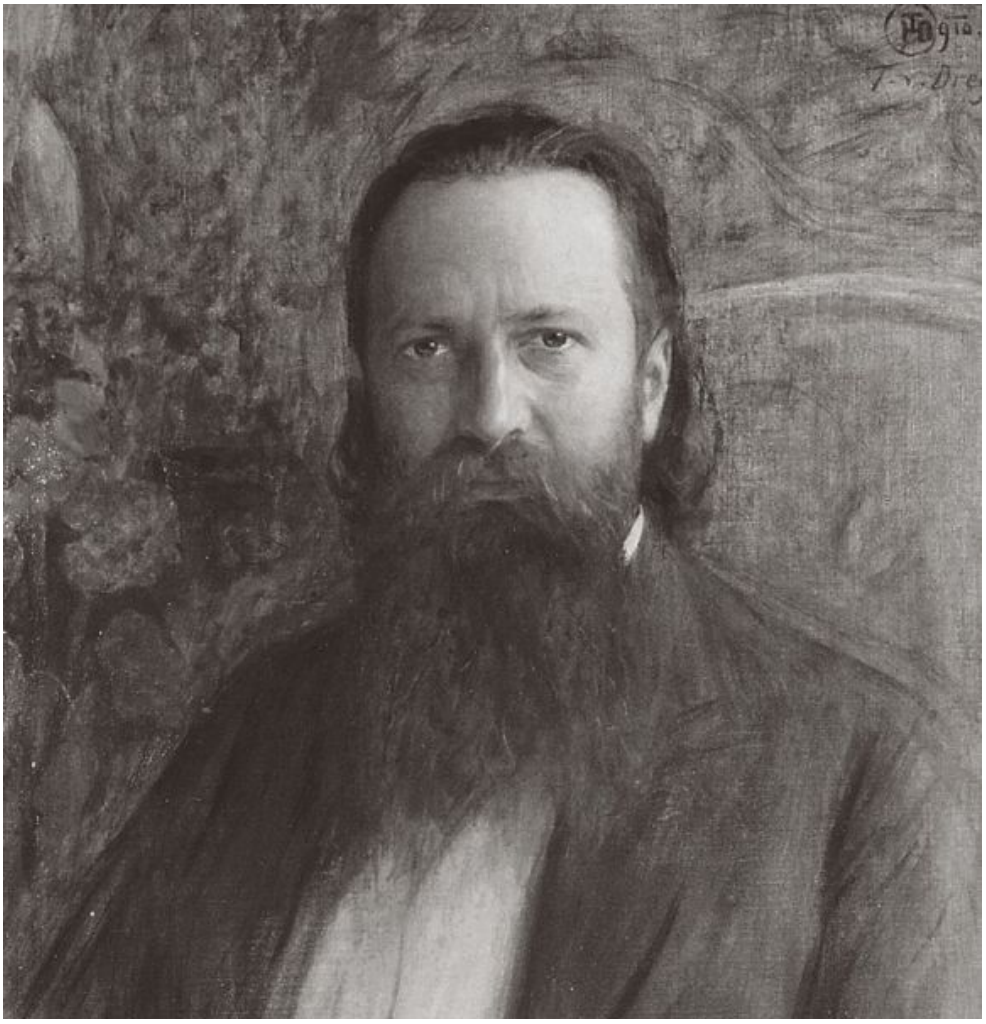
“An institute with a cultural mission”

Wolfgang Schaufler



Emil Hertzka

The 28th of June 1914, which was the day on which the Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were assassinated in Sarajevo, was sunny and warm. We know this from meteorological records. However, there is also an entry in Arthur Schnitzler’s diary which reports on the assassination and then, after a dash, finishes with “nice summer’s day”. A few days later, he wrote: “After the initial shock, the murder of F.F has ceased to have much effect. His immense unpopularity.”

It seems that Schnitzler was in the habit of writing succinct notes to comment on major events of his day. For example, he also experienced the "scandal concert" on 31 March 1913 at the Musikverein in Vienna. After a brief explanation of the events ("Someone in the stalls, 'rascal'. Man came down into the stalls from the stage, in absolute silence; clobbered him. General tussle."), he closes his entry with: "after that, had supper at the Imperial."

