

2 From Bohemia to the Balkans

Towards a Socioeconomic History of Itinerant Women Musicians, 1860–1889

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Introduction

This article examines late nineteenth-century women musicians from the Ore Mountains region (*Erzgebirge*) in northwestern Bohemia. Widely known for its itinerant musicians, the region produced a considerable share of the workforce in the variety and restaurant music industry of pre-World War I Europe (Babbe, 2017; Binterová, 2004; Müller, 1993/1994; Kupková, 2020).¹ It was especially well known for its *Damenkapellen* or ladies' orchestras – that is, itinerant ensembles of about 10 to 15 musicians performing in restaurants and cafés all over the world (Babbe, 2011; Bagge, 2018; Myers, 1993; Kaufmann, 1997). Despite groundbreaking publications by, for example, Kaufmann (1997) and Babbe (2011), these orchestras have remained in the margins of music history. Although interest in historical women musicians has been on the rise, it has tended to favour relatively well-known composers with ample social and cultural capital, such as Clara Schumann or Fanny Hensel. By shedding light on *Erzgebirge*-born musicians and their socioeconomic position, this text aims to enrich our understanding of women's musical labour in late nineteenth-century Europe. What were these musicians' socioeconomic backgrounds like? Why did they choose a musical career? And how does their socioeconomic position relate to our prevalent historiographical picture of both nineteenth-century women and music making? Chronologically, this analysis ranges from the 1860s to the 1880s, covering the early, less-thoroughly researched phase of the ladies' orchestra phenomenon. Although the *Erzgebirge* geographically entails a wide range of the border area in both Bohemia and Saxony, I mainly use the term to refer to musicians born in Pressnitz or the nearby villages of Dörsndorf, Schmiedeberg, Kupferberg, Köstelwald and Sonnenberg, as these formed the focal point of late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestra culture in the area.

My key argument is that understanding women's musical work in late nineteenth-century Europe requires a nuanced sociohistorical analysis, with special attention paid to the intersection of class and gender. Apart from a

few pivotal publications (Ege, 2020; Grotjahn, 2012), intersectional aspects such as race and class have not been widely embraced in the field of music history, although they have been prevalent in recent studies of music sociology (Bull, 2019; Scharff, 2017; Yoshihara, 2008). Reich (1993: 125), for example, has famously suggested analysing nineteenth-century European women musicians as an integrated ‘musician-artist class’. This perspective risks monochromaticity by overemphasising the role of the middle class and obscuring socioeconomic hierarchies (Koivisto, 2019: 10). I would like to emphasise that I do not want to undermine the highly important work that many colleagues are doing on well-known women composers (Prince, 2017). Rather, this is to point out that our field of study – including my own research – still focuses mainly on white, upper middle-class, educated women of so-called Western art music, which is a problem that must be addressed within the academic community. As we shall see, the social position of a ladies’ orchestra musician was very different from that of a famed soloist or composer, which, in turn, means that gendered assumptions and power hierarchies affected them in different ways.

Methodologically, this article is a combination of microhistory, feminist historical sociology and translocal studies. Finding new microhistorical ‘clues’ in fragmentary biographical materials on everyday life helps us challenge the canon-oriented perspectives of traditional music history (Zemon Davis, 1997; Putnam, 2006). Feminist historical sociology, in turn, enables us to critically examine patriarchal power structures as well as gendered prejudice, social norms and patterns of behaviour (Miller, 1998). Furthermore, translocal studies give us the chance to analyse the musicians’ cross-cultural networks while avoiding the pitfalls of so-called methodological nationalism (Freitag and von Oppen, 2010; Kurkela and Rantanen, 2017). Through these three perspectives, the article thus combines micro- and macro-level scales of analysis.

The sources mostly consist of biographical documents preserved in the District Archives of Chomutov in Kadaň. In addition, the archives hold a collection of 38 women musicians’ or musicians’ wives’ estate inventories, ranging from 1863 to 1897, which have not been used in previous academic research. Since the number of inheritance documents is vast and requires detailed source work, it mainly features in the case study part of this article, with a focus on the musicians’ everyday life on tour. To back up the primary sources, newspaper clippings – mainly family memoirs and anecdotes from the periodical *Mei’ Erzgebirg’* – have been used, as well as exhibition materials available at the Chomutov town museum, curated by Eveline Müller.

