutenmässigen musikalischen Aufführungen theilnehmende Familienglied eine separate Eintrittskarte beim Herrn Vereinskassier **Carl Karinger** gegen Entrichtung des statutenmässigen Jahresbeitrages von 1 fl. gelöst werden.

Kleinmayr & Bamberg, Laibach.



**Figure 1**

On 10 December 1876 Zöhrer played Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor in the Redoutensaal (Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije – dLib.si).



It should be noted that as a pianist Zöhrer enjoyed tackling the most modern piano literature of the day. On 10 December 1876, at the third concert of the 1876/77 season, he played Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, which prompted the reviewer to write a lengthy reflection on Chopin and performances of his music in Ljubljana: "Chopin has never felt completely at home in our concert programmes; since 1867 he has appeared in the Society's programmes only seven times, with the exception of those occasions when he has been performed by visiting artists (such as Treiber, Breitner, Phrym)." The reviewer goes on to say: "Chopin is, incidentally, a rare guest not only in our concert hall but also elsewhere: a fact that is perhaps due to the strangeness of his musical individuality and the overpowering of sentiment by his musical imagination."<sup>30</sup> The New Year's concert on 13 January 1884 was another "wonderful pleasure", where the reviewer particularly highlighted the performance of Zöhrer, who "once again showed himself to be an artistically mature, virtuosic master of the piano. The manner in which he played Chopin revealed him as not only a skilled pianist but also a man of musical education, artistic taste and refined understanding."<sup>31</sup> It seems obvious that Zöhrer, as one of the principal interpreters of Chopin in this country during the nineteenth century, deserves much of the credit for popularizing the composer's music in Ljubljana.

Zöhrer continued to seek out new works for the piano in the seasons that followed. A notable feature of the 1880/81 season was the inclusion of Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, composed in 1868, in the programme of the concert on 27 March 1881, since with the exception of his tone poem *Danse macabre*, the French composer was an entirely unknown quantity to the Ljubljana audience. The reviewer was enthusiastic about the concert and even more enthusiastic about the performer, the local pianist Josef Zöhrer, who in his opinion appeared too infrequently on the concert platform as a soloist: "When a city has an artist of Zöhrer's calibre within its walls, it ought to give him more opportunities to perform."<sup>32</sup> Zöhrer played the concerto, like almost all the works he performed, from memory.

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<sup>30</sup> "Chopin konnte in unseren Concertprogrammen nie recht heimisch werden; seit dem Jahre 1867 erscheint er mit Ausnahme jener Fälle, in denen ihn durchreisende Künstler auf ihre Concertprogramme setzen (wie Trieber, Breitner, Phrym) nur siebenmal in dem Programme der Gesellschaft vor: 2 Nocturnes, 2 Polonaisen (die in Cis-moll von Herrn Zöhrer gespielt), 1 Rondo, die Valses brillantes op. 34, Nr. 1 (von Herrn Zöhrer gespielt) und der erste Satz des gestern zur Aufführung gelangten E-moll-Concertes, welchen im Jahre 1869 Fr. Kathinka Phryme in einem Gesellschaftconcerte spielte. Chopin ist übrigens nicht bloß in unserem Concertsaale ein seltener Gast, er ist dies auch in allen übrigen Concertsälen, was wo[h]l in der Fremdartigkeit seiner musikalischen Individualität, in der Ueberwucherung der Phantasie über das Gemüthsleben seinen Grund haben dürfte." "Concert", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 11 December 1876, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-8XZKJVKN>.

<sup>31</sup> "Musikdirector Zöhrer hatte in diesem Concerte Gelegenheit, seine musikalische Vielseitigkeit in glänzendstem Lichte zu zeigen. [...] Zöhrer zeigte sich diesmal auch wieder als künstlerisch gereifter, virtuos durchgebildeter Meister auf dem Fortepiano, und die Art, wie er Chopin zu Gehör brachte (Ballade, Notturmo, Scherzo) manifestierte nicht bloß den Klaviertechniker, sondern auch den Mann von musikalischer Bildung, künstlerischem Geschmack und feinem Verständnis." "Locales", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 15 January 1884, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-9TN4YASH>.

<sup>32</sup> "Wenn man einen Künstler von der Bedeutung Zöhrers innerhalb der Mauern der Stadt besitzt,

Although he primarily appeared as pianist or accompanist at chamber concerts, Zöhrer was nevertheless perfectly capable of performing the solo parts of the most demanding works in the piano concerto repertoire, something he demonstrated on many occasions, including one notable performance in the 1896/97 season. On 29 November 1896 he gave the first performance in Ljubljana of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor. Reviewing the concert, Januschowsky once again praised his piano performance in glowing terms.<sup>33</sup> Zöhrer continued to distinguish himself in later years both as a pianist (for example at a Beethoven memorial concert, where he once again played the piano part in the Choral Fantasy) and as an accompanist.<sup>34</sup> His compelling performances also attracted notice outside Ljubljana, and he appeared with great success at a concert of the Radnitzky Quartet (Franz Radnitzky, August Siebert, Anton Stecher and Theobald Kretschmann) in the Bösendorfer Hall in Vienna.<sup>35</sup>

The repertoire he played and the reviews of his solo and chamber performances reveal Zöhrer to have been an ambitious and technically accomplished pianist who was not afraid to tackle the most difficult pages of contemporary piano literature. As a soloist he particularly distinguished himself in performances of demanding piano concertos by many great composers (Weber, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Chopin, Weber, Saint-Saëns, Rubinstein), while he also frequently performed with chamber ensembles or in accompaniment to the violinist Hans Gerstner and, occasionally, visiting singers. That his powers as a pianist were not diminished by the passage of the years is demonstrated by an account of the first performance of his own Piano Quintet in D minor in 1913, when he was already over seventy years old, at which he himself took the piano part.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted, however, that Zöhrer only rarely performed as a soloist without an orchestra – and always in concerts with a mixed programme, never in solo recitals.

### Josef Zöhrer as Conductor

Piano playing was not the only area of musical performance in which Zöhrer was active. Since he was a musician of the broadest training and one of the better qualified performers in Ljubljana, it was not long after he settled permanently in Ljubljana that he began

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so sollte demselben, so dächten wir, öfter Gelegenheit geboten werden, als Solist vor das Publikum zu treten [...]" "Locales", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 29 March 1881, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-CQ8EHTBP>.

<sup>33</sup> "Das gestrige zweite Mitglieder-Konzert der philharmonischen Gesellschaft war vom schönsten Erfolge begleitet. Insbesondere erfreute sich Herr Musikdirector Zöhrer, der das herrliche Klavierconcert in C-moll von Beethoven kunstvollendet vortrug, der schmeichelhaftesten Gunstbezeugungen seitens des Publicums." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 30 November 1896, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-FGNXBYA1>.

