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THE JERUSALEM POST JANUARY 20, 2023



Saluting Gustav Mahler

A Jerusalem Masterclass on the
Nazi-denounced musician and other icons of his ilk

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IVRIT Talk



Degenerate regeneration

The music of Gustav Mahler and his followers get an immersive salute in Jerusalem

(Ryan Holloway/Unsplash)



GUSTAV MAHLER'S music was called 'degenerate' and was banned by the Third Reich. (Wikimedia Commons)

• BARRY DAVIS

When we think of Gustav Mahler, our thoughts may very well turn to glorious feral and emotive sounds, and images of Vienna in its heyday at the turn of the last century. If that were the case, we wouldn't be far wrong – but we would be getting only part of the picture.

That perception should change next week when Herbert Gantschacher comes here from Salzburg, Austria, together with Alexander Drcar and Michael Mautner from the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, to join counterparts at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance (JAMD) of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The Masterclass Project on Gustav Mahler and fellow composers Hugo Wolf, Alban Berg and Anton Webern will take place at the JAMD on January 22-24, with master classes in various forms of musical expression. A number of lectures also will enlighten JAMD students and members of the public about some of the backdrops to Mahler's oeuvre, as well as about some of those who followed in his illustrious footsteps. The three-day itinerary culminates in a free concert at 7 p.m. on the final day, with works by Arnold Schoenberg and the aforementioned foursome.

The project is the brainchild of Prof. Zvi Semel, dean of the faculty of performing arts at the host venue, who is joining forces with the ARBOS Company for Music and Theatre, based in Klagenfurt, Salzburg and Vienna, under Gantschacher's guidance. The project team also features JAMD president Prof. Michael Klinghoffer.

The event's patrons include Peter Kaiser, governor of the State of Carinthia in southern Austria, a region that serves as a pivotal common denominator between



SALZBURG-BASED director, producer and writer Herbert Gantschacher has spent many years researching and performing the work of Holocaust victim musicians. (Hans Hochstoeger)

the celebrated composers in question. Gantschacher, who spends much of his time in Carinthia, has devoted many years to studying the lives and work of musicians who hail from, or have strong ties with, the southern state that borders on Slovenia and Italy, particularly those who suffered from antisemitism and Nazi tyranny.

THE JAMD program has several themes and subtexts to it, including a focus on composers who were once lauded and widely performed – before being hounded and ostracized because of their Jewish roots, vehicle of artistic expression or political leanings – and were later rediscovered.

There is also a regional and technological aspect to the narrative, with Gantschacher bringing more than just a sense of Carinthia over here with him. "Research shows that the second-most important place for music, after Vienna, is Carinthia," he states.

Gantschacher and the JAMD are old sparring partners. The Austrian has contributed to various other binational projects over the years, with particular emphasis on Viktor Ullmann. He was a Vienna-trained musician and composer with Jewish Czech roots. The fact that his father converted to Catholicism and fought as a colonel in WW I in the environs of Carinthia did not help Ullmann after 1933.

Like many other Jewish artists, he was sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto-concentration camp where, during a two-year period, he wrote some 20 valuable works before being transported to Auschwitz, where he was soon sent to the gas chamber. Miraculously, some of the works from that time survived and are performed to this day. Gantschacher himself has overseen

several productions of Ullmann's creations, including the musical one-act play *The Emperor of Atlantis*, and has been instrumental in spreading the word about the composer.

FOR GANTSCHACHER, Mahler was a natural thematic successor to the Ullmann program. "The main artistic and musical work of Gustav Mahler was done in Carinthia," he explains. The project baseline was then expanded to incorporate additional composers with roots in the region, such as Webern.

Despite not being Jewish, and having a number of ardent Hitler supporters in his family, Webern was not only critical of the Nazis but also wrote contemporary, envelope-pushing music that was denigrated by the Third Reich.

His work, along with that of other non-Jewish composers whose creative direction did not suit the Nazi party line, was denounced and was classified as *entartete Kunst* - "degenerate art." The music of the likes of Webern, Mahler, Berg and Wolf was deemed to be fundamentally "unGerman."