Schnitzler was not the only person who misjudged the situation following the murder of the crown prince. On 31 July 1914, several days after war had been declared, Richard Strauss wrote to Gerty von Hofmannsthal, the wife of his librettist, Hugo: "I am still absolutely convinced that, first, there will not be a world war, that this little struggle with Serbia will soon come to an end, and that I will get the third act of my Frau ohne Schatten (The Woman without a Shadow) after all." Referring to the general assessment of the situation, Joseph Roth later wrote in Radetzkymarsch: "Back then, nobody was astute enough to notice the huge wheels turning in those massive, hidden mills that began to grind inexorably towards the Great War."

Even today, one hundred years later, historians are still analysing the forces which led to war breaking out, and this topic is still the subject of heated discussion among them. In his book The Sleepwalkers, the Cambridge professor Christopher Clark, who gave the opening address at this year's Salzburg Festival, recently presented the thesis that it is necessary to reconstruct the multifaceted decision-making processes which led to the war independently of each other in order to gain the full picture. He remarked that the crisis of July 1914 is "the most complex event of the modern age" and must be viewed from several different perspectives.

At that time, the management offices of Universal-Edition (then still written with a hyphen) were known for anything but sleepwalking. Emil Hertzka, born 1869 in Budapest, had taken over at the helm of the publishing house in 1907 and was the catalyst for the most significant turning point in the publisher's history.

Founded in Vienna in 1901 (at the suggestion of a brother-in-law of Johann Strauß, among others) and announced in the Wiener Tagblatt newspaper, the new publishing house was intended to counteract the domination of music traders from foreign countries in Vienna. It was a kind of "declaration of independence in the interests of cultural policy" for the capital city of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. With its approx. two million inhabitants, Vienna was one of the largest cities in the world at the time and the Imperial and Royal Ministry of the Interior gave its approval for the new joint-stock company without putting up any serious obstacles.

The name of the new publishing house was both its strategy and its manifesto. It signified the whole world of music, which meant there was a lot of ground to cover. Joseph Haydn's piano sonatas were awarded catalogue number 1. Number 1000, just three years later, was a piano score of Beethoven's Missa solemnis. When the "success that had been anticipated too eagerly had not yet materialised", as Hertzka's successor Alfred Schlee once phrased it, Universal-Edition gained "the face for which it is now known around the world" (Schlee) with its programmatic realignment. No documentation exists on the motives behind Hertzka's decision to change the profile of the publishing house so dramatically. In any case, Universal-Edition would focus on contemporary composers from that point on.

Hertzka did not have any musical training, but he did have a first-rate musical advisor in Josef Venantius von Wöss. Hertzka also allowed himself to be guided by his own keen instinct and became one of the most important promoters of modern music ever experienced in music history. Even from a purely statistical perspective, the effects of his approach can already be perceived in his first few years as Director.

In June 1909, a contract was concluded with Gustav Mahler, followed by another with Franz Schreker in July 1909. In October 1909, Arnold Schönberg signed a contract with the publishing house. Alfredo Casella followed in June 1910, with Alexander Zemlinsky joining at almost exactly the same time. The direction is unmistakable, and it is astonishing to think that Hertzka took this step towards musical modernism, which proved so important for the future of the company, within just two years (!). Had Hertzka anticipated that Schönberg would establish his own, influential school which would exert such magnetism on his pupils that he would become "the battery, the charge on which recharging becomes imperative" (Wolfgang Rihm)?

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As a true businessman, Hertzka must have been aware of the difficulty involved in representing such a selection of composers, also with regard to public recognition – witness the aforementioned “scandal concert”. Equally, Franz Schreker, who had concluded a general agreement for his musical-dramatic works, had yet to experience success as an opera dramatist at this juncture. Hertzka must have literally foreseen his success, for in the 15 years that followed, Schreker’s operas did indeed become the most frequently played stage works of their era and could even compete with those of Richard Strauss.

As the publishing house’s reputation grew, so too did the number of works by its composers. The selection of these works ultimately lay with the publishing house, of course, and we can only look back in amazement at the certainty with which Hertzka continued his strategy. One major composer was added to the publishing house catalogue almost every year.