<sup>34</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 358, 376, 418.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>36</sup> J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur: Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 26 November 1913, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-380FQQN9>.

conducting. His work as a conductor really began in earnest when he took over the position of deputy music director of the Philharmonic Society in the 1882/83 season. In September 1882 the Society's then music director, Nedvĕd, asked to go on sick leave and was replaced by Zöhrer, who had already stood in for him on a number of occasions. He had gained his first conducting experience as a twenty-seven-year-old young man, when he conducted three symphonic concerts for the first time during the 1868/69 season.<sup>37</sup>

As a conductor, he had a particular affinity for the music of Wagner. His concert performance of the first act of *Die Walküre* on 22 April 1880 paved the way for a rich series of Wagner interpretations at subsequent concerts of the Philharmonic Society.<sup>38</sup> At a concert on 5 March 1883, a mere three weeks after the death of the "master of Bayreuth", the Society paid homage to the "great musical genius, the greatest musician of the present age" with a performance of the overture to his opera *Tannhäuser*. The brilliant performance, prepared by Zöhrer, made a powerful impression on the audience: "A real storm of applause roared through the hall, and only subsided when the conductor, Herr Zöhrer, appeared on the podium for the third time!"<sup>39</sup> Although, as the critic Januschowsky noted in his review, Ljubljana was still "very much behind other cities in terms of the cultivation of great master's [Wagner's] monumental music dramas",<sup>40</sup> it was certainly partly thanks to Zöhrer that Wagner found his place on concert platforms in Ljubljana in the second half of the nineteenth century. Januschowsky also noted that concert life in the city had progressed under Zöhrer to an extent that earlier generations could not even have imagined.<sup>41</sup>

Zöhrer also worked hard to modernize concert programmes, as noted with satisfaction by an anonymous critic in the *Laibacher Zeitung* on 17 March 1883,<sup>42</sup> with reference to the chamber concert scheduled for the following day, which featured a programme that included, less than two years after its composition, Saint-Saëns's Septet in E-flat major: "a brand-new work only recently performed for the first time in Vienna, in which the trumpet plays an important role." It seems, then, that with Zöhrer's new focus on progressively introducing recently composed works into the Philharmonic Society's concert

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<sup>37</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmoniĉna druŹba*, 618–620.

<sup>38</sup> Weiss, "Wagner on Ljubljana's Concert and Opera Stages".

<sup>39</sup> "Ein wahrer Beifallssturm brauste durch den Saal, der sich erst legte, als der Dirigent Herr Zöhrer zum drittenmale dankend auf dem Podium erschienen war." "Locales", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 5 March 1883, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-AUV8VRL8>.

<sup>40</sup> "Wir sind in Laibach zwar im Vergleiche zu anderen Städten inbezug auf die Pflege der gewaltigen Musikdramen des großen Meisters noch sehr im Rückstande, das Concertleben hat jedoch im letzten Jahrzehnte Fortschritte aufzuweisen, wie sie frühere Generationen nie erhofft hätten." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 30 January 1901, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-YEYKH2YA>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> "Wir machen mit besonderem Vergnügen darauf aufmerksam, dass der morgen, Sonntag, stattfindende letzte Kammermusikabend sich durch ein ganz besonders interessantes Programm auszeichnet. Haydn und Beethoven in hier ganz neuen Quartetten, echten Perlen der Kammermusik, und Saint-Saëns' ganz neues, erst vor kurzem in Wien das erstmal aufgeführtes Septuor, in welchem bekanntlich auch die Trompete obligat ist [...]." "Locales", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 17 March 1883, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-PFRDZ6LQ>.

programmes, Ljubljana did not actually lag so far behind other much bigger and wealthier musical centres in the Empire, at least in terms of first performances of new repertoire.

The 1896/97 season began on 18 October 1896 with the first Ljubljana performance of Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major ("Romantic"). The reviewer described the performance as "a milestone in musical development, since to date the work has been performed only in Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin and Linz".<sup>43</sup> Although Zöhrer essentially adhered to the Classical and Romantic tradition when choosing repertoire, the Philharmonic Society's concert programmes give constant evidence of his efforts to familiarize the Ljubljana audience with the recent creative achievements of some of the most important contemporary composers. Critics praised Zöhrer's skill at designing programmes and engaging soloists, while at the same time emphasizing that "orchestral music must remain the priority: the Philharmonic Society is therefore on the right path, and any reformer attempting to disrupt its course would not prove to be its friend."<sup>44</sup> The latter warning was aimed at the directors of the Society's choir, who were attempting to increase the share of choral concerts to the detriment of orchestral concerts.

Zöhrer also frequently included works by Slav composers in the Society's concert programmes. Thus at the second concert of the 1898/99 season, which took place on 27 November 1898, Zöhrer conducted the first performance in Ljubljana of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 in B minor ("Pathétique"). The reviewer wrote that the conductor's artistic abilities and the orchestra's eminent qualities were once again revealed in their purest form.<sup>45</sup> Another particularly noteworthy occasion was the performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on 19 May 1902 to mark the bicentenary of the foundation of the Academia philharmonicorum. This was the first complete performance of the symphony in Ljubljana.

Zöhrer's great successes as a conductor did not pass unnoticed abroad. In January 1896 he received an invitation to take over the position of music director at the Music Society (Musikverein) in Bruckner's own Linz, at a higher salary than offered by his current position in Ljubljana. Zöhrer was faced with a dilemma. In the end, his loyalty to the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society appears to have prevailed, although it is probable that his choice was made at least a little easier by the decision of the management immediately to raise Zöhrer's salary – to the level being offered him in Linz – which shows that the

<sup>43</sup> "Die Erstaufführung erfuhr diese Symphonie in Wien im Februar 1883 unter Richters Leitung mit großartigem Erfolge. Die Aufführung in Laibach bedeutet zugleich eine würdige Feier, den Manen des dahingegangenen Meisters, von der ältesten Musikgesellschaft Österreichs gewidmet." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 17 October 1896, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-5FJ2K888>.

<sup>44</sup> "Dem Verlangen des liederfrohen Publicums nach Gesang wurde Rechnung getragen, und interessante Instrumentalvirtuosens erfreuten uns durch ihr Können. Vielleicht wird auch dem vielseitigen Wunsche, in die Concerte hie und da gemischte chorische Ausführungen kleineren Umfanges einzuschalten, ohne dass dadurch die Hauptsache, und die bilden Orchesterwerke, geschmälert wird, zu entsprechen möglich sein." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 22 March 1900, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-8EE4PUHB>.

<sup>45</sup> "Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 30 November 1898, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-15U1CBZM>.



Philharmonische Gesellschaft  
in Laibach.  
Gegründet 1702.

Sonntag den 18. October 1896  
im grossen Saale der Tonhalle  
**I. Mitglieder-Concert**  
unter der Leitung ihres Musikdirectors  
Herrn Josef Zöhrer.  
Beginn des Concerts um 5 Uhr nachm., Ende  $\frac{3}{4}$ 7 Uhr abends.

PROGRAMM.

- 1.) **Dr. Anton Bruckner**: Vierte Symphonie (romantische), Es-dur.  
Erster Satz: Ruhig bewegt. (Allegro molto moderato.)  
Zweiter Satz: Andante.  
Dritter Satz: Scherzo. (Bewegt.)  
Vierter Satz: Finale. (Mäßig.)  
(Erste Aufführung in Laibach.)
- 2.) **Richard Wagner**: «Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg.» (Vorspiel.)

☛ Während der Aufführung eines Musikstücks bleiben die Saalthüren geschlossen. ☛

Der Saal wird um 4 Uhr geöffnet.