So far, researchers have shown surprisingly little interest in the *Erzgebirge* region’s women musicians. The topic has been studied in brilliant and interesting articles and source editions by, for example, Babbe (2017) and Tibbe (2012 and 2011), and examined by local historians such as Werner (2005) and Müller (1993/1994). Musical transfer between Bohemia

and Saxony has also been studied on a more general level (Müns, 2005). However, no comprehensive sociohistorical study on these musicians has been published so far. Thus, this article also draws on more general studies on the social history of ladies' orchestras in Europe (Kaufmann, 1997; Myers, 1993; Rode-Breyman, 2017; Tibbe, 2011 and 2012; Babbe and Timmermann, 2016).

This article is composed of two analysis sections, preceded by a short overview of musical life in the Pressnitz region and followed by conclusions. In the first analysis section, an overview of the socioeconomic status of women musicians in the region is presented. The second part, in turn, focuses on the life and career of Theresia Elster (1848–1866), a flautist from Schmiedeberg. Her story will illustrate and support the larger-scale argument of socially nuanced music historiography.

Musicians in Erzgebirge: An Overview

Geographically, *Erzgebirge* lies in the borderlands between Saxony and Bohemia, which, in the late nineteenth century, were parts of the German and Habsburg empires, respectively. As its name suggests, mining was a central source of livelihood in this mountainous region. It was also renowned for its itinerant musicians, especially those from the town of Pressnitz and its nearby villages, Dörsdorf, Schmiedeberg, Kupferberg and Köstelwald, just barely on the Bohemian side of the mountain range and today part of the Czech Republic.² The area was rural, catholic and German-speaking: at the turn of the century, Pressnitz consisted of a little more than 400 houses and 4,080 inhabitants (Binterová, 2004: 53; cited in Koivisto, 2019: 75). Sadly, the town has not survived to this day: it was demolished in 1973 to make way for an artificial lake (Werner, 2005: 162).

It was largely due to the economic changes brought on by industrialisation that the Pressnitz area gradually became famous for its itinerant musicians and ensembles during the nineteenth century (Babbe, 2017; Binterová, 2004; Kaufmann, 1997; Werner, 2005). As the traditional mining and craft professions declined, inhabitants set out to look for new ways of earning their living. This change was significant for women, who had been contributing to their family income by lace-making and other types of needlework (Babbe, 2017: 306–307; Kaufmann, 1997: 23–24). However, it should be emphasised that Pressnitz was not unique in this respect. For example, the towns of Salzgitter in Lower Saxony and Hundeshagen in Thuringia experienced similar developments (Kaufmann, 1997: 21; Babbe, 2011: 25; on Salzgitter, see also Dieck, 1962). By the second half of the nineteenth century, music had become one of the most important professions in the region, and Pressnitz was referred to as a 'music city' (*Musikstadt*) in local press as early as the 1840s (*Allgemeiner Anzeiger der K. Kreisstadt Saaz*, 45/1840: 358). This line of development was also reflected in nearby villages and visible on an institutional level. In 1883, a local music school