A whole generation of students, in particular those of Arnold Schönberg, were enlisted to work at the publishers. Universal-Edition seemed to be at the heart of everything and Hertzka was – as Zoltan Kodály once said – “like a father with countless children to look after”. Consequently, he was their intellectual father who not only looked after the business side of things, but also showed a personal interest in the composers’ worries. When Karol Szymanowski, who joined the publishing house in 1912, did not get in touch for years during the turmoil of war, Hertzka was deeply concerned. Their correspondence only resumed in 1918. ("Your welfare throughout the past years has always been a matter of worry to me", Hertzka to Szymanowski, 15 June 1918; see Musikblätter 5.)

It was also Hertzka who was running UE when it moved into the mezzanine floor of the Musikverein building in 1914. In 1909, the Musikverein Conservatoire was nationalised, and the resultant “K.K. Akademie” (Imperial and Royal Academy) became the predecessor to today’s University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna.

17 February 1913 is the date on which Hertzka first wrote to the “Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde” specifically regarding space requirements: “We are unconcerned about the storey on which the rooms are located.” For the “management offices” he needed 8–10 rooms, plus some “dry souterrain or cellar rooms” for the storehouse. On 17 June 1913, the owner welcomed the project with the “warmest sentiments”. He said that the Society intended to focus “every effort” on making it work and an agreement was reached after only a short time.

On 26 July 1913, Hertzka fulfilled his objective "with great pleasure" and Universal-Edition became a tenant in the Musikverein; the tenancy agreement was signed on 26 June 1914. The address in those days was still Giselastrasse 12, and not yet today's Bösendorferstraße 12. There was an entirely enthusiastic feeling that the publishing house was entering an economically prosperous age, although it would need an even greater effort to find acceptance for the recently published works. The extent to which the start of the First World War had an effect on international promotions, which were already anything but simple, need not be emphasised. Only two days after the tenancy agreement was signed, those fatal shots were fired in Sarajevo. The slightly shortened annual report for the thirteenth fiscal year of the joint-stock company "Universal-Edition" for the period from 1 January to 31 December 1914, submitted to the 12th Annual General Meeting on 9 August 1915, reads as follows:

"My dear Sirs!
The thirteenth fiscal year of Universal-Edition has just come to an end and the first half more than justified our high hopes. We achieved an increase in turnover and, in expectation of a general upturn, all measures taken were designed to exploit the expected favourable economic situation to the fullest extent. Our foreign relations, particularly with England, where we had recently received full freedom of delivery, were developed under favourable auspices. Several large-scale works which the publishing house had purchased in previous years had excellent prospects. These included Schreker's opera The Distant Sound and some of the most successful symphonic works from the entire musical repertoire of recent years, such as Mahler's Symphony No. 8, Schönberg's Gurre-Lieder and the newly purchased symphony by Franz Schmidt, which were all due to be performed in many places at home and abroad at the beginning of the 1914/15 season. There were binding performance contracts for these works, and also for several of the publishing house's operas, not only at home but also at theatres and with orchestras in Paris, London, Brussels, New York, Philadelphia and others.

The preliminary work for our move to the new offices, which has intensified and simplified our publishing activities, had been completed, and so everything was prepared most carefully to ensure that the 1914/15 season would yield a full, rich harvest.

However, things then took a most unfortunate turn. Just when we were in the middle of this period, during which we had worked harder and enjoyed better - prospects than had ever been experienced at our company, the World War broke out and changed the entire situation in a most terrible fashion from one moment to the next.

Immediately after war broke out, we did everything we could to adapt to the new circumstances. We suspended arrangements wherever it was possible to do so and endeavoured to reduce business expenses. However, this was naturally only possible to a limited extent as we were unable to reduce expenses such as salaries, rental costs, tax, removal costs, depreciation and the suchlike. (...) Conditions during the initial months of the war were downright terrifying, as business activities and operations came to a complete halt. Domestic sales eventually began to increase during the last two months of the year, but foreign business ceased almost entirely. The many valuable agreements for stage and concert performances, travel arrangements, newspaper advertisements, etc., were rendered void. (□)

We would like to take a moment to remember the 14 employees who are currently under arms, and we hope that they will all be able to return to their work after a victorious peace at the end of the war."