Die Direction der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft erlaubt sich, den § 10 der Gesellschaftsstatuten in Erinnerung zu bringen, welcher dahin lautet, dass eine Familienkarte nur für drei im gemeinsamen Haushalte lebende und nicht selbständige Personen gültig und das Übertragen der auf den Namen des Besitzers lautenden Karte, überhaupt das Mitnehmen von in Laibach ansässigen Nichtmitgliedern in Concerte und Aufführungen der Gesellschaft ganz unstatthaft ist, also auch in dem Falle nicht zulässig erscheint, wenn eine Familie die zum Eintritte berechnete Zahl für sich nicht voll in Anspruch nimmt. Jedes weitere Familienmitglied erhält die Mitgliedskarte um den Jahresbeitrag von 1 fl. Auch wird höflichst ersucht, Kinder unter 12 Jahren in Concerte nicht mitzunehmen. — Zur Aufrechterhaltung der Ordnung und zu nöthigen Aufklärungen, sowie zur Entgegennahme allfälliger Beschwerden von Seite der P. T. Mitglieder werden bei jedem Concerte zwei Directionsmitglieder als Ordner fungieren, deren Anordnungen gefälligst Folgegegeben werden möge. Dieselben sind an einem Abzeichen (weiße Schleife an der linken Brustseite) erkenntlich.

*An die P. T. Mitglieder! Man bittet, die Mitgliedskarten mitzunehmen und selbe am Eingange den Billeteurs abzugeben, da ohne Karte kein Einlass stattfindet.*

Kleinmayr & Bamberg, 3145



Figure 2

On 18 October 1896 Zöhrer conducted the first performance in Ljubljana of Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major ("Romantic") in the Tonhalle (Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije – dLib.si).

Society was well aware of the great difficulty of replacing an all-round performer and teacher of his calibre.

Zöhrer also successfully conducted a number of large-scale vocal-instrumental works. One of his more prominent achievements in this field was a performance of Liszt's oratorio *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth* on 2 May 1897. The critic Januschowsky's review in the *Laibacher Zeitung* of the following day noted that

Master Zöhrer had dedicated himself to the rehearsal of the immensely difficult work with genuine artistic enthusiasm; the large mixed choir, which performed excellently, and also the orchestra had dedicated themselves to their high tasks with enthusiastic perseverance. [...] The audience was most warmly receptive to the beauties of the tone poem; when Mr. Zöhrer was presented with a magnificent silver wreath, bestowed by the singers in grateful admiration, the listeners joyfully seized the opportunity to offer an enthusiastic ovation to the master, who deserves so much for his art.<sup>46</sup>

Another concert that wrote itself into the Society's annals, a season later, was the performance of Haydn's oratorio *The Seasons* on 24 April 1898. The *Laibacher Zeitung* dedicated a special supplement to the event, and we read in the review that "yesterday's performance of Haydn's *Die Jahreszeiten* will be written in golden letters in the annals of the Philharmonic Society, since under Zöhrer's direction the choir, soloists and orchestra joined in a magnificent rendition of this immortal and beautiful work, leaving the audience utterly charmed."<sup>47</sup> Zöhrer was the recipient of more standing ovations than ever before. Both of Haydn's two great oratorios had in fact already been programmed several times by the Philharmonic Society. Contributing to this, along with the magnificence of the works themselves, was the fact that Haydn was one of the most important honorary members of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society. A performance of *Die Schöpfung* on 3 May 1909 – to mark the centenary of Haydn's death – was likewise prepared by Zöhrer, who, the reviewer noted, was able "to bring to the work that life-enhancing, invigorating joy that gives *Die Jahreszeiten* its immortal freshness and grace."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> "Mit echter kunstfreudiger Begeisterung hatte sich Meister Zöhrer dem Einstudieren des unheimlich schwierigen Werkes, mit begeisterter Ausdauer hatten sich der große gemischte Chor, der Ausgezeichnete leistete, und auch das Orchester ihren hohen Aufgaben gewidmet. [...] Die Concertbesucher brachten den Schönheiten der Tondichtung das wärmste Empfängnis entgegen; als Herrn Musikdirector Zöhrer ein von den Sängern und Sängerinnen in dankbarer Verehrung gewidmeter prächtiger Silberkranz überreicht wurde, ergriff das Publicum mit Freuden die Gelegenheit, um dem um die Kunst hochverdienten Meister begeisterte Ovationen darzubringen." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 3 May 1897, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-VLPZH6M8>.

<sup>47</sup> "Die gestrige Aufführung der 'Jahreszeiten' von Haydn wird mit goldenen Lettern im Ehrenbuche der philharmonischen Gesellschaft verzeichnet sein, denn es vereinigten sich Chor, Solisten und Orchester unter der Leitung des Musikdirectors Herrn Zöhrer zu der glänzendsten Vermittlung des unvergänglich schönen Werkes, das einen außerordentlichen Reiz auf die Zuhörer ausübte." "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 25 April 1898, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-7DYIZ8HG>.

<sup>48</sup> "Herr Musikdirector Zöhrer wußte jenen lebensfrohen, sinnigfreudigen Zug in das Werk zu bringen, welcher der 'Schöpfung' den Stempel unvergänglicher Frische und Anmut aufprägt." J.

It should be mentioned at this point that two names predominated at the gala concerts dedicated to honorary members of the Philharmonic Society: Beethoven and Brahms. The popularization of the latter in Ljubljana was largely due to the efforts of Zöhrer, who in 1903 obtained authorization from the Brahms Committee in Vienna to raise money in Ljubljana for the purchase of some of Brahms's effects and manuscripts.<sup>49</sup> Events of particular note included the first performance in Ljubljana, on 22 April 1900, of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* with more than 120 singers drawn from different choirs: a performance into which Zöhrer poured all his "skill, effort and enthusiasm".<sup>50</sup> No less memorable was the performance of Brahms's Symphony No. 4 in E minor, which Zöhrer conducted on 7 December 1902, thereby rounding off the cycle of first performances of the great composer's symphonies in Ljubljana. Zöhrer continued to make regular appearances as a conductor at Philharmonic Society concerts in later years, although he increasingly suffered from poor health, with the result that on several occasions other conductors had to take his place.

### Problems Faced by Zöhrer as Conductor

Zöhrer's almost half-century of activity as the conductor of the Philharmonic Society orchestra was not without its difficulties. A particularly serious problem was that of ensuring that the orchestra possessed the personnel necessary to perform the difficult repertoire and meet the conductor's high performance standards. For the most part, the orchestra was made up of transient military musicians and the teaching staff of the Philharmonic Society school in Ljubljana. For oratorios, these were supplemented by deputies. Disputes often broke out between the military band and the Philharmonic Society. On 6 October 1901, for example, the military *Kapellmeister*, Theodor Christoph, mentioned to Zöhrer the possibility that the commanding officers of the 27th Infantry Regiment might ban military musicians from playing at the Philharmonic Society's concerts. The Philharmonic Society's management drew the attention of the regimental commanding officers to the War Ministry Permit No. 6008 of 28 December 1886, authorizing military musicians to perform at all Philharmonic concerts.<sup>51</sup> The argument was subsequently accepted by the infantry regiment's music captain, Schmidt, who allowed the military band to continue to collaborate with the Philharmonic Society.<sup>52</sup>

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[Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten: Philharmonische Gesellschaft. II", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 6 May 1909, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-X7RJKZQ4>.

<sup>49</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 317.

