

In the Labyrinth of Identities

Rediscovering Hans/Hanuš Winterberg

by Michael Haas

Boosey & Hawkes, in cooperation with Exilarte, present the composer's rich, previously unpublished work.



What does nationality say about a composer? Stravinsky is credited with saying that a composer should always have his passport in his pocket – that is, he should always be certain of his musical origins and positioning. For an artist deeply anchored in the Russian tradition, this poses less of a problem than it does for one whose formative experiences came out of the cultural melting pot of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy – one whose identity is multiple in nature. For Hans/Hanuš Winterberg, this multiple identity involved being musically rooted in the Bohemian-Moravian tradition, being close to the second Vienna School, speaking better German than Czech, and being able to either avow or ignore his Jewish identity until 1939, when ignoring it was no longer possible. Hans/Hanuš Winterberg's life and work offer a prime example of the fate of art and artists when politics demands clear-cut identities, and where ambivalence is the source of inspiration and creativity.

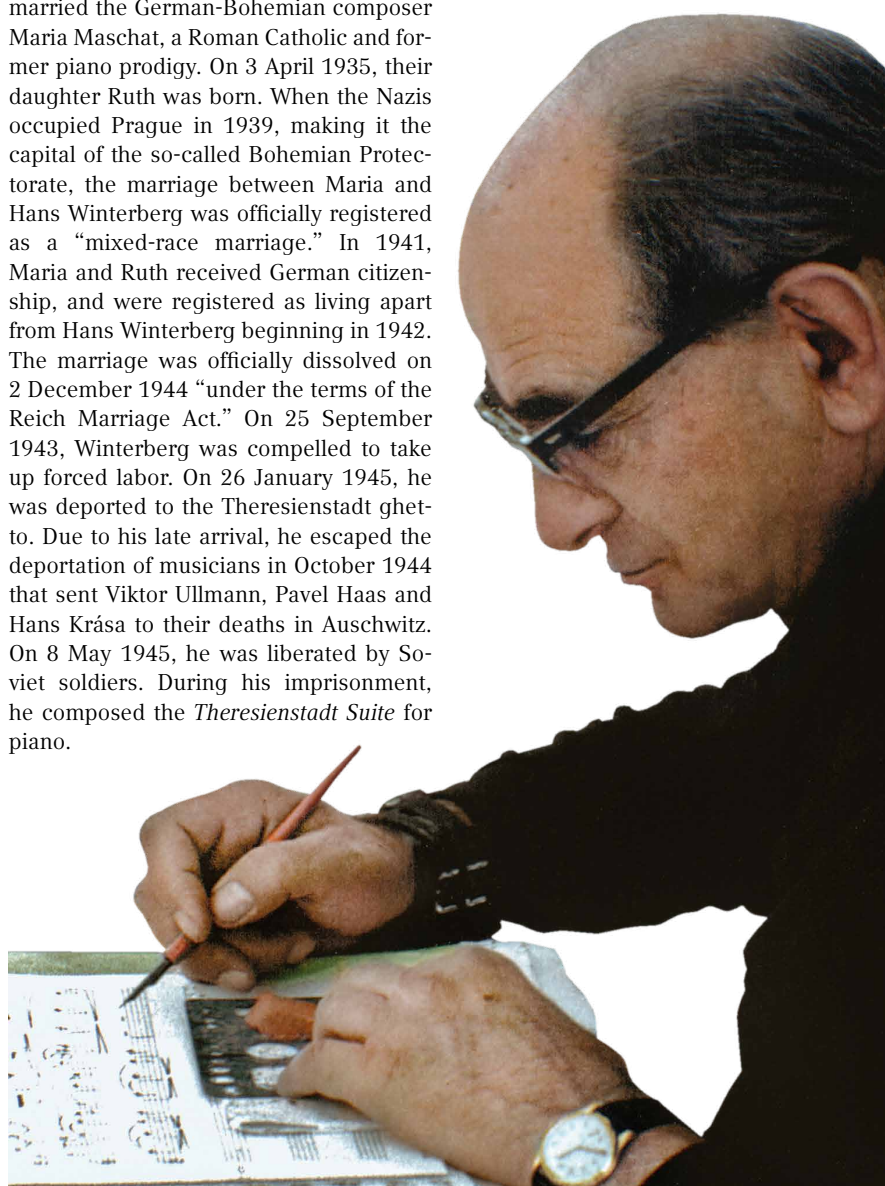
Winterberg was born in Prague on 23 March 1901, the son of factory owner Rudolf Winterberg and his wife Olga (née Popper). He came from a Jewish family. His father's father Leopold (Löwi) Winterberg was a rabbi and cantor in Ausig (Ústí nad Labem), and later the first rabbi in Prague-Žižkov. Hans learned piano with Terezie Goldschmidtova (born Thèrese Wallerstein; later murdered in Maly Trostinez in 1942), and later studied composition with Fidelio F. Finke and conducting with Alexander Zemlinsky at the German Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Prague. In 1939/1940, he studied composition with Alois Hába at the Prague State Conservatory, where Gideon Klein was a fellow student. In between his studies with Finke, Zemlinsky and Hába,