Universal-Edition survived the First World War in astonishingly good shape. The company remained in business even during the war, and a number of composers concluded their initial contracts in this period: the aforementioned Franz Schmidt, who joined UE in 1914, was followed in 1915 by Joseph Marx and Egon Wellesz.

In December 1916, Hertzka concluded a publishing contract with Leoš Janáček on the recommendation of Max Brod, who had been in contact with the publishing house since 1910 as a result of its acceptance of individual compositions. The first work presented by Janáček was his opera Jenůfa. This once again emphasises Hertzka's visionary talent for artistic issues. Considering the political situation around the year 1916, it was quite simply rash to be thinking about expensive plans for operas.

Béla Bartók followed in 1917. Full of enthusiasm, he wrote to a friend: "This is truly wonderful." (see Musikblätter 6).

There was an entirely enthusiastic feeling that the publishing house was entering an economically prosperous age.

Despite the First World War, some significant premieres still took place. On 30 January 1917, Alexander Zemlinsky's Eine florentinische Tragödie opened in Stuttgart. On 25 April 1918, Franz Schreker's opera The Stigmatised was premiered in Frankfurt, and on 24 May 1918, the premiere of Béla Bartók's Bluebeard's Castle took place in Budapest.

Shortly after the war, some more well-known composers joined the company: Walter Braunfels in 1919, Anton Webern and Zoltán Kodály in 1920, Ernst Krenek and Ottorino Respighi in 1921, Darius Milhaud and Francesco Malipiero in 1922, Alban Berg and Hanns Eisler in 1923, and Kurt Weill in 1924.

In 1919, the bimonthly journal Musikblätter des Anbruch appeared for the first time (until 1937), edited by Paul Stefan from 1922 onwards (No. 7). In 1923, Hans W. Heinsheimer joined the publishing house as head of the stage department. His recollections can be found on pages 14–18.

In 1927, Alfred Schlee joined UE as an employee on the recommendation of Heinsheimer, initially as editor of the quarterly journal Schrifttanz (1928–1931). Soon afterwards he was offered the position of UE representative in Berlin, which he "accepted with the greatest pleasure".

Emil Hertzka's death in 1932 marked the end of an era. In his commemorative address, which incidentally was held in the Brahms-Saal at the Musikverein, Alban Berg recalled the difficult early years:

"Looking back twenty to thirty years will be enough; it is sufficient to look at the [musical] programme of this very commemorative celebration, with its three composers – Bruckner, Mahler, and Schönberg. Bringing them together in a single concert seems as fitting to us today as it was daring back then to perform even one of them.

Think back, ladies and gentlemen, to what happened in the halls of this building when such music was played. Even Bruckner, then ten years dead, was far from what is called 'generally recognised' and 'accepted'. To bring his works nearer to the world's understanding, societies had to be founded to give introductory lectures and four-hands performances of his symphonies (I heard them here myself), to make what is now called propaganda, something then

still necessary for Bruckner. Even his students and others who were his closest friends still thought it appropriate to edit his works, to introduce extensive 'cuts' in them, mutilating them to make them generally palatable to the musical world

If the nurture of this music was then a problem and largely an internal matter for societies (which carried Bruckner's name, or Wagner's or Hugo Wolf's), what was the effect on the music of Mahler and Schönberg? What happened in the halls of this house when such music was played need not be repeated. Even if Mahler had a large 'following', the enthusiasm of this following for this 'secessionistic' music, this 'conductor's music', was entirely incomprehensible to the larger musical world of that day. Just as incomprehensible as the general rejection of the 'cacophonies' of the 'fraud' Schönberg was comprehensible and normal in that world. They were not opposed to the strivings of a 'society' or the enthusiasm of a 'following', but only against the views of a very small partisan group, for which the only name to be found was 'Schönberg clique'.

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So this was the response, about a quarter century ago, to what was offered to the world as new music, to a world in which composers and their societies, followings, and cliques believed in all seriousness that they should not only be performed and heard but also preserved for posterity, that is, printed and published!