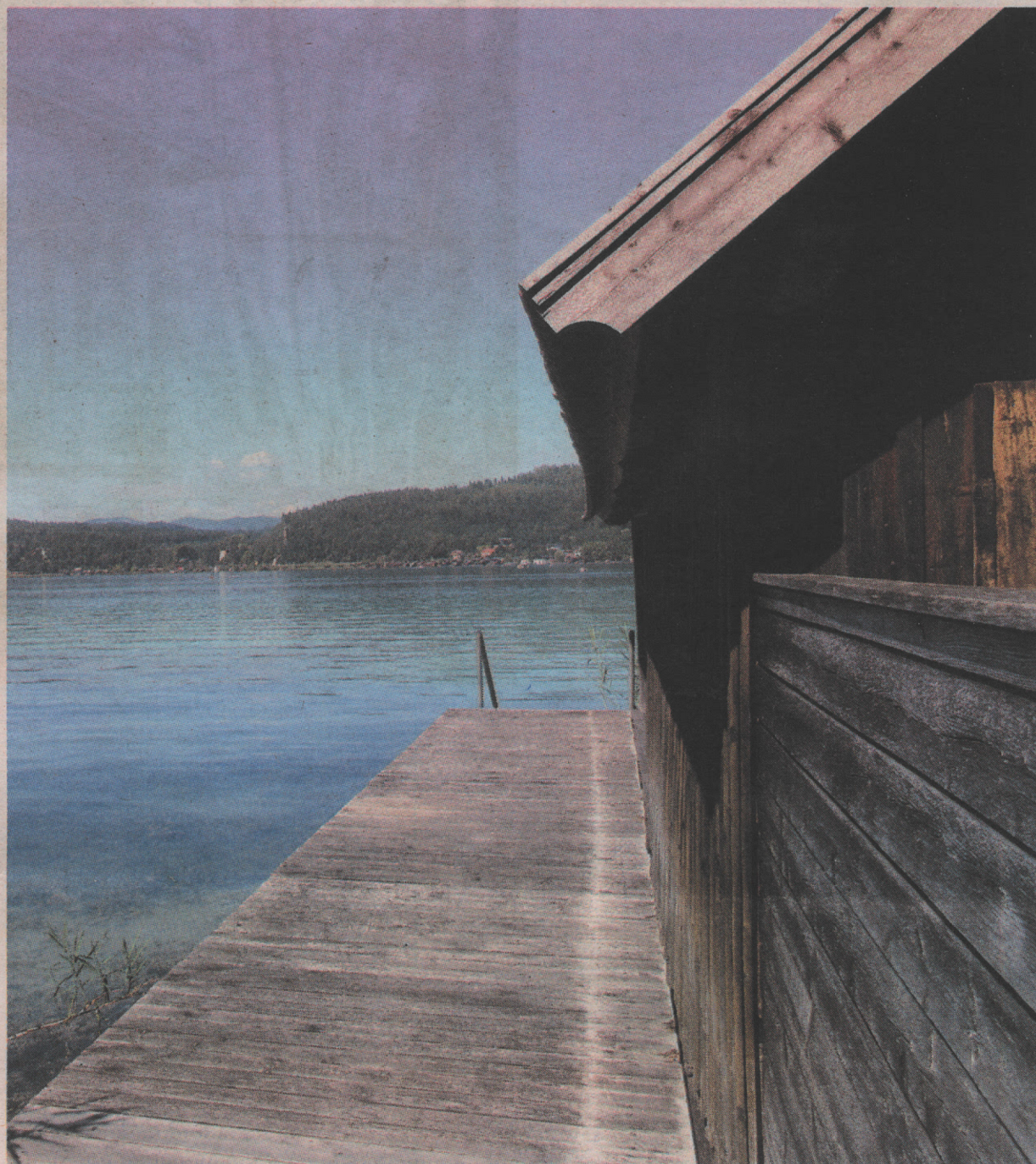
Today, Mahler's works are widely celebrated, even though it took many years for some, such as his *Symphony No. 6*, to build up a decent head of steam in concert halls around the world. Mahler, who died in 1911 at age 51, did not see much success during his own lifetime. That may have been down to the fact that he was hailed as a great conductor, and his demanding day job left precious little time for writing.

In fact, notwithstanding the scheduling constraints to compose, Mahler held possibly the most sought-after position in the Austrian musical sector, that of conductor of the State Opera House in Vienna. As a former Jew who converted to Catholicism for understandable pragmatic reasons, Mahler's appointment in 1897, which was eventually sanctioned by Emperor Franz Joseph, was not a given.

This relatively young man, just 37, was treated with mistrust by the conservative Viennese establishment of the day. Added to that Karl Lueger, a conservative populist antisemite, had just been elected mayor of Vienna. It was not an ideal set of circumstances in which to launch his career in Vienna, but Mahler managed that with aplomb, opening his Opera House conducting account with acclaimed renditions of Wagner's romantic opera *Lohengrin* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Mahler had something of a rough ride during his 10-year tenure, after which he spent three not altogether successful years in New York, principally with the Metropolitan Opera House, augmented by a number of appearances with the New York Philharmonic.

There was also an early career stint with the Hamburg State Theater as conductor, with the summers devoted to composing. That was when Mahler's connection with Carinthia began. "There was cholera in Ham-



MAHLER WROTE numerous compositions from his lakeside abode by the Woerthersee lake in Carinthia, southern Austria. (Herbert Gantschacher)

burg," Gantschacher notes. "All the theaters were closed, and he looked for a safe place for himself and his family."