he worked as a répétiteur in Brno (Brünn) and Jablonec nad Nisou (Gablonz an der Neiße).

In the Czechoslovakian census of 1930, Rudolf Winterberg registered his family as linguistically and culturally "Czech," due to a certain loyalty to then-President Masaryk. However, this was probably also to avoid losing government contracts for the Fröhlich & Winterberg factory. On May 3 of this same year, Hans Winterberg married the German-Bohemian composer Maria Maschat, a Roman Catholic and former piano prodigy. On 3 April 1935, their daughter Ruth was born. When the Nazis occupied Prague in 1939, making it the capital of the so-called Bohemian Protectorate, the marriage between Maria and Hans Winterberg was officially registered as a "mixed-race marriage." In 1941, Maria and Ruth received German citizenship, and were registered as living apart from Hans Winterberg beginning in 1942. The marriage was officially dissolved on 2 December 1944 "under the terms of the Reich Marriage Act." On 25 September 1943, Winterberg was compelled to take up forced labor. On 26 January 1945, he was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Due to his late arrival, he escaped the deportation of musicians in October 1944 that sent Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas and Hans Krása to their deaths in Auschwitz. On 8 May 1945, he was liberated by Soviet soldiers. During his imprisonment, he composed the *Theresienstadt Suite* for piano.

Though not allowed to leave the Ghetto until June 3, on June 7 he returned to his former apartment.

The Fröhlich & Winterberg factory, property of his father Rudolf and Rudolf's brother-in-law Hugo Fröhlich, had been aryanized in 1940. Rudolf had died in 1932, while Hugo Fröhlich perished in Dachau in December 1940. Hans' mother was shot in August 1942 in the Maly Trostinez extermination camp.



“I have come to the conclusion that my grandfather Hans Winterberg was of course not a Sudeten German, but rather a Jew of Prague. Hans Winterberg never had reason or occasion to regard himself as ‘German.’ Why? Three peoples, the Czech, the German and the Jewish, had lived alongside each other for centuries in the Bohemian territories. All of Winterberg’s ancestors were exclusively Jews who had settled along the oldest long-distance trade routes since the 11th century. I can establish this with certainty thanks to the genealogical work done by Eric Randol Schoenberg, grandson of the composer Arnold Schoenberg. Thus, Hans Winterberg was explicitly not a German (!) Jew. What connection should Hans Winterberg have had with the German people, aside from language and culture? But he also had this connection to Czech culture, which can certainly be heard in his musical work. He repeatedly professed an allegiance to universalism as ‘a kind of bridge between Western culture (thus, also the German) and that of the East’ (Sudetendeutsches Musiklexikon 2000).”

Peter Kreitmeir

Due to the Beneš decrees expelling German-Czechs from Czechoslovakia, Maria and their daughter Ruth had to leave the country in 1945. The marriage had by then already fallen apart and thus, the enforced divorce under Nazi law had become a reality.