I must say that for a businessman – and a publisher is always that – it took a lot of nerve to deal in such wares, wares that the consumer had rejected as unpalatable. And if you, ladies and gentlemen, can imagine and keep before your eyes the discrepancy between these two spheres of interest, you will not find it an exaggeration that I spoke earlier of an 'almost unbridgeable chasm' between artist and salesman, these even being 'enemies', for this is something that must happen when two such worlds collide.

And despite it all, contrary to all calculating logic and business practice, the unexpected happened! There appeared a businessman who in this apparently hopeless struggle between producers and consumers came down on the side that was not only economically weaker but, in other ways too, had never been right. What did this small bunch of musicians mean in comparison with the worldwide power of the music establishment? What did it matter if the dozen (if that many) younger composers found a few supporters in the form of journalists? Even if a few performances caused a 'sensation', scoring an abstract gain that could still not outweigh the losses in the deficit column? What must have been in the mind of a businessman (and, as it turned out, one who understood business) for him to decide on something that until then had achieved neither honour nor prospects for material success, something no other publisher in the world wanted a part of? What must have been in this businessman's head for him to recognise these few musical events as the beginning of a movement, a musical movement that would remain intact still after a quarter century, indeed remain the only one that is still today a movement? And finally we must ask: what power did this small businessman – and that's what he was then – possess to turn such fantastic insights into plans, to put them into action, and then over the course of a quarter century to communicate them irrepressibly over the whole musical world and literally to force them upon this world?

We know that it was not one of those powers to which nearly everything is attributed in large and successful undertakings, even those of an intellectual nature. No, it wasn't the power of money or that of status. It wasn't the trappings of power, without which virtually nothing in Vienna gets done or is shown to advantage, as in the power of the press or of Viennese society, when 'they have name and rank' and 'connections' to the 'highest levels of authority, art, and science'. What power was it that accomplished something that otherwise seems quite unthinkable without the help of those factors?

I have no answer, and for us musicians there is no other explanation than this: it was the power of an idea. It was the idea that was brought into the world by the 'musical movement' about which I just spoke and upon which the entire intellectual balance sheet of this publisher is figured, including a material success that has not been absent and the real power that ultimately came from this publisher in earning its now leading position. Do not be surprised, ladies and gentlemen – even the non-musicians among you – when I assert that for us musicians the spiritual aura of the name 'Universal-Edition' plays a more important role than the name of a well-led, smoothly organised, and accordingly successful publishing business. And don't be surprised, even though there is the risk of it sounding paradoxical, when I contend that this does not depend so much on everything that is usually praised when a great

publisher dies, such as him."

The trading of music scores had developed into "an institute with a cultural mission", as Alfred Schlee remarked in 1976 in an exhibition catalogue to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Universal Edition:

"As the main emphasis had shifted from the past to the present day, it was necessary to draft a plan with a long-term objective for the future, one which would last for generations. With a sure instinct, akin to a divining rod, creative talent was recognised before it had even surfaced and we succumbed gladly to the temptation of putting on a production for which quality and progressiveness were more important than the more immediate, material success.

The collapse of the imperial empire meant that the national publishing catalogue, which contained works by composers from the multinational state, had become an international project. Expanding its international concept in all directions thus seemed like a natural progression. Showing open-mindedness and practising true mediation between the creative individuals and the recipients in all countries while maintaining independence was a key prerequisite, even when life was at its most testing, for successful work and as a justification of Austria as a modern-day location.

We have been laughed at, mocked, insulted and suspected for long enough. We share the fate of those whom we endeavour to support. It is almost a miracle that we have succeeded in manoeuvring the publishing house through all these difficulties, when there was often simply insufficient means to allow us to realise its ambitions. A personal relationship and even friendship among publishing house employees and composers, performers and event organisers have helped to reach a common goal more easily by working together. Occasional human shortcomings, failings, and also justified and unjustified complaints have been unable to change our intentions. However, it has always required all our strength to create a decent balance between wanting to do something and being able to do it, between patronage and business, between ambition and shame."

Additional research by Katja Kaiser (text archives) and Angelika Dworak (photo archives)