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## **Surviving the Everyday**

### **Gendered Violence, Patriarchal Power Structures, and Strategies of Resistance in Late Nineteenth-Century Ladies' Orchestras**

#### **Nuppu Koivisto-Kaasik**

Dear parents! Please forgive me for having always written you letters in which I told you that I was doing well. I am in no way to blame for this, since the director [of the *Maiglöckchen* ladies' orchestra] always dictated these letters to me. Now I need no longer fear him, since he and his wife [sic, Josephine Preissig] are being held in pre-trial detention. [...] My dear parents, the letter you wrote to the director in Leipzig, asking him to send me home at once, caused me many sufferings. [...] The other girls were even worse off, the director tied them tightly to chairs and hit them [...]. One time, when his cane broke, the director bought a dog whip and told us we would be getting it in the neck when he took us to Russia. We are all happy that the trip came to nothing.<sup>1</sup>

This is how the sixteen-year-old aspiring musician Caroline Fonda described her everyday life in the ladies' salon orchestra *Erste Wiener Damen-Capelle Maiglöckchen*, led by bandmaster Julius Onczay, in October 1895.<sup>2</sup> The ensemble had toured Central Europe for some years when Onczay's violent and abusive behaviour were revealed in the press, leading to a scandalous court case.<sup>3</sup> By late 1895, the news had spread all over the world, resulting in a public debate on working conditions in ladies' salon orchestras.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Liebe Eltern! Ihr müsst mir schon verzeihen, dass ich Euch immer Briefe schrieb, in welchen ich meldete, dass es mir gut gehe. Ich bin keineswegs daran schuld, da mir der Director immer diese Briefe dictirte. Jetzt brauche ich keine Angst mehr vor ihm zu haben, denn er und seine Frau sind in Untersuchungshaft genommen worden. [...] Ihr Brief, liebe Eltern, den Sie dem Director nach Leipzig schrieben, er möge mich sofort nach Hause schicken, hat mir viel Leid gebracht. [...] Anderen Mädchen ist es noch schlechter gegangen, er hat sie an Stühle fest angebunden und [...] geschlagen. Als einmal der Stock zerbrach, kaufte er sich eine Hundspeitsche und sagte uns, wir würden ihn erst kennen lernen, wenn er mit uns nach Russland reisen werde. Wir sind alle glücklich, dass es nicht dazu gekommen ist." 'Entführte Mädchen', *Prager Tagblatt*, 19 October 1895, p. 8; see also 'In den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 22 October 1895, p. 2. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated. Josephine Preissig was not officially Onczay's wife, but his mistress.

<sup>2</sup> 'Eine Bestie', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 15 March 1896, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> 'Verschwundene Mädchen', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 8 October 1895, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., 'En damorkesters roman', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 1 November 1895 (no 297), p. 2.

In this chapter, I analyse the forms of gender-based violence experienced by the members of the Maiglöckchen orchestra. How and why did abuse become a part of their everyday lives? Were there similar features in other late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestras; and if so, what does it tell us about the gendered power hierarchies of the *belle époque* entertainment industry? Special attention is paid to the musicians' strategies of resistance.

Following the traditions of feminist musicology, this article aims to consider the gendered power hierarchies of late nineteenth-century musical life from a wider perspective, through the prism of the Maiglöckchen case.<sup>5</sup> This feminist analysis is backed up by presenting socio-historical data on the band members. However, discussing the sensitive themes of abuse and violence require more specific theoretical attention. Art historian Griselda Pollock has, in my opinion, successfully analysed the role of domestic abuse in the life and career of the artist Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943). Salomon has become widely known for her magnum opus *Leben? oder Theater?*, which draws elements from the artist's own family history as well as European societies and cultures in general, combining watercolours, literary elements, and musical references. Pollock has suggested that instead of concentrating solely on large-scale historical tragedies such as the Holocaust, attention should be paid to the way in which Salomon's work portrays feminine subjectivities, their strategies of navigating a heavily gendered system of institutional and social norms, as well as the recurring, intimate violence they might have faced. Psychoanalytic close readings are Pollock's main tools for mapping out the tension between these two dimensions, 'the Event and the Everyday, the exceptional and the mundane', as she calls them.<sup>6</sup>

Pollock's method is not directly applicable in this case, since we are dealing with radically different historical circumstances. Furthermore, similar issues and methods of analysis have been widely discussed in the field of microhistory and the history of violence, although from a slightly different perspective.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I argue that the conceptual interplay between the Event and the Everyday is a useful tool for constructing feminist analyses of domestic and gender-based violence.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Marcia J. Citron *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota & Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Charlotte Salomon and the Theatre of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Kaisa Vehkalahti, 'Se virallinen tarina? Lastensuojeluarkistojen hiljaisuuksia', in *Salattu, hävetty, vaiettu: miten tutkia piilossa olevia ilmiöitä*, ed. Antti Häkkinen & Mikko Salasuo (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2015), pp. 234–263; Antti Häkkinen & Mikko Salasuo, 'Johdanto', in *Salattu, hävetty, vaiettu: miten tutkia piilossa olevia ilmiöitä*, ed. Antti Häkkinen & Mikko Salasuo (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2015), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Pollock, p. 480. Even though this article focuses on violence and misconduct in a professional, i.e., orchestra setting I have deliberately chosen to use the term 'domestic violence' along with 'gender-based violence/abuse', in order to underline the family-like, patriarchal hierarchies in late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestras. On terminology, see also Satu Lidman, *Väkivaltakulttuurin perintö: sukupuoli, asenteet ja historia* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus 2015), pp. 18–20.