was founded by the Rauscher family, and in 1896, it was granted governmental status, attracting students from various parts of Bohemia (Müller, 1993/1994: 203–207). Despite these developments, music making was itinerant by default in nineteenth-century Pressnitz. In the early days, musical groups from the area wandered from town to town in search for income, often on foot and closely following market seasons. As early as in the 1850s, it was rumoured that over 300 Pressnitz-based musical groups left their hometown every year (Babbe, 2017: 132). These groups were mostly family-based and included women from early on (Müller, 1993/1994; Binterová, 2004). Little by little, the bands adapted to the demands of the modern entertainment industry, playing in cafés and restaurants wherever they could and travelling by steamboat and train (*Taufmatrik der Stadt Pressnitz 1888–1905*, sig. L125/12, fol. 16; see also Binterová, 2004: 99; Tibbe, 2011). In the 1860s and 1870s, the Ottoman Empire became an especially popular touring destination: according to a local anecdote, a Pressnitz-based ladies' orchestra even performed at the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Müller's exhibition showboards 26–12 and 26–12b, Chomutov Regional Museum; Panhans, 1944: 9; Koivisto, 2019: 83). At this stage, many of the musical groups started to label themselves as *Damenkapellen* or ladies' orchestras (Kaufmann, 1997; Myers, 1993). It has even been suggested by scholars that the Pressnitz region played a crucial role in the whole ladies' orchestra phenomenon (Kaufmann, 1997; Babbe, 2017), and indeed it seems so. For example, the 'First European Ladies' Orchestra' of Josephine Amann-Weinlich, founded in Vienna in the late 1860s, was considered as the first internationally renowned ladies' orchestra, included members from Bohemia (Babbe, 2011: 41). It is telling that as many as 21.2 percent of the 354 ladies' orchestras that toured Europe in the 1890s and that I studied for my doctoral dissertation originated from Pressnitz or the nearby villages (Koivisto, 2019: 74).

Women Musicians in Pressnitz, 1870–1889: A Socioeconomic Analysis

Biographical records suggest that the musical profession was significantly hereditary in the Pressnitz region (Koivisto, 2019: 76–80). This tendency has also been noted by Eveline Müller, who suggests that the musicians formed a local socioeconomic and cultural subgroup (Müller, 1993/1994: 209). They had their own dialect (*Schallersprache*) and they married amongst themselves – a topical feature even in other music towns, such as Salzgitter (Dieck, 1962: 448–502). This led to the creation of local music 'dynasties', such as the Anger, Bärtl and Fellinghauer families (Koivisto, 2019: 78–79). However, both the Pressnitz-area musical culture as well as the revenue logic within the late nineteenth-century entertainment industry were patriarchal and hierarchical by default. Even though women often formed the majority of the orchestra members, a male-controlled family remained the core unit

of these groups (Müller, 1993/1994: 207–218). Typically, an orchestra was led by a male director and possibly his wife, whereas the other musicians – mostly young women – were employed and taken care of by them. Thus, the orchestra members had little means for negotiating their own salary or working conditions and faced a serious threat of financial, social and even physical abuse (Koivisto, 2021, forthcoming; on working conditions in ladies’ orchestras, see Kaufmann, 1997; Myers, 1993). Although women musicians from the upper echelons of society faced different types of gendered prejudice in many respects (Prince, 2017), they operated with a fundamentally different set of social and financial capital and professional networks than their colleagues working in ladies’ orchestras.

Against this backdrop, it is enlightening to analyse the socioeconomic position of Pressnitz-based women musicians in the context of patriarchal power structures as articulated by historian Miller (1998). As tight, family-based units controlled by a *paterfamilias* – in this case, a conductor or director – the region’s orchestras were based on the traditions of European patriarchy, stemming from pre-modern times (Miller, 1998: 1). As the musical profession arose to compete with and replace traditional branches of rural, family-based handicraft workshops, it is plausible to assume that the same gendered division of labour and male-dominated power hierarchies remained slow to change. On the other hand, *Erzgebirge* had strong mining and handicraft traditions and could thus be described what Miller calls a ‘proto-industrial’ or ‘cottage industry’ region, where patriarchal norms were slightly more flexible and where women routinely contributed to the family economy by making and selling products (Miller, 1998: 69–72, 77). Although Miller refers to early modern societies in her analysis, the concepts are applicable on a wider chronological scale, especially in the context of rural communities. Furthermore, as family bands gradually transformed into ladies’ orchestras, they became closely tied to the blooming and hectic entertainment industry, which was notably urban, in contrast to the agrarian lifestyle of Pressnitz. A glance into the professions of the parents of Pressnitz-based musicians active in the 1870s and 1880s – that is, during a phase when the family bands were getting more and more popular and starting to (re)brand themselves as *Damenkapellen* (Kaufmann, 1997: 30, Table 2.1) – further elucidates the aforementioned tendencies and supports claims about the family-oriented nature of music making in Pressnitz (see Table 2.1).³ This was a trend that strengthened over the years – the percentage of musician-parents grew from 24.3 percent to 35.1 percent from the 1870s to the 1880s.