<sup>50</sup> "Die Gesamtprobe, der wir angewohnt, hat uns überzeugt, dass Musikdirector Herr Zöhrer sein ganzes Können, seinen aufopfernden Fleiß und seine Kunstbegeisterung in die Wagschale geworfen hat, um der Aufführung einen glänzenden Erfolg zu sichern." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 20 April 1900, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-YHR9MZJP>.

<sup>51</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 247.

<sup>52</sup> Kuret, "Kronika Ljubljanske filharmonične družbe 1899/1907", 123–124.

A second problem was the periodic lack of interest in Philharmonic Society concerts on the part of audiences. As already mentioned, Zöhrer had begun introducing less well known works to concert programmes, such as Niels Gade's *The Elf-King's Daughter* (*Elverskud*, *Erlekönigs Tochter*) and Massenet's orchestral suite *Scènes pittoresques*. Judging from the report in the *Laibacher Zeitung*, the audience was somewhat muted in its appreciation of these and similar novelties. One reviewer noted that while the programme was interestingly put together and well performed by soloists, choir and orchestra, the audience's reaction to these new works was nevertheless rather cool.<sup>53</sup>

The third problem, perhaps the most pressing of all, was poor attendance at rehearsals. The diary of the Philharmonic Society's director, Josef Hauffen, which is held in the archives of the Society of the Friends of Music in Vienna and which Primož Kuret published in the journal *Muzikološki zbornik* in 2015,<sup>54</sup> recounts the problems that Zöhrer had with poor attendance at rehearsals of Liszt's *Eine Sinfonie nach Dantes Divina Commedia*. As Hauffen explains in his entry for 8 October 1903:

Before this, we personally invited all 23 gentlemen participating as members and performers of our String Society through Zöhrer to participate and asked them to attend the rehearsals regularly by distributing the orchestral parts. Only about one fifth of the gentlemen came to the various rehearsals, and even they were not prepared to play their difficult parts. As the repeated invitations before each rehearsal did not bear fruit, nor were the members of the military brass band sufficiently prepared, Zöhrer found it necessary to cancel further rehearsals. This meant cancelling the concert altogether.<sup>55</sup>

Zöhrer detailed all these difficulties in a letter to Hauffen, where he gave a precise account of the problems he was facing in trying to prepare the season. It is not clear exactly how the matter was resolved, but the concert took place on 22 November 1903, and the *Laibacher Zeitung* review that appeared a few days later described the performance of Liszt's *Dante Symphony* as “an important musical feat” and “an outstanding cultural achievement”.<sup>56</sup> Thus despite the numerous difficulties, Zöhrer proved to be successful at resolving those problems that were a constant of musical life in Ljubljana.

<sup>53</sup> “Das Hauptverdienst gebürt Herrn Zöhrer, welcher Chor und Orchester so tüchtig einübte. Trotz dieser vorzüglichen Aufführung des musikalisch durchwegs interessanten Werkes hielt sich das Publicum demselben gegenüber ziemlich kühl.” “Locales”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 13 November 1883, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-PEGYTK8T>.

<sup>54</sup> Kuret, “Kronika Ljubljanske filharmonične družbe 1899/1907”.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>56</sup> “Die hohe Bedeutung der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft für unser öffentliches Musikleben, ihr künstlerischer Einfluß auf die musikalische Erziehung und Geschmacksbildung. [...] Die Ausführung des großen, schwierigen Werkes durch das philharmonische Orchester unter Leitung Zöhrers kann als bedeutende musikalische Tat gerühmt werden und zählt jedenfalls zu den hervorragendsten künstlerischen Ereignissen im Konzertsaal. Musikdirektor Zöhrer holte das Geheimste aus den mystischen Tiefen der Symphonie hervor, bewies im Herausarbeiten der grandiosen Steigerungen des ersten, den Zartheiten des zweiten und der Erhabenheit des letzten Satzes Geist und Empfindung.” J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], “Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten: Philharmonische Gesellschaft”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 26 November 1903, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-XW8KGUV>.



## Reviews of Zöhrer's Appearances as Conductor

The vast majority of the reviews that Zöhrer received over the course of his career as conductor and performer were favourable. Competent critics such as Julius Ohm Januschowsky acknowledged that the musicians of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society met all the conditions necessary to win over indifferent and uninterested listeners with their achievements, and also to increase the number of subscription concerts: “with Zöhrer as conductor and with a concertmaster like Gerstner, with the finest musicians in Ljubljana reinforced by the military orchestra, and with numerous artistically disposed listeners, the way is open for the achievement of the Society's goals, and I firmly believe that the need for art will itself contribute to increasing the number of concerts.”<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, then, it was mainly on Zöhrer as conductor and Gerstner as concertmaster that Januschowsky's optimism was founded. Yet if the accounts in the press of Zöhrer's conducting and other activities with the Philharmonic Society are almost exclusively favourable, tensions nevertheless appeared within the society from time to time, although for the most part these were skilfully concealed. The entry in Hauffen's diary for 30 November 1900 mentions complaints that Zöhrer's gruff manner was off-putting to singers and potential students, who were consequently choosing to enrol at the Music Society (*Glasbena matica*) music school rather than at that of the Philharmonic Society.<sup>58</sup> Zöhrer defended himself saying that he had to be strict if he wished to achieve success, since with the material he had available to him in the choir an energetic approach was urgently needed.

Zöhrer always placed the highest demands on the performers working under him. A telling anecdote in this regard relates to the engagement of the eminent local violinist Baroness Maria Concha Codelli. We learn from Hauffen's diary entry on 2 February 1901 that Friedrich Keesbacher, Josef Zöhrer and the Philharmonic Society's new director Josef Hauffen had gone in person to invite the Baroness to appear as a soloist at one of the Society's concerts. She was supposed to perform Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor in Ljubljana, but quit after just two rehearsals with Zöhrer, announcing that she was pregnant and that playing was too tiring for her. Hauffen noted: “Yet she had no reservations when we invited her, neither did her husband.”<sup>59</sup> It appears that Zöhrer may have been the problem. The precise circumstances are not known, but it seems that Zöhrer had high expectations of her, just as he did with every other performer, only that the famous Baroness was unwilling to adapt to his demands. That some kind of disagreement was involved is also shown by the fact that the Baroness did later appear in Ljubljana, albeit not under Zöhrer's direction.

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<sup>57</sup> “Mit einem Zöhrer als Dirigenten, mit einem Konzertmeister von der Bedeutung eines Gerstner, mit dem durch die besten Musiker Laibachs verstärkten Militärorchester und mit zahlreichen kunstsinnigen Zuhörern ist der Weg zum Ziele offen[,] und wir sind überzeugt, dass das Kunstbedürfnis selbst unserem Vorschlage nach Vermehrung der Mitglieder-Konzerte zum Siege verhelfen wird.” J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], “Philharmonische Gesellschaft”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 12 March 1898, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-70MLLE90>.