In this case study, Julius Onczay's trial becomes the historical Event, from the shadow of which we need to trace the abusive Everyday as experienced by the orchestra members.

In analysing historical patterns of violence, ethical issues of anonymisation need to be carefully thought out. After thorough consideration, I have decided to include the full names of everyone involved. As Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen has pointed out, this can serve to promote the agency of marginalised historical actors and emphasise their active resistance against the oppressor.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Event took place almost a 130 years ago, and historical newspaper articles available on the Internet state the full names of everyone involved. However, in accordance with the basic ethical principles of historical research, I have avoided any unnecessary dwelling on sensationalist details.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, first-hand sources on the Maiglöckchen orchestra are scarce. Although judiciary proceedings of the trial in Hamburg must have existed, the city's archives are only partially preserved, and were not consultable at the time of research.<sup>11</sup> Thus, my source material consists mainly of German and Austrian newspaper articles as well as the Dusseldorf-based *Der Artist*, the main weekly paper for entertainment artistes.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, newspaper evidence needs to be handled with caution, as it was written in order to attract readers. To back up my analysis, I have used a variety of first-hand sources such as birth and marriage records as well as judiciary documents when tracing the lives and careers of the musicians.<sup>13</sup>

In general, ladies' salon orchestras have remained a neglected part of the Western musical past. The ensembles have mainly been studied by Dorothea Kaufmann (1997) and Margaret

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<sup>9</sup> Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, 'Historiantutkimus, vastuullisuus ja tietosuojat', *Tieteessä Tapahtuu* 36:4 (2018), pp. 4–7.

<sup>10</sup> Pirita Frigrén, 'Tirkistelyä vai ymmärryksen lisäämistä? Historioitsija arkaluontoisista asioista kirjoittamassa', in *Historiantutkimuksen etiikka*, ed. by Satu Lidman and others (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2017), pp. 80–89.

<sup>11</sup> The Onczay case was handled in the Hamburg *Landesgericht* tribunal, and most of its archival material from the nineteenth century has been lost; see the online inventories of Staatsarchiv Hamburg <<https://www.hamburg.de/bkm/online-findmittel/>> [accessed 26 April 2020]. I was planning to visit the archive in March 2020, but the plan fell through due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The archival personnel, however, have confirmed to me via e-mail (29 April 2022) that there are indeed no surviving documents on the Onczay case available.

<sup>12</sup> The material has been mostly gathered from the following databases: Europeana Newspaper Library <<https://www.europeana.eu/en/collections/topic/18-newspapers>> [accessed 26 April 2020], and from ANNO, the digitized newspaper collection of Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek <<http://anno.onb.ac.at/>> [accessed 26 April 2020]. *Der Artist* is only available on microfilm (1885–1887, Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main, sig. MF 24261; 1892–1896, Bibliothek, Carl-von-Ossietsky Universität Oldenburg, sig. F 61 mus 545 VT 0076).

<sup>13</sup> Litoměřice, The State Regional Archives of Litoměřice, sig. 70/29, Jirkov baptismal registers 1877–1883, available online at <<http://vademeccum.soalitomerice.cz/>> [accessed 11 April 2022]; Brno, Moravian Regional Archives, Brno–Neposkvrněné početí P. Marie na Křenové baptismal registers 1877–1881 (17083), Brno–sv. Jakub marriage registers 1907–1920 (16897), Modřice baptismal registers 1865–1879 (1360), Židlochovice baptismal registers 1871–1881 (2197), all available online at <<https://www.mza.cz/actapublica/>> [accessed 11 April 2022]; Budapest, The Budapest City Archives, HU BFL VII.106, Documents of the Royal Prison of Budapest, Register of convicted prisoners (1881, no 0875); Registers of prisoners on remand (1881, no 825; 1885, no 1998), all available online at <<https://www.eleveltar.hu/>> [accessed 26 April 2020]; Opava, Opava Regional Archives, Místek census records 1890, NAD 825/489, available online at <<https://digi.archives.cz/da/>> [accessed 11 April 2022].

Myers (1993). Although the Onczay scandal was widely publicised during the heyday of ladies' orchestras, it has received no attention whatsoever in music historiography. The social problems regarding ladies' orchestras have, however, been discussed by Kaufmann and Nancy M. Wingfield (2017).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, music sociologists Anna Bull, Christina Scharff, and Anna Ramstedt, among others, have conducted ground-breaking studies on sexual misconduct and structures of gendered abuse in modern-day classical music industries (see Bull 2019; Scharff 2017; Ramstedt 2021; Page et al. 2021). Thus, the article at hand aims to contribute to a historical contextualisation of the phenomena studied by these scholars.