There are some caveats to consider, though. The data has been derived from baptismal records in Pressnitz (SOAL, Taufmatrik der Stadt Pressnitz 1859–1872, sig. L125/10; 1872–1888, sig. L125/11; 1888–1905, sig. L125/12), which means that it only includes the parentage of those musicians whose children were born, baptised or registered in Pressnitz church books. Since the data set thus by default excludes most of the musicians that had

Table 2.1 Most common profession groups of the parents of Pressnitz-based musicians, 1870–1889

<i>Profession</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>%</i>
Musicians				
Musician [Musiker*in]	71	10	61	29.3
Musician/other profession	5	0	5	2.1
<i>In total</i>	76	10	66	31.4
Miners				
Miner [Bergarbeiter*in]	18	4	14	7.4
Bergsteiger*in	4	0	4	1.7
Other	2	0	2	0.8
<i>In total</i>	24	4	20	9.9
Burgbers and houseowners				
Burgber [Bürger*in]	12	0	12	5.0
Houseowner [Hausbesitzer*in] ⁴	4	0	4	1.7
Houseowner/other profession	3	0	3	1.2
<i>In total</i>	19	0	19	7.9
Carpenters and woodworkers				
Master carpenter [Tischler-/ Zimmermeister*in]	6	1	5	2.5
Carpenter [Tischler*in]	4	3	1	1.7
Other	7	3	4	2.9
<i>In total</i>	17	7	10	7.0
Workers				
Day labourer [Tagelöhner*n/Tagarbeiter*in]	12	4	8	5.0
Tenant farmer [Häusler*in]	5	0	5	2.1
<i>In total</i>	17	4	13	7.0
Shoemakers				
Shoemaker [Schuhmacher*in]	8	3	5	3.3
Master shoemaker [Schuhmachermeister*in]	7	1	6	2.9
<i>In total</i>	15	4	11	6.2
Tailors and textile workers				
Master tailor [Schneidermeister*in]	4	3	1	1.7
Tailor [Schneider*in]	2	0	2	0.8
Other	7	0	7	2.9
<i>In total</i>	13	3	10	5.4
Bakers				
Baker [Bäcker*in]	5	1	4	2.1
Master baker [Bäckermeister*in]	2	2	0	0.8
<i>In total</i>	7	3	4	2.9
Civil servants and teachers				
Civil servant	5	3	2	2.1
Teacher [Lehrer*in]	2	1	1	0.8
<i>In total</i>	7	4	3	2.9
Other professions	29	7	22	12.0
Profession unknown	18	3	15	7.4
In total	242	49	193	100

married and/or settled permanently abroad, as well as those who remained childless, the results are indicative at best. Furthermore, mothers' professions are rarely indicated, and the numbers for cases in which parents' professions were not mentioned at all remains relatively high. Although the evidence is circumstantial and fragmentary in this sense, it does back up the view of musicianship as a hereditary, key profession prevalent in other sources and previous research.

Upon closer inspection, the musicians' backgrounds presented in Table 2.1 seem to refer to the important mining industry of the region, as well as diverse professions of craftsmanship such as cobblers, tailors and carpenters. Indeed, as Babbe has shown, Pressnitz had a firm tradition of miner-musicians (*Bergmusikant*inen*), which would explain the strong ties between these two professions (Babbe, 2017: 306–307). As for craft professions, connections between craftsmanship and musicianship were a common feature in the entertainment scene and among members of ladies' orchestras in Europe (Rühlemann, 2012: 182–183; Babbe, 2017: 316). It is telling that the only Finnish women musicians working in a ladies' orchestra that I have been able to identify so far came from a tailor's family (Koivisto, 2019: 232–241; Rantanen and Koivisto, 2022, forthcoming). In addition, the list includes diverse professions all the way from burghers and homeowners to day labourers, covering the professional structure of a rural town in all its variety. However, straightforwardly agrarian professions such as farmers as well as professions requiring higher education remain marginal throughout the evidence.