The southern Austrian state got the nod on all sorts of grounds, including technological advancements that made the area something of an international transport hub. "At this time, Carinthia had the most modern railway system in Europe."

Gantschacher puts that surprising fact down to political dynamics. "The [Austro-Hungarian] Hapsburg Empire built two main lines in their empire, from Budapest to Innsbruck through Vienna in the north, and they built a second in the south, from Budapest crossing Carinthia to southern Tyrol and then to Innsbruck."

That facilitated the ferrying of soldiers and ammunition to the south and, in particular, in the direction of Italy. Venice had seceded from the empire and was brought back into the Austro-Hungarian fold in the late 1840s. "Then they built, as fast as they could, a railway line from Venice to Villach [in Carinthia]," Gantschacher says.

The prior political shenanigans meant that Mahler could commute to Vienna with ease from his new southern home base at Maiernigg by the banks of

Woerthersee lake, where he composed most of his symphonic works and songs between 1899-1907. Berg also hailed from the area, from Landskron by the Ossiacher See lake, just north of Villach.

Mahler later moved to Waldvillla near Woerthersee, while Webern attended high school in Klagenfurt and later lived and composed there. By now, the Carinthian anchor for next week's JAMD rollout had become crystal clear.

"He was fascinated by the local landscapes. That inspired him," Gantschacher notes. That stands to reason. As any music educator, musician or musicologist will tell you, all creative output feeds off the artist's milieu, as well as their intellect, emotions, gifts and technical expertise. "That is the reason he lived there." Mahler took in all sorts of local vistas as he walked and cycled around the area.

He was a forward-looking man of his time, on various fronts, not just in his capacity as a composer and conductor. "Mahler was just as modern on the road in Carinthia, namely by [traveling by] bicycle, when he and his girlfriend at this time, the violist Natalie Bauer-Lechner, had the opportunity [to do so]," Gantschacher continues. The man was evidently way ahead of his time. It took several decades before certain



MAHLER BECAME aware of the musical possibilities of polyphony when he heard bands playing at the Kreuzbergl Park pavilion in Klagenfurt. (Herbert Gantschacher)



CELEBRATED JEWISH Viennese violinist Arnold Rose with his violinist daughter Alma, who saved fellow orchestra members in Auschwitz. (Austrian National Library)



BEFORE WW II, Alma Rose enjoyed a hugely successful career around Europe with The Waltzing Girls of Vienna ensemble. (Austrian National Library)

performed in their most polished form in the closing concert.

It should prove to be an enlightening and rewarding experience for all. ♦

Western train systems began allowing bicycles on board.

Notes Semel: "I am sure we are going to have an enriching experience at Herbert's lectures. We will learn about the time, the environment and landscapes where the composers worked, and their milieu – not necessarily in a physical sense. All of that impacted their work. Herbert has such deep knowledge and understanding of all of that."

Semel feels the sonic end result is inseparable from the conditions in which it was created. "You can't take any cultural event, throughout history, out of its economic or historic setting. You have to look at all sorts of aspects – personal, artistic, what was going on at the time. It all comes into play."

That is borne out by the sounds and structures that infused Mahler's work. "There is a hill in Klagenfurt where there is a meadow," says Gantschacher. "I remember when I was a child, in the 1960s, there were bands, choirs, brass bands, military bands, dance ensembles. They all performed at the same time, and this created this multiple polyphone sound. Mahler was so impressed."

That was something of a reprise for the composer. "Mahler heard polyphony the first time [as a child] from the military bands in his birthplace in Bohemia. Then [in Carinthia] he took a walk with [preeminent Jewish Viennese violinist] Arnold Rosé and Natalie

Bauer-Lechner to Kreuzbergl [National Park in Klagenfurt]. There he saw and heard this polyphony. He took that for his technical compositions. That is his creation [in classical music]."

Gantschacher says Mahler took on board the sounds, sights and natural light in his environs in Carinthia, which fueled him with sensorial notions that found their way into his scores. "What Mahler brought into his symphonies was the natural sounds of cowbells and so on – the cowbells he used for his symphonies he heard in Maiernigg. He also took sounds from festivals."

That elemental departure, and other Mahler innovations, were taken up by a host of composers further down the line, such as Benjamin Britten, Shostakovich and Elgar. "[Twentieth-century American composer] John Cage later did that," says Gantschacher.

Cage took the idea of musical multistratification and ran with it. His 1960s musical extravaganza *Musicircus* was the product of a gathering of groups, ensembles and all sorts of sounds produced free of any structure other than the freewheeling concept.

The master classes will address songs for voice and accordion or piano; chamber music; and new compositions based on motifs, themes or ideas by Mahler, Wolf, Berg and Webern. The results of the students' efforts, under the aegis of Drcar and Mautner, will be played in the second half of the sessions, before being