

OPERA

Émigré musicians from Nazi Europe had a lasting influence on the development of opera in Britain. In 1934, the English landowner John Christie (1882-1962) decided to build a small opera house on his estate, Glyndebourne, near Lewes in East Sussex. At the same time, the acclaimed conductor Fritz Busch (1890-1951) had been dismissed as music director of the Dresden State Opera because of his opposition to the Nazis. Together with the formidable opera director Carl Ebert (1887-1980), who was also anti-Nazi, and general manager Rudolf Bing (1902-1997), who was forced to flee because he was Jewish, Busch helped to pioneer a new, internationally mobile system of operatic production with the highest artistic standards. Bing and the Glyndebourne Company would also go on to be instrumental in the establishment of the Edinburgh International Festival.

Photographs of Hans and Erna Gál and Audrey Mildmay and Jani Strasser courtesy of the Glyndebourne Archives

In the photograph on the left, we see Hans Gál and his sister Erna – a language coach and pianist – pictured at Glyndebourne in 1951. In the background is the director Carl Ebert. In the photograph on the right, the soprano (and wife of John Christie) Audrey Mildmay is pictured with the singer and vocal coach Jani Strasser, who acted as head of music at Glyndebourne.

Dress designed by Anne Litherland and photograph of Irene Eisinger courtesy of the Glyndebourne Archives

This dress was worn in performances of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* by the singer Irene Eisinger (1903-1994), who sang the role of Susanna. Like many others, Eisinger was forced to leave Germany because of her Jewish origins. She was invited by Ebert and Busch to sing in the first Glyndebourne season in 1934, at which

point she was unknown to the British public, despite being well-established on both stage and screen in Germany. She would go on to become a leading performer at the festival in its early years, as well as at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.



Elsewhere, the Austrian émigré Karl Rankl (1898-1968) was appointed in 1946 as music director of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, where he used his continental experience to build the first full-time opera company in Britain. While the appointment of foreigners such as Rankl and Busch faced opposition, it undoubtedly transformed the operatic landscape and offered new opportunities to British-born musicians too.



Photographs of émigré staff members courtesy of the Glyndebourne Archives

Here we see a number of the early Glyndebourne staff who moved – either by choice or by force – to Britain following the rise of the Nazis. On the top row, from the left: conductor Fritz Busch, administrator Rudolf Bing, and director Carl Ebert. On the second row, from the left: vocal coach Jani Strasser (1902-1978), pianist and educator Martin Isepp (1930-2011), and conductor Hans Oppenheim (1892-1965). Many other émigré musicians, including Paul Hamburger, Peter Gellhorn, Joseph Horovitz, Laura Sarti, and Berthold Goldschmidt, would be involved with the Glyndebourne festival throughout the twentieth century.

The drawings below were made by the German émigré artist Milein Cosman (1921-2017), who came to Britain in 1939 and became well known for her striking drawings of performing artists. On the right is her drawing of the title character in the Glyndebourne Company production of Verdi's *Macbeth* at the first Edinburgh Festival in 1947. One of the original group of Glyndebourne émigrés, Rudolf Bing, was the founding director of the Edinburgh Festival, which sought to champion international composers, conductors and performers in an atmosphere of post-war reconciliation. The striking similarity between the cityscapes of Salzburg (famous for its opera festival) and Edinburgh are said to have inspired Rudolf Bing to start an international festival in the Scottish capital. Milein Cosman paid regular visits to the festivals in both Edinburgh and Salzburg every summer, producing thousands of drawings of performers in action.

Drawings by Milein Cosman of (left to right) Salzburg (1952), Edinburgh Castle (1948) and *Macbeth* (1947)

Courtesy of the RCM and the Cosman Keller Art and Music Trust



Milein Cosman at the Edinburgh Festival in 1949, sketching Peter Ustinov at the premiere of his play *The Man in the Raincoat*.

Courtesy of the Cosman Keller Art and Music Trust



Karl Rankl had a successful career as a conductor of opera in Germany until the rise of the Nazis caused him to leave his post as principal conductor of the state opera house in Wiesbaden and move back to his native Austria. After a period as director of opera in Graz, he moved to Prague in 1937, only to be forced to flee in 1939, due to his opposition to the Nazis and the Jewish heritage of his wife. With the help of contacts at the BBC, he came to London and resumed conducting in 1944. Two years later he was offered the musical directorship of the new Royal Opera Company being established at Covent Garden. In the face of some xenophobic opposition, he was successful in helping the new company progress and professionalise during the lean years during the war. He went on to conduct the Scottish National Orchestra in 1952 and the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company in Australia from 1957.

Karl Rankl image: Angus McBean © Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University



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FOREIGN MUSICIANS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES
Sir,—I have read the address of Sir George Dyson in the January issue of the *Musical Times* and the article which it evoked in *The Times* on Friday, February 13. I feel that I must support the article and Dame Myra Hess's letter of February 20. We patrons of music are not prepared to make this artificial and feeble distinction between British and foreign artists. We want the best artists we can get, and Glyndebourne claims that it has proved that, given the right opportunities and the right preparation, British artists have nothing to fear from foreign names. We claim also that this view was accepted by the British public.