<sup>58</sup> Kuret, “Kronika Ljubljanske filharmonične družbe 1899/1907”, 120.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

As an interpreter, Zöhrer frequently made decisive interventions in the scores he conducted, which occasionally led to disapproval from critics. The centrepiece of the last Philharmonic concert of the 1909/10 season, on 20 March 1910, was Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor. Zöhrer reworked the concerto, shortening the *tutti* passages, lightening the brass and transposing the high trumpet notes. The reviewer of this concert judged the intervention to be justified on the grounds that the work's conventional, sometimes noisy and overloaded orchestral accompaniment was seriously disproportionate to the delightful charms of the solo instrument.<sup>60</sup> Less understanding for actions of this kind was shown by Januschowsky, who became embroiled in a rare public dispute with Zöhrer. The date was 21 October 1906, and the trigger was a performance of Bruckner's Symphony No. 2 in C minor that the orchestra of the Philharmonic Society had given in the composer's memory. The critic reproached the conductor for disregarding the *fermata* when the theme is repeated in the Scherzo movement, pointing out that Bruckner particularly loved caesuras and employed them judiciously, and for "the execution of the triplets marked 'Breit' (Largo) at the start of the Finale, a passage that is later repeated, at far too rapid a tempo."<sup>61</sup> Zöhrer disagreed with this, arguing that the *fermata* was already conditioned by the preceding *ritardando* and also that "because some of the strings have to turn the page at this point and I have to give them enough time."<sup>62</sup> The critic stuck to his guns and appealed to the practice of the long-standing conductor and director of the Vienna Court Opera, Franz Schalk. He also rejected Zöhrer's comments: "We know that the director of the Philharmonic Society's concerts is particularly fond of Bruckner; this is something that the critics have always been happy to recognize. But that the warm appreciation which Herr Zöhrer is accustomed to receiving for his work should descend

<sup>60</sup> "Leider steht die konventionelle, zum Teil lärmende und überladene Orchesterbegleitung in argem Mißverhältnis zu dem entzückenden Reitze des Soloinstruments. Wir sind daher Musikdirektor Herrn Zöhrer zu Dank verpflichtet, daß er die Tuttistellen entsprechend kürzte und das Bleche entlastete, besonders die hohen Töne der Trompeten umsetzte." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 23 March 1910.

<sup>61</sup> "Dazu gehört die Nichtbeachtung der Fermate bei Wiederkehr des Themas im Scherzo, wobei betont werden soll, daß Bruckner Zäsuren besonders liebte und sie mit weisem Vorbedacht angebracht hat, ferner die Ausführung der mit 'Breit' überschriebenen Triole im Eingange des Finale, eine Stelle, die später wiederkehrt, in viel zu raschem Zeitmaße." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten: Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 24 October 1906, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-3WSP57CU>.

<sup>62</sup> "Was die 'Nichtbeachtung der Fermate' anlangt, die ich mir in Scherzo der Sinfonie angeblich Zuschulden kommen ließ, so können es sämtliche Mitwirkende im Orchester bestätigen, daß sie sogar sehr lange gehalten wurde, da dies, abgesehen von der Vorschrift Bruckners, einerseits schon durch das vorhergehende *Ritardando* bedingt ist, andererseits aber auch aus dem Grunde, weil ein Teil der Streicher nach jener Stelle umzuwenden hatte, wozu ich ihnen doch genügend Zeit gönnen mußte. Daß ich ferner das Tempo im Finale der Sinfonie unverändert festhielt, dazu war ich vollauf berechtigt, und ich würde es bei einer etwaigen Wiederholung des Werkes wieder tun, da sich weder in der gestochenen Orchesterpartitur – die doch den zweifellosen Willen des Meisters kundgibt – noch in einer der zahlreichen Orchesterstimmen die Bezeichnung 'breit' vorfindet." Josef Zöhrer, "Theater, Kunst und Literatur", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 25 October 1906, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-XUKTMWXTX>.

to the level of unconditional praise: this is surely the last thing the Herr Musikdirektor would want. And that is also my last word on the matter.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Josef Zöhrer as Music Director**

As has already been mentioned, Zöhrer frequently stood in as conductor for music director Anton Nedvčed when the latter was sick or absent for another reason. It is therefore interesting to read, in Kuret’s monograph on the Philharmonic Society, that Zöhrer actually assumed the joint artistic direction of the Society with Nedvčed in as early as 1871, following a meeting of the Society’s board on 10 March 1871 and pursuant to the new *Instruktion für das Orchester der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft in Laibach*.<sup>64</sup> Which would mean that for more than a decade before his official appointment as music director of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society, he was already jointly responsible for the repertoire of what at that time was the most important concert-giving institution in Ljubljana.

Like Zöhrer and Gerstner, the Czech musician Anton Nedvčed was a central figure in the concert life of Ljubljana. He was an experienced musician who also acted as a kind of meeting point between Germans and Slovenes in musical matters in Ljubljana. As a musical authority and first-rate choir director and conductor, he enjoyed a good reputation with both factions, both of which endeavoured to get him on their side. It is particularly significant that he was also always actively involved with Slovenian musical organizations. In 1883, as Hans Gerstner notes in his diary, Nedvčed was compelled to step down because of ill health, and the Philharmonic Society director Friedrich Keesbacher’s long-held desire to see his good friend Zöhrer occupy the position of music director was at last realized.<sup>65</sup> Given Nedvčed’s subsequent relationship with the Philharmonic Society, it is more or less evident that the reason for the termination of his employment was not only health-related: it also had a political background. Although the Germans made every effort to get Nedvčed to join their circle, to which end they constantly praised his erudition and artistic achievements and awarded him important accolades, they never fully succeeded in winning him over to their camp. As a music teacher and composer, he always remained favourably disposed to the Slovenes. Thus even Gerstner noted in his diary: “What is less commonly known is that Zöhrer was said to be in dispute with Nedvčed, the music director.”<sup>66</sup> Keesbacher was apparently keen to remove Nedvčed in as early as 1875 and promote Zöhrer to music director and conductor in his place. The Society was split into

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<sup>63</sup> “Jeder Kunstfreund in Laibach weiß ja, daß der Leiter der Philharmonischen Konzerte gerade Bruckner innig zugetan ist: dies wird auch von der Kritik stets freudig anerkannt. Daß jedoch die warme Anerkennung, die Herrn Direktor Zöhrer hiefür wie überhaupt für sein ganzes Wirken gebührt, zu einer bedingungslosen Lobhudelei herabsinke, wird Herr Musikdirektor Zöhrer wohl selbst am allerwenigsten wollen. Hiemit ist die Sache auch für mich vollständig erledigt.” Julius Ritter Ohm- Januschowsky, “Theater, Kunst und Literatur”, *Laibacher Zeitung*, 27 October 1906, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-CDEV15X9>.

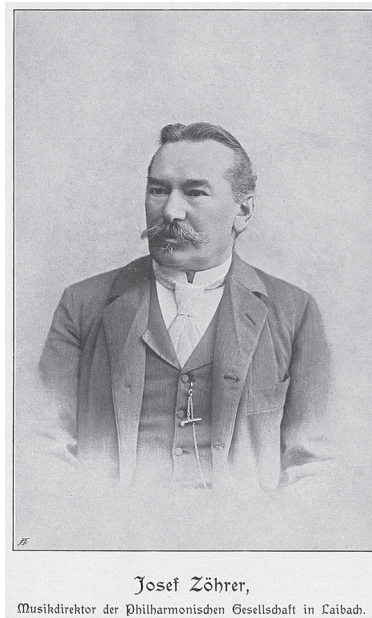
<sup>64</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmonična družba*, 173.