As for women musicians, there are some particularities worth mentioning. The Pressnitz baptismal records offer us information on 49 such musicians, who had children from 1870 until 1889 (see Table 2.2). There are three cases, or 6.1 percent, in which parents' professions are unknown. The source material has some considerable limitations, including the fact that women's professions were rarely indicated in biographical records if they were married. Thus, most of the women musicians examined here were unmarried and/or bore their children out of wedlock. However, illegitimate children were not an uncommon phenomenon in late nineteenth-century Pressnitz, and it was not entirely unusual for a couple to start a relationship and found a family before marriage (Koivisto, 2019: 86–87).

In any case, the material suggests interesting deviations when compared to the overall data on musicians' backgrounds. First, the musical profession was much less hereditary. Second, the women's socioeconomic backgrounds seem more varied and, in many cases, more unassuming when compared to musicians in total. The number of teachers and civil servants is relatively high, and master-level craft professionals are also present. On the other hand, references to burghers or homeowners are completely missing, although this group forms a considerable share of the overall data, covering almost ten percent (9.8%) of the male musicians' parentage. Correspondingly, the number of carpenters and woodworkers, bakers and day labourers is

Table 2.2 Most common profession groups of the parents of Pressnitz-based women musicians, 1870–1889

<i>Profession</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Musicians		
Musician [Musiker*in]	10	20.4
<i>In total</i>	10	20.4
Carpenters and woodworkers		
Master carpenter [Tischler-/Zimmermeister*in]	1	2.0
Carpenter [Tischler*in]	3	6.1
Other	3	6.1
<i>In total</i>	7	14.3
Miners		
Miner [Bergarbeiter*in]	4	8.2
<i>In total</i>	4	8.2
Workers		
Day labourer [Tagelöhner*in/Tagarbeiter*in]	4	8.2
<i>In total</i>	4	8.2
Shoemakers		
Shoemaker [Schuhmacher*in]	3	6.1
Master shoemaker [Schuhmachermeister*in]	1	2.0
<i>In total</i>	4	8.2
Civil servants and teachers		
Civil servant	3	6.1
Teacher [Lehrer*in]	1	2.0
<i>In total</i>	4	8.2
Tailors and textile workers		
Master tailor [Schneidermeister*in]	3	6.1
<i>In total</i>	3	6.1
Bakers		
Baker [Bäcker*in]	1	2.0
Master baker [Bäckermeister*in]	2	4.1
<i>In total</i>	3	6.1
Other professions	7	14.3
Profession unknown	3	6.1
In total	49	100

proportionally higher among the women musician's parentage than that of their male colleagues. This is interesting but hardly surprising, considering that the musical profession was seen as a gateway for climbing the social ladder, especially for women. Anecdotes of young women musicians who managed to make an advantageous match abroad were common in Pressnitz and its nearby villages (*Mei' Erzgebirg'* 5/1996, no. 500, 8–9 and 10/1997, no. 517, 7; Müller's exhibition showboard 26-7b, Chomutov Regional Museum).

Even the inheritance records tell us of women musicians from diverse socioeconomic positions. Those who lived longer and married were often able to acquire property or savings, such as musician Anna Malz (sig. IV, 63/53)