In 1938 and 1939 festivals were published in the Press daily the nationalities of our singers. Covent Garden omitted the nationalities. Covent Garden in 1939 gave three performances of *Don Giovanni* with only one British singer and reduced their price to 25s., while we with only one foreigner, Baccaloni, maintained our price at £2 and sold out nine performances. Surely this is the answer to this attitude of despair and feebleness argued in certain circles?

Glyndebourne wants an "open shop," and on behalf of British musicians has no fear of competition or of snobbery. British music must put its house in order and not retire to bed with a cold. Surely out of the fusion of British and foreign artists the right solution will come, so long as there is one purpose and one purpose only—the search for the best artists, irrespective of national exploitation and prejudices and of commercial profit.

Yours truly,

February 20.

JOHN CHRISTIE.

Debates in *The Times*

The letter above is taken from a 1942 exchange in *The Times*, in which the Glyndebourne founder John Christie argued in favour of the employment of refugee musicians. His insistence on the need for the best-quality performers is consistent with the internationalism of the Glyndebourne enterprise. A reply from George Dyson (director of the Royal College of Music and head of the Incorporated Society of Musicians) defended a more protectionist stance. He highlighted concerns about the scarcity of work for British musicians during the war and the effect of military conscription on them.

After the war, there was more controversy about the appointment of the Austrian-born conductor Karl Rankl as music director of the Royal Opera House. Thomas Beecham, the most prominent English opera conductor before the war, made a controversial speech attacking the Covent Garden Trust's decision at the Incorporated Society of Musicians' annual conference in 1949, as can be seen in this article from *The Times*.

COVENT GARDEN REPLIES TO SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

Sir John¹ Anderson Defends Opera Trust

The chairman of the Covent Garden Opera Trust, Sir John Anderson, last night issued a reply to Sir Thomas Beecham, who earlier in the day had strongly criticised the constitution and working of the trust.

Sir Thomas, speaking at the annual conference of the Incorporated Society of Musicians at Brighton, said that members of the Society should demand an inquiry "into the doings of all persons associated with the Covent Garden Trust since its foundation and even before it, and an examination of all contracts made in the name of the trust." "I let everything be brought into the open," he said. "The public and press must be fully aware of the intense resentment against—and even disgust with—the strange and un-English way of doing things."

Let us see the evidence of how the vast sum of £100,000 has been spent in one year with so little to show for it except the disapproval of almost the whole body of the public press of Great Britain."

MEMBERSHIP OF TRUST

Sir Thomas read out to the audience the names of the members of the trust.

"What does this list suggest to you?" he asked. "The first and most noticeable feature is that there is not a single person who knows anything about opera or has had practical experience of it and whose second feature is the total absence of the names of any British musicians ever associated with opera over a lengthy period."

Referring to the appointment of Dr. Karl Rankl as musical director, Sir Thomas said:

"The appointment of an alien, and especially one bearing a German name, to the post of musical director of the British National Opera is so incredible that I have from time to time to remind myself that it has actually happened and is not some fantastic dream."

"It must be, I think, because the hapless set of circumstances and outlooks which were under the impression that the functions of a musical director in an opera house were of such exotic, intricate, and profound a nature that only a person of the sublime intelligence of a 'Jedon' could grasp and manipulate them."

"My advice to the society is to call for—you won't attain it—the resignation of all persons involved in the national opera scheme. Cry halt to the preposterous scheme to acquire Covent Garden and make out a practical scheme, aided by your experts, to present to the Government and the House of Commons."

Sir Thomas said that his address was to be printed and would be sent to all

members of the Government and the House of Commons, to members of local authorities, and for circulation abroad.

SIR JOHN ANDERSON'S REPLY

A statement issued by Sir John Anderson last night said:

"I have read the remarks attributed to Sir Thomas Beecham—with surprise and regret. Sir Thomas's eminent services to music are well known, but unfortunately his great gifts are associated with other characteristics, including, as he has demonstrated again and again, an unbridled tongue."

The Covent Garden Opera Trust, of which I became chairman on the death of Lord Sponne, and whose policy and activities Sir Thomas criticises so severely, includes such well-known names in the musical and artistic world as Sir Stanley Marchant, Sir Stewart Wilson, Dr. William Walton, Professor E. J. Dent, the Hon. James Smith—presently, a former colleague of Sir Thomas's—and Sir Kenneth Clark.

"I particularly deplore the attack upon Messrs. Boosey and Hawkes, who are the trustees of the Opera House and under whose agreement with the trust the firm has been out of pocket to the tune of many thousands of pounds. I am sure my colleagues have been as impressed as I have been by the disinterested public spirit with which these gentlemen have throughout their lives been engaged in the business of the trust."

The subsidy from the Excisequer to Covent Garden covers a complete scheme of ballet as well as opera, and would, the trustees believe, be found on inquiry to fall considerably short of what has been provided in the case of the great Continental opera houses."

DR. RANKL SILENT

Soaking through his secretary, Dr. Rankl said that he had no comment to make, nor had he ever replied to any public criticism; this had been a principle of his since he started as a conductor 25 years ago.

Mr. Leslie A. Boosey, of Boosey and Hawkes, Ltd., said that he had no comment to make. Mr. Boosey and Mr. Ralph Hawkes are members of the trust, in addition to those named in Sir John Anderson's statement.