<sup>65</sup> Weiss, *Hans Gerstner*, 126.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

two camps, with tensions running high between them for months. There were even three extraordinary congresses in the assembly room of what was then the Provincial Diet, after which Nedvěd and his allies prevailed.<sup>67</sup>

Be that as it may, with Zöhrer's promotion to the position of music director, as Gerstner puts it, "a new era began and a new spirit settled in the Philharmonic Society."<sup>68</sup> Throughout the years of his activity Zöhrer proved himself to be a worthy successor to Nedvěd. It was largely due to his efforts that a succession of remarkably high-quality soloists and orchestras visited Ljubljana at around the turn of the century. These included the Berlin Philharmonic (Berliner Philharmoniker), which on 28 April 1900 performed a concert under the famous conductor Hans Richter in Ljubljana's new philharmonic hall, the Tonhalle, completed in late 1891 (which represented an enormous advance both for the orchestra and for audiences, since in contrast to the previous cramped concert hall it had a capacity of around 600). Another first-class event in the extremely rich history of philharmonic concerts by visiting orchestras was a performance by the Berliner Tonkünstler Orchester on 8 March 1903, conducted by Richard Strauss. This was a historic musical event for Ljubljana, and the concert was, of course, sold out. Gerstner and Zöhrer apparently spent more than an hour in conversation with Strauss in the Tonhalle after the concert.<sup>69</sup>



### Figure 3

Zöhrer was for almost three decades (1883–1913) music director of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana. Bock, *Die philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach*, 21 (Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije – dLib.si).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 126–127.

<sup>69</sup> Gerstner, "Ein Leben für die Musik", 75.

Both the management and the members of the Philharmonic Society were well aware of Zöhrer's importance to the Society's activities and on several occasions showed him due attention at concerts with lavish thanks and a variety of accolades. The 1889/90 season was a particularly notable one. Even the dress rehearsal for the first concert on 12 December in the hall of the old shooting range attracted a large number of listeners. Word had got out that something special was being prepared for the music director Zöhrer and concertmaster Gerstner. Following the overture, the Society's director Keesbacher took the stage and gave a long speech praising Zöhrer for helping the Society flourish. He mentioned the great difficulties the music director had to face in return for a modest salary. These included problems with the choir, with the orchestra, with rehearsals and with an inadequate concert hall. Anyone occupying the position of music director in Ljubljana therefore needed a will of iron, hand of steel, invincible toughness and, above all, a genuine and true love of art that overcomes all obstacles. Keesbacher ended his speech by presenting Zöhrer with a conductor's baton as a mark of gratitude and an emblem of his artistic position, and at the same time as the symbolic baton with which he, as the commander of a musical army, leads his troops to victory and success. The baton was made of ebony and richly decorated with a silver emblem of the arts and an inscription reading: "In memory of 29 May 1889, to the respected music director Josef Zöhrer, from the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana".<sup>70</sup> The orchestra then sounded a fanfare and applause filled the hall. Zöhrer offered his sincere thanks. Also particularly notable was Zöhrer's jubilee season of 1905/06, when he celebrated forty years of employment in the company of a circle of close friends. Evidence that his achievements were also recognized outside Ljubljana came with the flood of congratulations that arrived from Vienna, Graz, Leipzig, Trieste and elsewhere.

Despite the numerous difficulties he faced, Zöhrer largely achieved his ambitions at the Philharmonic Society. Available figures show that over the course of just under half a century he participated creatively in around 350 concerts of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana (around 160 as performer and around 190 as conductor).<sup>71</sup> These concerts included performances of twenty-one of his own compositions. He received the recognition both of Ljubljana's music critics and of audiences, which almost always filled the Philharmonic Hall for symphonic and chamber concerts. As befitted a conductor, he was decisive and uncompromising. As such, he was one of the principal authorities responsible for half a century of performance-related activity by the Philharmonic Society and, consequently, musical culture in Ljubljana.

On 25 January 1912 he applied for retirement. An extraordinary concert on 4 May 1912 was dedicated to a solemn celebration of his golden jubilee (the fiftieth anniversary of his first appearance before a Ljubljana audience). The reviewer described it as an "epoch-making event",<sup>72</sup> but Zöhrer had actually already been synonymous with the

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<sup>70</sup> Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach, *Jahres-Bericht der philharmonischen Gesellschaft*, 13–14.

<sup>71</sup> The data collected by Maruša Zupančič were retrieved from the MUSDAT database.

<sup>72</sup> "Das am Samstag stattgehabte Gesellschaftskonzert gestaltete sich, um mit Worten des Gesellschaftsdirektors zu reden, 'zu einem epochalen Ereignis.'" [Otmar Hagemann], "Theater,

Philharmonic Society for many years. The celebration began on the evening before the concert, at the dress rehearsal, when the maestro took his leave of the choir. The concert hall was festively decorated and Zöhrer was greeted by waves of applause that refused to abate. Gathered around the music director once again were the orchestra and choir that for three decades he had led to artistic successes. Zöhrer's almost half-century of activity was also remembered by the critics.<sup>73</sup> Januschowky, who had followed Zöhrer's achievements for decades, wrote the following in the *Laibacher Zeitung* when the latter's application for retirement was made public:

[...] With the departure of this distinguished man and artist from public activity, not only the Philharmonic Society, but the entire musical life of our city suffers a heavy, indeed irreplaceable loss. [...] We will abstain from a detailed description of the devoted activity of this highly deserving man, who enjoys common respect and veneration, and we cherish the heartfelt wish that after half a century of selfless work in the service of the noblest of the arts, he will be allowed to devote himself for a long time to well-deserved rest and relaxation.<sup>74</sup>

Responsibility for orchestral concerts was temporarily assumed by the military *Kapellmeister* Theodor Christoph, while Gerstner was appointed provisional head of the music school in the wake of Zöhrer's retirement.<sup>75</sup> Zöhrer, however, expressed his

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Kunst und Literatur: außerordentliches Konzert der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 7 May 1912, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-84T5SZM2>.

<sup>73</sup> "Es erübrigt uns nur namens der Musikkritik, die in dieser Stelle durch fast fünf Jahrzehnte Zöhrers Kunst zu besprechen hatte, dem Scheidenden einen herzlichen Gruß mit dem Wusche zu entbieten, daß seinem regen Geiste durch die, will's Gott, lange ausgiebige Maße des Ruhestandes erst recht die Entfaltung weiteren ehrenvollen Kunstschaffens gesichert werde, so daß es auch hier, zum mindesten bei der Besprechung alter und kommender Zöhrerschen Werke heißen darf: Auf Wiederseh'n!" O. H. [Otmar Hagemann], "Theater, Kunst und Literatur: außerordentliches Konzert der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 8 May 1912, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-Y5DWPI8N>.

<sup>74</sup> "Wie uns mitgeteilt wird, hat Musikdirektor Herr Josef Zöhrer seines vorgeschrittenen Alters halben um Versetzung in den dauernden Ruhestand ersucht. Durch das Scheiden dieses ausgezeichneten Menschen und Künstlers aus öffentlicher Tätigkeit erleidet nicht nur die Philharmonische Gesellschaft, sondern das ganze Musikleben unserer Stadt einen schweren, ja unersetzlichen Verlust. Herr Musikdirektor Zöhrer wirkt seit 1869 – also durch 43 Jahre – segensreich als Lehrer, Künstler und Dirigent im Dienste der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft, die ihm die Hebung ihres Ansehens, die Mehrung ihres künstlerischen Rufes dankt. In den letzten Jahren trat Herr Zöhrer auch als Komponist mit mehreren geistvollen Werken erfolgreich hervor. Wir behalten uns eine eingehende, Schilderung der hingebungsvollen Tätigkeit des hochverdienten Mannes vor, der allgemeine Achtung und Verehrung genießt und hegen den herzlichen Wunsch, es möge ihm nach einem halben Jahrhundert aufopfernden Wirkens im Dienste der edelsten der Künste noch lange gegönnt sein, sich der wohlverdienten Erholung und Ruhe zu widmen." J. [Julius Ohm-Januschowsky], "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten: Philharmonische Gesellschaft", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 7 February 1912, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-BQDN4GDH>.