and musician's wife Emilia Münzer (1872, sig. IV, 72/254). According to diaries and memoirs, this was characteristic of itinerant musicians from the *Erzgebirge*: not only did they send money home from abroad, but they also saved up to settle down, marry and buy land after retiring from the stage. Musician Marie Stütz (1856–1929), from Sonnenberg, is an illustrative example of this. She forged a career in a local itinerant ladies' orchestra and eventually married its conductor Johann Stütz (1845–1917). After saving up enough money, the couple retired and bought a small inn (*Gasthof*) in their home region (Tibbe, 2012 and 2011). After all, ladies' orchestra members needed to be young and attractive, which meant that the musicians could not count on a lifelong career of performing, unless they chose to found their own orchestra, which was not so simple in the male-dominated world of music directors and impresarios (Kaufmann, 1997: 146 and 148). The documents also tell us about young girls from meagre conditions who had only just started their musical careers but contracted a fatal disease on tour, such as the inheritance records of Josefa Bergner and Franziska Purkart, Justina Huss, Marie Schmiedl, Maria Ludwig and Theresia Bartl (SOAL, inheritance records, sig. IV, 65/199 & 200, sig. IV, 76/171, sig. IV, 77/2 & 272, sig. IV, 79/236). In addition, the inheritance records reveal a great deal about the social positions of early-career musicians as well as their everyday lives on tour. One such musician is Theresia Elster (1848–1866), whose life and career will now be analysed in further detail.

Case Study: Theresia Elster's (1848–1866) Family Background and Career

Theresia Elster was born, out of wedlock, in the village of Schmiedeberg near Pressnitz on October 30, 1848 (SOAL, *Taufbuch der Pfarre Schmiedeberg, 1837–1853*, sig. L71/2, fol. 208–281). Almost nothing is known of her mother Emilie and even less about her father. It seems that Theresia Elster grew up with her maternal grandparents Theresia (born Stockhann, 1799–1878), a musician, and Anton Elster (1790–1860), a lace merchant and a houseowner of lot number 228 in Schmiedeberg (SOAL, *Sterbebuch der Pfarre Schmiedeberg 1836–1888*, sig. L71/10, fol. 251). This assumption is supported by the fact that, by the time of Theresia Elster's premature death, her only close living relatives were her grandmother and her uncle Franz (sig. IV, 67/112, death certificates dated July 20, 1866, in Italian, and July 10, 1867, in German). Interestingly, despite his relatively stable social position, Anton Elster was illiterate – not an uncommon feature in his age group and social framework (see SOAL, *Taufbuch der Pfarre Schmiedeberg, 1837–1853 & 1853–1863*, sig. L71/2 & 71/3). Theresia Elster probably got her education and studied music locally, choosing flute as her instrument (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, estate inventories dated July 19, 1866, in Italian, and May 31, 1867, in German).

Like most of her colleagues, Elster began working at a young age, setting out to play in an orchestra. This was a significant financial investment in the future, as Elster had to loan money for her travel expenses and buy clothing on credit before her departure (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, death certificate dated July 10, 1867, in German). She left the Austro-Hungarian Empire in November 1865 to tour in the Balkans, Turkey and Russia, crossing the Ottoman border at the town of Orsova (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, passport issued in Prague, October 13, 1865). Her destination was the music ensemble (*Musik-Gesellschaft*) of Theresia Stütz, in which she performed at Mr Avieiro's café in the coastal town of Sulina from May 1866 (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, Theresia Stütz' testimony dated September 1, 1866). The Stütz family originated from Dörnsdorf in Theresia Elster's home region and included several musicians, such as the aforementioned conductor Johann Stütz, who played in the band during Elster's brief career (for more information on Stütz, see Tibbe, 2011; Tibbe, 2012). Thus, in all likelihood, Elster had gotten her contract via the network of local musicians in the *Erzgebirge*. Even her travel route was a very typical one, as many ladies' orchestras from the region set out to urban areas in the Black Sea region or Egypt such as Constanța, Sulina, Cairo, Port Said and Alexandria from the 1860s to the 1880s (Binterová, 2004: 99). However, Theresia Elster's career abruptly ended after a few short months when, in July 1866, she suddenly became ill (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, Theresia Stütz' testimony dated September 1, 1866). A barber-surgeon was called to examine her and she was prescribed medication – alas, to no avail (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, receipt dated July 30 [?], 1866). On July 17, 1866, Elster died of 'acute tuberculosis' (*tuberculosis acuta*) at the age of 17 (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, doctor's certificate dated July 17, 1866). She was buried in Sulina, and the orchestra's leader, Theresia Stütz, took care of the funeral arrangements and other practicalities such as informing the local Austrian consulate about the incident. This was a customary practice in ladies' orchestras; for example, the paperwork regarding the deaths Maria Ludwig and Theresia Bartl, both of whom passed away in Egypt while on tour, was handled by their employer, conductor Moritz Siegl (SOAL, sig. IV, 77/272, sig. IV, 79/236; on Siegl, see *Mei' Erzgebirg'*, 4/1996, no. 499: 8; see also Tibbe, 2012: 26).