On 27 December 1945, they registered their residence in Ammerland, south of Munich. In June 1946, Winterberg, who was unaffected by the Beneš decrees since his family had registered themselves as “Czech” in 1930, applied for a passport in order to retrieve manuscripts that – or so he argued to the Czech authorities – he had, in an effort to ensure their safekeeping, left with friends elsewhere in Europe. If it had been clear to the Czech authorities that Winterberg wanted to immigrate to Germany, the passport and travel most likely would not have been approved.

But did he intend from the beginning to not return to Prague? Prague had emerged from the war largely unscathed, while a significant portion of Munich had been razed to the ground. Winterberg had lost virtually his entire family in the Shoah. For most survivors, a return or actual relocation to the country of the Nazi criminals was unthinkable. Yet all the people Winterberg had been closest to in pre-war Prague were now either dead or living in Germany. Apparently, Czech acquaintances, pointing to his German-language background, also suggested that he move to Bavaria, as he explained in a 1955 letter to his former fellow student in Prague, composer Heinrich Simbriger. (In 1966, Simbriger founded the Esslinger Music Archive of the Artists Guild, today deposited in the Sudeten German Music Institute (SMD), founded in Regensburg in 1990). In 1947, Winterberg arrived in Rieder- au am Ammersee, where he lived near his daughter Ruth and her mother, who in 1948 helped him obtain positions at Bavarian Radio and the Richard Strauss Conservatory. He subsequently remarried three times, but had no more children. His fourth wife, Luise-Maria Pfeifer, a “Sudeten German,” already had an adult son, Christoph.

Sudeten German or Czech or...

Defining the politically contaminated term “Sudeten German” is no simple task. The “Sudetenland” referred to a province in the north of Czechoslovakia after that country gained national independence following World War I. The grouping included portions of Moravia, Bohemia and Silesia. The population was made up of Czech citizens who predominantly spoke German. In 1938, this area was surrendered to Hitler’s Germany by Chamberlain, Daladier and Mussolini in the so-called Munich Agreement. In general, however, the term also referred to German speakers in all the border areas of Czechoslovakia. Just over 23% of the total Czech population was German-speaking, including nearly all Czech Jews. However, the German-speaking Czech population also included Czech nationalists such as Bedřich Smetana (born Friedrich Smetana, 1824 – 1884), who is still celebrated as a Czech national composer today due to works such as

the *Má vlast* symphonic cycle and operas such as *Dalibor* and *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*). For many Czechs, including the composers Pavel Haas, Erwin Schulhoff and Hans Krása, German was a language that said nothing about their national identity. Some of the most significant German-language authors of the first half of the 20th century were from Prague, including Franz Werfel, Max Brod, Egon Erwin Kisch, Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke. It would be absurd to call these figures “Sudeten Germans.” However, this is what befell the German-speaking composers Hans Winterberg, Walter Süsskind, Hans Feiertag and Kurt Seidl – all of whom worked in Prague – in the Prague-based German-language music press of the 1930s. Feiertag’s case in particular illustrates the term’s abstruse and problematic nature, as he was a native of Vienna. As a portmanteau, the term “Sudeten German” was ultimately used for all German-speaking Czechs expelled from Czechoslovakia following the Beneš decrees of 1945.

Nationality?
What kind of back-
ward, perverse
idea is this?

HANS WINTERBERG

Winterberg belonged to the German-speaking Jewish cultural elite in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. As a student at both the Prague State Conservatory and the German Academy, he was influenced on the one hand by the Bohemian-Moravian tradition. He is indebted to Janáček especially in his use of folkloric elements, but above all in his fondness for polyrhythmic structures – a characteristic that links him with Pavel Haas, Hans Krása, Bohuslav Martinů and Erwin Schulhoff. On the other hand, he is also close to the Second Viennese School, with this influence certainly transmitted through Zemlinsky. He wrote about his career in an autobiographical sketch:



“Originally inspired by Arnold Schoenberg, in the end, I found a polyrhythmic, polytonal path.”