<sup>75</sup> The management had already asked Gerstner to assume responsibility for philharmonic concerts in a typed letter dated 20 October 1910. Die Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Laibach to Hans Gerstner, 20 October 1910, fasc. Hans Gerstner, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien.

willingness to remain in his post until 31 December 1912, which demonstrates his great spirit of self-sacrifice. Gerstner was happy to leave him in the position of head of the music school until the beginning of 1913. Thus it was only in January 1913 that Zöhrer's duties were assumed by Gerstner and Rudolf von Weis-Ostborn. Zöhrer's retirement actually brought to an end a long period of tireless and conscientiously planned work of a kind that the Philharmonic Society had never previously achieved – and never did again. It was during Josef Zöhrer's tenure at the head of the Philharmonic Society that Ljubljana's reputation as a musical centre spread beyond its borders. Decades of tireless work gave rise to an important musical tradition in Ljubljana, with first performances of works by the great masters, appearances by outstanding soloists, and a general increase in the quality of Ljubljana's musical life.

Then on 21 November 1916 the Emperor Franz Joseph died. The death of the Habsburg ruler pushed into the background the news that the Philharmonic Society's former artistic director Josef Zöhrer had died in his eighty-sixth year (on 20 November 1916). Zöhrer was buried at Ljubljana's Sveti Križ cemetery on 22 November. With space in the newspapers largely given over to coverage of the death of the great emperor, a commemorative article about Zöhrer did not appear until 29 November.<sup>76</sup> The Philharmonic Society's annual reports for the 1916/17 and 1917/18 seasons dedicated special articles to Zöhrer, in which they remembered his achievements, successes and concerts. An official mourning ceremony took place in the appropriately decorated small hall of the Tonhalle on 17 December. Half a century of Philharmonic Society history went to the grave with Zöhrer, who had embodied the institution in Ljubljana almost as much as the "Iron Emperor" Franz Joseph had embodied the Habsburg monarchy.

### **Josef Zöhrer's Role in Musical Culture in Slovenia**

We know that as music director Zöhrer did not get involved in national disputes or other rivalries, and this is confirmed by many of his decisions and actions. As the chroniclers report, he was always interested above all in his work, in which he was conscientious and precise. Not only did he frequently include works by Slav composers in his concert programmes, as already mentioned, but he also supported joint appearances by otherwise rival institutions. Thus, for example, at the beginning of his tenure as music director, when the Philharmonic Society was organizing a concert to take place on 12 July 1883 at the Provincial Theatre to mark the six-hundredth anniversary of the absorption of Carniola into the Habsburg dominions, he invited the Music Society to participate. Accordingly, when Emperor Franz Joseph visited the city in July 1883, performers from the two institutions appeared together, with the Slovenian contingent strongly in evidence. Later, too, Zöhrer was in favour of collaboration with the Music Society. The 1897/98 season was marked by the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Music Society, on which occasion the Philharmonic Society sent its congratulations. A series of articles in the

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<sup>76</sup> "Local- und Provinzial-Nachrichten", *Laibacher Zeitung*, 29 November 1916, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-LAXGFKFZ>.

*Laibacher Zeitung* was dedicated to the work and achievements of this central Slovenian creative institution, which, like the Philharmonic Society, characterized one of the poles of “German-Slovenian” musical life in the Slovenian lands.

Nevertheless, on a number of occasions the Music Society accused the Philharmonic Society of neglecting works by Slovenian and other Slav composers. An anonymous individual writing in the journal *Ljubljanski zvon* accused the Society of failing to include even a single Slovenian work in its programmes, while paradoxically drawing attention to Gallus and Nedvěd,<sup>77</sup> who cannot, of course, be placed unambiguously in the Slovenian camp. Although there could be said to be some truth to the accusation regarding the failure to perform Slovenian works, it has to be acknowledged that there were hardly any suitable Slovenian symphonic compositions available at the time. Meanwhile, the accusation does not hold water at all when it comes to performances of works by other Slav composers, since under Zöhrer’s leadership the Philharmonic Society performed both Dvořák’s major symphonies and those of Tchaikovsky. In this connection, it should be emphasized that Zöhrer never expressed his national sympathies or views in an explicit fashion.

On the other hand, it was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, when Slovenian musical production began to advance in terms of quality in the circle around *Novi akordi* and in terms of performance with the establishment of Hubad’s choir and, later, Talich’s Slovenska filharmonija, that a rivalry began to make itself more strongly felt, eventually resulting in a greater polarization between “Slovenian” and “German” musical institutions. This shift coincided with political developments that saw the Slovenian party gain power in the city of Ljubljana. It should, however, be emphasized at the same time that this period, as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, saw a significant rise in quality both at the Philharmonic Society and at the Music Society, which did not wish to lag behind. It appears, then, that musical culture reached a peak in this period precisely because of the increasing rivalry between what were the two principal musical institutions in the country. Thus the two institutions partly complemented, partly competed with, each other. Sometimes, they even collaborated. Above all, however, they afforded a great diversity of musical pleasures to the people of Ljubljana (and thus not only to German citizens or only to Slovenian citizens).

As often happens in Slovenia when someone stands out as being above average, Zöhrer was the victim of frequent harassment both from the Slovenian side and, even more often, from his own “colleagues”. As we know, from 1884 onwards he taught choral singing at the Philharmonic Society school. The choir of the Philharmonic Society frequently performed together with the choir of the German Turnverein (gymnastics association). Despite repeated suggestions that the two choirs should merge, the Philharmonic Society management decided on 26 November 1889 that they would remain separate but continue to work together, particularly on large-scale vocal-instrumental works. The Turnverein choir was directed by Viktor Ranth, who was of a markedly German orientation. Zöhrer, as on other occasions, refused to be drawn into disputes between Germans and Slovenians or to side with one camp or the other. The singers of the Turnverein, in particular, made several attempts to enlist him in their ranks and then accused him of being gruff at rehearsals,

<sup>77</sup> Slovenski glasbenik, “Filharmonična družba v Ljubljani”, 485–486.



of being too interested in “higher” music and of snubbing their company. Zöhrer rejected all these accusations and said that he would not allow the Turnverein members to impose obligations on him to accompany them on their revels – and even less so since he had recently observed among them a kind of “pan-Germanic current” in which he had no intention of participating, because he was the head of the Philharmonic Society, to which all national aspirations were alien, and which received financial aid from the state, the province and the municipality. This statement of Zöhrer’s was recorded in the minutes of a meeting of the Philharmonic Society.<sup>78</sup>