Sadly, Theresia Elster's fate was not an anomaly. Sources tell us of several young musicians who died from contagious diseases such as typhus and dysentery mid-tour (SOAL, *Sterbematrik der Stadt Pressnitz 1867–1920*, sig. L125/144). Tuberculosis was an especially common cause of death, even more so among young adults. A look into the death records of Pressnitz-based women musicians and musicians' wives from 1870 to 1889 reveals that the disease caused an overwhelming majority of deaths among the families – 43 out of the 129 deceased, or 33 percent, died of some form of tuberculosis, with pulmonary tuberculosis amounting to 39 deaths in total. It is possible that the real number is even higher, since medical categorisations such as 'lung paralysis' (*Lungenlähmung*) are vague by modern standards

and do not correspond to our current classification of diseases. It should be noted that the results are indicative, as children under 14 have not been included in the analysis, and not all deaths abroad feature in the registers.

In terms of career planning, Theresia Elster chose her profession out of the necessity to earn a living. As Elster had been sending her wages to her family just before her illness, she owned little more than her flute and some clothes at the time of her death (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, Theresia Stütz' testimony dated September 1, 1866). Her most valuable possessions were four complete women's suits, estimated to be worth 150 piasters. Interestingly, the inventory included items that would seem somewhat out of the ordinary for a young girl of modest circumstances, such as a golden ring and necklace, a crinoline and a parasol (SOAL, sig. IV, 67/112, estate inventories dated July 19, 1866, in Italian, and May 31, 1867, in German). Working on the stage demanded elegant attire, as the musicians were expected to entice potential restaurant and café customers with their appearances (Kaufmann, 1997: 156; Myers, 1993: 194–222). This would explain why Elster and her colleagues might have ended up with relatively imposing dresses and accessories. Theresia Bartl, deceased in Alexandria in 1879, even owned what could be called luxury items such as fans, scented soap and perfume bottles (SOAL, sig. IV, 79/236, estate inventory dated September 27, 1879). Violinist Maria Ludwig, who died in Alexandria in 1877, while on tour with Moritz Siegl's orchestra, 'left behind but her few personal possessions' (*non ha lasciato che i suoi pochi effetti*, SOAL, sig. IV, 79/236, estate inventory dated September 27, 1879). These 'few possessions' mainly consisted of her instrument as well as items of clothing and linen, a typical array of possessions. In addition, the records tell us of photographs and letters, which seems to point at a lively correspondence with friends and family at home (SOAL, sig. IV, 79/236). These observations fall in line with previous research on the socioeconomic status of ladies' orchestra musicians in the 1890s and 1900s. According to Kaufmann (1997: 131), their wage levels were in general modest enough and could be compared to those of maids. However, there was financial variation depending on instruments and potential soloist positions.

Financial success and material possessions were, of course, not the only factors in boosting a musician's social status and spreading out professional networks. Although women musicians – especially pianists and singers – had gained access to several European conservatoires by the final decades of the nineteenth century, Elster and many of her colleagues were trained locally and had to earn their daily bread by performing (Kaufmann, 1997: 84–90). On the other hand, local professional networks enabled the musicians to get paid work, and the hereditary and family-oriented nature of music making in the Pressnitz region as well as its cross-cultural dimensions are evident in the inheritance records. Maria Ludwig's eighteen-year-old sister Rosa, for example, worked in the same orchestra as her, and another one of the Ludwig sisters had married and settled in Port Said, probably while on a

concert tour (SOAL, sig. IV, 77/232). Musician Katharina Huss's children, in turn, had ended up all the way in Cracow and Wallachia, and at least two of her sons had taken up a musical career (SOAL, sig. IV, 65/72).