Just as Winterberg had a very personal, individual concept of “impressionistic” composition, so was his transformation of Schoenberg’s technique entirely unorthodox, and adapted to his own needs. In his piano cycle *Neoimpressionistische Stücke in 12-Tönen* (*Neo-Impressionistic Pieces in 12 Tones*) he placed the supposedly irreconcilable spheres into a single context – certainly not without irony, but nevertheless in a fashion entirely characteristic of his work. In 1967, he wrote in a letter to Wolfgang Fortner: “As a composer, I’ve got to know, so to speak, all of the music-developments of our century and have worked within each of them, starting with Impressionism or Expressionism from the 1920s, during a period when serial and atonal compositions from Schoenberg and his followers were also current. Later, and since my emigration from Prague (after the Second World War), I’ve intensively followed new music developments, which have taken place specifically here in Germany. Nevertheless, after many long decades of musical roundabouts, I’ve finally found for myself, even if only in my more advanced years, a personal style that not just in my own opinion, represents something akin to a free variation of serialism.”

Yet what links Winterberg most deeply with the spirit of the Czech and particularly Prague culture of the 1920s and 1930s is the element of the fantastic, the

surreal, the uncanny, as we encounter it in Kafka, and in the operas of Schulhoff, Krása and Martinů. Winterberg did not compose any operas. However, he thought and conceived his pieces theatrically. Like Bartók’s *Miraculous Mandarin* or Stravinsky’s *Firebird*, his **ballets** can be performed in concert as free-standing tone poems. The actions are almost always of a phantasmagoric nature, as seen in *Ballade um Pandora*, *Die Sonnengötter*, *Himmlische Hochzeit*, *Mandragora – Mystisches Ballett* and *Moor-Mythos* (*Ballad of Pandora*, *The Sun Gods*, *Celestial Wedding*, *Mandragora – Mystical Ballet*, and *The Myth of the Moor*.)

His **orchestral works** are also programmatically conceived. These include *Arena 20. Jahrhundert*, *Stationen für Orchester* and *Symphonischer Epilog* (*The Arena of the 20th Century*, *Stations for Orchestra*, *Symphonic Epilogue*), to mention just a few. He referred to his *Symphonische Reise-Ballade* (*Symphonic Travel Ballad*) as a “surrealistic dream ballet,” and provides his idea of a storyline in the foreword. Even in his symphonies and piano concertos, Winterberg seems to carry the listener out of reality through a musical wormhole into an uncanny world of irreality; yet they are conceived with such architectonic precision that they never lose themselves in associative flourishes. Winterberg also left behind an extensive, highly demanding and rewarding body of **chamber music** for a wide range of ensembles, as well as numerous **piano works** and **songs** with piano or orchestral accompaniment. One can assume that Winterberg’s music

represents a path that other composers of the Czech prewar avant-garde would have taken had they survived. Quite a few compositions by the introverted and reclusive composer were performed and recorded for broadcast during his lifetime, but none were published.

In 2002, 11 years after Winterberg’s death on 10 March 1991, his adopted son Christoph Winterberg sold the estate to the Sudeten German Music Institute (SMI). One of the conditions of the contract was that the work be kept from the public until 1 January 2031. The relevant paragraph of the 2002 contract reads as follows: “For reasons of personal privacy rights, the Sudeten German Music Institute prohibits the entire estate of Hans Winterberg, as transferred to us, from being used in any way until 31 December 2030.” With regard to any future performances, the SMI also agreed on a provision “...ensuring that any such event must take place exclu-

AVAILABLE ON CD



Chamber Music, Volume One
Arizona Wind Quintet
and other artist
Toccata Classics TOCC 0491

Piano Music, Volume One
Brigitte Helbig, piano
Toccata Classics TOCC 0531

Piano Sonata No. 1 (1936) | Suite Theresienstadt (1945)
Christophe Sirodeau, piano
Melism Records MLSCD011
("Feinberg & Winterberg: The Lost Works")

1) Contract between Christoph Winterberg and the SMI, signed on 2 September 2002. A copy is in the possession of Winterberg’s grandson, Peter Kreitmeir.



sively under the motto ‘Sudeten German Composers.’ Additions such as ‘of Jewish origin’ or anything similar that could serve as an indication of Jewish origin may not be used.”