At this point it is necessary to highlight one more important dividing line between Slovenian and German music societies. It is important to be aware that in the second half of the nineteenth century, Slovenian music societies were more a complement to the musical life of the country than its centre. At the same time, as Aleš Nagode notes, musical culture imbued with a national element was, right up till the end of the nineteenth century, something almost unimaginable for the majority of members of the German – and Slovenian – bourgeoisie, all of whom had been raised in a spirit of bilingualism. While the latter was aware of the need for performances of works of musical theatre and vocal music with Slovenian librettos or lyrics, it was difficult for them to accept the idea that the Slovenian side should compete in every way with the old-established Philharmonic Society even in the performance of other genres of music, and thereby strive constantly to demonstrate the equal value of Slovenian composers.<sup>79</sup> In particular, instrumental music from the German-speaking world represented a musical “ideal” with which the bourgeoisie identified.<sup>80</sup> Significantly, the music mentioned above was received even outside Europe (for instance, in America) in exactly the same way as on the territory of present-day Slovenia, likewise representing a universal status symbol of the bourgeoisie.<sup>81</sup>

In that spirit the members of Ljubljana’s bourgeoisie continued to enrol their children in the music school of the Philharmonic Society and attend the evening concerts of that institution and the performances of the Provincial Theatre with their spouses, and despite occasional signs of enthusiasm for the national awakening tended to view the first attempts at organizing new – Slovenian – music societies at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century with considerable scepticism. Not because of their Slovenian character *per se*, but simply because it seemed unreasonable to them to have to give up their settled way of life and compete in every way with what were then central musical institutions such as the Provincial Theatre and the Philharmonic Society. As a result, the Slovenian societies for the most part lacked permanent and adequate financial support on the part of the bourgeoisie, the consequence of which was an inevitable truncation of their activities.

Musicians, too, tended to make decisions more on the basis of practical, existential reasons and advantages (according to the principle *ubi bene, ibi patria*) than as the result of the influence of one or other set of national ideas. Thus, for example, Anton Nedvĕd, the long-serving music director of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society, had no hesitation

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<sup>78</sup> Kuret, *Ljubljanska Filharmoniĕna druŕba*, 254.

<sup>79</sup> Nagode, “Prvih dvajset let Glasbene matice”, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Applegate, “How German Is It?”, 276.

<sup>81</sup> Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy*.

in agreeing to serve on the board of the Music Society Ljubljana when it was founded in 1872. On the one hand, he included his own compositions in the programmes of events connected to the Slovenian national awakening, while on the other, as part of his concert activities at the Ljubljana Philharmonic Society, he was the first musician in Ljubljana to offer extracts from Wagner's music dramas. In a similar way, it is evident from the performance activities of Josef Zöhrer, one of the protagonists of musical life in Ljubljana in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, that the application of a nationally conditioned concept of musical culture in the period in question is highly questionable, if not downright controversial.

Why, then, is Zöhrer today a forgotten musician whose name we seek in vain in the fundamental literature<sup>82</sup> of Slovenian music history? The reason probably lies in the extremely narrow view of our musical past mentioned in the introduction, the imperative of which was a concept of national musical culture. It seems as if in our search for the "Slovenian-ness" of music in present-day Slovenia we have all too willingly renounced an extremely important part of our musical tradition of which we should rightfully be proud. Ultimately, the majority of the musical immigrants who worked in the Slovenian lands for any length of time assimilated fully to the local population. They understood their mission, and the identity connected to it, above all as a contribution to advancing the musical culture of the country in which they found themselves.

Perhaps the time has finally come to shine a brighter light on the activity of all those important figures who, through the power of their intellect, were capable of distinguishing themselves within the territory of present-day Slovenia, a process that will certainly be greatly aided by the findings of the project "Influx of Musicians to the Slovenian Lands During the Long Nineteenth Century – Their Impact and Integration". Today, it is certainly possible, simply by recognizing tradition rather than renouncing it, to achieve at a European level a degree of recognition that will afford a more prominent place on the map of European musical heritage to foreign musicians active in Slovenia and their works.

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<sup>82</sup> Cvetko, *Slovenska glasba v evropskem prostoru*, 502.

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## GLASBENO POUSTVARJALNO DELOVANJE JOSEFA ZÖHRERJA V FILHARMONIČNI DRUŽBI V LJUBLJANI

### Povzetek

Eden osrednjih poustvarjalcev ljubljanskega glasbenega življenja druge polovice 19. in začetka 20. stoletja, Josef Zöhrer (1841–1916), je v Ljubljani prvič javno nastopil 21. marca 1862, ko je na komornem večeru igral violončelo. Posebej pomembno je prispeval kot pianist in dirigent filharmoničnih koncertov. Trenutna statistika kaže, da je kot poustvarjalec v domala pol stoletja skupaj sodeloval na ok. 350 koncertih Filharmonične družbe v Ljubljani (in sicer na ok. 160 kot izvajalec in na ok. 190 kot dirigent). Repertoar in kritike Zöhrerjevih solističnih ter komornih pianističnih nastopov razkrivajo ambicioznega in tehnično dovršenega pianista, ki je med drugim posegal po najzahtevnejši sodobni klavirski literaturi. Kot solist se je posebej izkazal v izvedbah zahtevnih klavirskih koncertov uveljavljenih skladateljev, redno pa je nastopal tudi v komornih zasedbah. Ob tem je treba poudariti, da je Zöhrer le izjemoma nastopal kot solist brez orkestra, in sicer kot solist na koncertih z mešanim sporedom, ne pa na samostojnih recitalih.

Kot eden bolje izobraženih poustvarjalcev na Slovenskem je že kmalu po svojem stalnem prihodu v Ljubljano začel tudi z dirigentskim delovanjem, ki se je posebej razmahnilo po prevzemu funkcije glasbenega direktorja Filharmonične družbe v sezoni 1882/83. V Filharmonični družbi je Zöhrer kljub številnim težavam v veliki meri uveljavil svoje ambicije in družba je znala ceniti njegovo delo in uspehe. Bil je odločen in nepopustljiv dirigent in kot tak ena glavnih avtoritet polstoletnega poustvarjalnega delovanja Filharmonične družbe ter posledično glasbene kulture na Slovenskem. Vseskozi sta mu priznanje dajala tudi ljubljanska glasbena kritika in občinstvo, ki je po pravilu polnilo filharmonično dvorano ob simfoničnih in komornih koncertih. Prav Zöhrerju gre tudi največ zaslug, da mu je uspelo v Ljubljano na prelomu stoletja pripeljati vrsto izjemno kakovostnih solistov in orkestrskih sestavov. Z novo Zöhrerjevo usmeritvijo, ki je v koncertne sporede vse bolj vključevala tudi nekatera najsodobnejša dela, Ljubljana glede na čas prvih izvedb v repertoarnem smislu ni veliko zaostajala za veliko večjimi in bogatejšimi glasbenimi središči monarhije.

Tako se je s Zöhrerjevim delovanjem dirigenta in glasbenega direktorja dejansko začelo dolgo obdobje neutrudnega in zavestno načrtovanega dela, kakršnega Filharmonična družba ni dosegla ne prej ne kasneje. Ljubljana je prav v času, ko je Filharmonično družbo vodil Josef Zöhrer, postala znano glasbeno mesto tudi zunaj svojih meja. V desetletjih neumornega dela je nastajala pomembna glasbena tradicija Ljubljane s prvimi izvedbami del svetovnih mojstrov, nastopi izvrstnih solistov in splošnim dvigom ravni ljubljanskega glasbenega življenja.