All in all, Theresia Elster's case elucidates the social and economic preconditions for women musicians from the Pressnitz area on three crucial levels. First, she chose the same profession as her grandmother, setting out to earn her living as a musician and aspiring for a stable social position. Second, she started her career in a family-based orchestra from her home region. Third, the profoundly translocal nature of her music-making is evident. It is telling that her inheritance records include documents in Greek, Italian, German and even Arabic script.

Conclusions

Throughout this article, I have been advocating for a sociohistorically nuanced way of analysing the work of women musicians in nineteenth-century Europe. The case of the *Erzgebirge*-based women musicians suggests three key perspectives that could offer fruitful insights for other case studies and theoretical discussions. First, the ladies' orchestra as a family business with strong ties to small-town agrarian communities points to the underlying patriarchal power structures that affected and restricted the work of women musicians. From this point of view, the lines between public, professional careers as a performer and private, domestic gender roles become blurred. Second, the musical profession, with its potential for achieving financial security, helps us to consider women musicians as self-motivated, independent historical actors. They had private and professional dreams and ambitions, and they contributed into the livelihood of their families in a crucial way. Despite challenging working conditions, playing in cafés and restaurants at least theoretically enabled the musicians to socialise across class-borders. Third, the late nineteenth-century European entertainment industry was fundamentally urban and translocal. Lengthy concert tours provided the musicians with the chance to permanently settle abroad if the occasion arose. Musicians from the *Erzgebirge* region ended up married in different corners of the world and, in some cases, brought their families with them. However, the colonial aspect of these endeavours remains largely unstudied.

As Theresia Elster's career illustrates, women musicians from the Ore Mountains belonged to a very different kind of social group than many of the well-known women composers or soloists of the late nineteenth century. We need to remember that not all nineteenth-century women musicians were Clara Schumanns or Fanny Hensels with an aura of middle- or upper-class respectability and contacts to the musical elites of Central Europe. Due to their lower middle- or working-class, agrarian backgrounds and their careers in restaurant music, women musicians from the *Erzgebirge* region have been silenced in the traditional gender history of music.

However, it would be simplistic and ethically questionable to see Theresia Elster and her colleagues as mere passive victims of patriarchal power hierarchies and historiographical negligence. It is true that these musicians had to navigate a male-dominated professional field with next to no legal or union protection, and that they had to endure harassment and abuse. However, they chose their career paths for weighty professional and financial reasons, and there are recorded instances of the musicians teaming up, rebelling against abusive bandmasters and fighting for their rights (Koivisto, 2022, forthcoming). Thus, they deserve to be heard in their own right, as individuals, professionals and pathbreakers in music history.

Notes

- 1 I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all the archival personnel in Kadaň and Chomutov, especially Michaela Balášová and Jan Hirsch, for their invaluable help in searching for sources. I would also like to thank Stefania Burnelli for enlightening discussions and for sharing her family history with me, which has been of great help.
- 2 In Czech, the town and village names read as follows: Přísečnice (Pressnitz), Dolina (Dörnsdorf), Kovářská (Schmiedeberg), Měděnec (Kupferberg), Kotlina (Köstelwald), and Výsluní (Sonnenberg). For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use the German placenames throughout this article.
- 3 This is an enlarged, enhanced and adjusted version of a similar survey I performed for my dissertation for the years 1870–1879 (Koivisto, 2019: 77–78). To highlight the versatility of the musicians' backgrounds, I have chosen to categorise the professions according to expertise and field, and English translations for different professions have been provided whenever possible. In a few cases, two different professions were announced for the same person on different occasions (e.g., 'houseowner' and 'merchant'). These have been marked in separate rows as 'musician/other profession' and 'houseowner/other profession'.
- 4 The somewhat vague translation 'houseowner' has been used here to account for potential variation in the social status of this particular group. It is possible – and probable – that at least part of these houseowners rented out rooms as landlords, but the source material used here does not convey any detailed information on the matter.

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