Without the efforts of Hans Winterberg’s grandson Peter Kreitmeir, Ruth Winterberg’s son, who found his grandfather’s trail only in 2011, Hans Winterberg’s legacy would still be under lock and key. Kreitmeir initially contacted American lawyer Randol Schoenberg, the grandson of both Arnold Schoenberg and Erich Zeisl, and a figure known for the restitution of Gustav Klimt’s paintings to Maria Altmann. The lawyer forwarded the contract to Michael Haas (the author of this article), with the note “I think this is something for your blog.” When the scan of the contract with the SMI was published on the Forbidden Music blog, German journalists began asking questions, which resulted in the embargo being immediately lifted. At that time Peter Kreitmeir granted permission to the Exilarte Center at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna to conduct further work on the estate.

Had Winterberg not been discovered, the Nazi occupiers’ catastrophic orgy of murder would have left not a single significant survivor of that generation of Czech musicians, aside from Martinů. With Winterberg, at least one outstanding representative of this important chapter of Central European music history, and of the fruitful Czech-German-Jewish symbiosis, has returned.

In 2021, editorial analysis and publication of Hans Winterberg’s compositional estate began as a collaboration between Boosey & Hawkes, Winterberg’s grandson Peter Kreitmeir, and the Exilarte Center at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. A number of chamber-music works are already available in new editions. The British pianist Jonathan Powell is overseeing the source-critical edition of the four piano concertos.

In June 2021, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra will record the first CD of Winterberg’s orchestral works, conducted by Johannes Kalitzke. The program includes the 1st Symphony, the orchestra work *Rhythmophonie*, and the 1st Piano Concerto, to be performed with Jonathan Powell. The English label Toccata Classics has already released two dedicated productions of Winterberg’s chamber music and piano works. The label is also preparing the release of “Piano Music, Volume Two” on CD, performed by Brigitte Helbig, while the Prague label ArcoDiva will release the first recording of songs, with Czech soprano Irena Troupová. ■

Michael Haas is a producer, musicologist, journalist and staff member at the Exilarte Research Center in Vienna. He initiated and produced the “Entartete Musik” (“Degenerate Music”) series of recordings on the DECCA record label. His book, Forbidden Music – The Jewish Composers Banned by the Nazis was published in 2013 by Yale University Press.

(Translation: Barbara Serfozo)

2) Ibid.

SELECTED WORKS

Sinfonia drammatica (Symphony No. 1) (1936) 16’
2(I,II=picc).2.bcl.2.2—4.2.2.0—
timp(=cym)—strings

Piano Concerto No. 1 (1948) 15’
2(I,II=picc).2.2.2—3.2.2.0—
timp.perc(1):glsp—strings

Ballade um Pandora (1957) 40’
2.2.corA.3(III=Dcl).bcl.2.1—
4.2.3.1—timp.perc(3)—harp—
pft—cel/glsp—strings

Rhythmophonie (1966/67)
2(I,II=picc).2.2.2—4.2.3.1—
timp.perc(3)—harp—strings

Dort und hier (1937) 17’
for soprano and piano trio
Text: Franz Werfel

Eight Songs (1971) 25’
for soprano, baritone and piano
Text: Luise-M. Pfeifer-Winterberg
& Roderich Menzel

Suite (1959) 19’
for 4 winds and cembalo/piano

Suite Theresienstadt (1944) 8’
for piano

7 Neo-Impressionistic Pieces in 12 Tones (1973) 18’
for piano

Further information at:

► composers.germany@boosey.com

The Exilarte Centre at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna is dedicated to the many artists who were persecuted and ostracised during the “Third Reich”. The processing of the estates serves to rediscover a lost cultural heritage and to pass it on to future generations through concerts, exhibitions, seminars and publications, as well as the preparation of academic teaching concepts.

► exilarte.org