This chapter examines the background of the Maiglöckchen orchestra, before focusing on the Event, i.e., Onczay's trial. Finally, the forms of resistance and rebellion expressed by the orchestra members are analysed in detail.

### **In Search of the *Maiglöckchen* Orchestra**

The term 'ladies' orchestra' may refer to many different sorts of historical bands. In this chapter, it is used to denote a certain type of late nineteenth-century salon or restaurant orchestra, known as *Damenkapelle* or *Damenorchester*, which literally translate to 'ladies' band' or 'ladies' orchestra'. As *Damenkapellen* were an extremely popular phenomenon all around Europe before the Great War, we are talking about hundreds of orchestras and thousands of professional musicians.<sup>15</sup>

Although late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestras ranged from brass bands to small family ensembles, they shared certain common features.<sup>16</sup> These orchestras of ten to fifteen musicians usually led an itinerant lifestyle, taking up engagements in cafés and restaurants. Their members – mostly young women – were rarely conservatory-trained: rather, they came from so-called *Musikstädte*, rural towns with significant musician communities in Central Europe.<sup>17</sup> A typical ladies' orchestra included at least one man, normally serving as the director. The musicians were usually dressed in white frocks with colourful sashes to enhance their youth and good looks.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See also Dorothea Kaufmann, "...routinierte Trommlerin gesucht". *Musikerin in einer Damenkapelle zum Bild eines vergessenen Frauenberufes aus der Kaiserzeit* (Karben: CODA Verlag, 1997), pp. 102–104.

<sup>15</sup> Kaufmann, p. 30, table 1; Koivisto, pp. 305–315, appendix 2.

<sup>16</sup> Kaufmann, pp. 59–78.

<sup>17</sup> Annkatrin Babbe. 'Von Ort zu Ort: Reisenden Damenkapellen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Populares und Popularität in der Musik, XLII Wissenschaftliche Arbeitstagung Michaelstein, 6. bis 8. Mai 2016*, ed. by Christina Philipsen & Ute Omonsky (Michaelstein: Augsburg & Blankenburg, 2017), pp. 305–306; Kaufmann, pp. 21–25.

<sup>18</sup> Maren Bagge, "'am besten, wie Sie sehn, tut uns die Pfeife stehn": Werbung und Inszenierungsstrategien von Damenensembles um 1900 auf Postkarten', in *Wege: Festschrift für Susanne Rode-Breymann*, ed. by Annette Kreuztigger-Herr and others (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2018), pp. 5–29; Margaret Myers, *Blowing Her Own Trumpet: European Ladies' Orchestras & Other Woman Musicians 1870–1950 in Sweden*, PhD diss. (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 1993), pp. 150–151; Kaufmann, pp. 154–156.

In many respects, the Maiglöckchen orchestra fits well into the stereotypical mould of a late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestra. The *Hamburger Anzeiger* stated that it consisted of eight women and two men, a standard distribution by gender in these ensembles.<sup>19</sup> Apart from Caroline Fonda, a musician's daughter from Vienna, all the members came from Bohemia or Moravia (see table 1). This was not unusual: most of the women working in ladies' orchestras came from the Habsburg Empire – which resulted in the popularity of 'Viennese' or 'Austrian' bands.<sup>20</sup> Like many other ladies' salon orchestras, the *Maiglöckchen* ensemble adopted the practice of white dresses with ornamental sashes.<sup>21</sup> Even the orchestra's name – literally, 'lilies-of-the-valley' – blended in: different flower names such as Edelweiss or Blauveilchen ('pansies') were popular among the ensembles.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of line-up, little information has survived. Based on the size of the orchestra, it seems that it was a typical, piano-trio-based salon ensemble.<sup>23</sup> As customary, the ensemble was led by a violinist, Josephine Ernestine Preissig, who was older and more experienced than the other band members. Apparently, Preissig also served as a music teacher for her younger colleagues. As for Julius Onczay, he acted as the orchestra's impresario rather than its conductor.<sup>24</sup>

The musicians were young indeed; at the time of Onczay's arrest and trial, their ages ranged from 13 up to 18 years (see table 1).<sup>25</sup> Late nineteenth-century newspapers, of course, tended to exaggerate their stories for shock value. However, based on a comparison with parish registers, it seems that the information about the musicians' ages and hometowns provided by the press was surprisingly accurate.<sup>26</sup> In general, the presence of teenage girls was not uncommon in ladies' orchestras, as the trade was learned on the go rather than through a separate music school system. It was even hinted that some of Maiglöckchen's string players only pretended to perform, their bows having been treated with soap; a well-known trick of the trade in the entertainment industry.<sup>27</sup> Some reporters even noted that Onczay had lured the young girls into his orchestra by promising to send them to 'a music school in Leipzig'.<sup>28</sup> Since Leipzig with its prestigious conservatory was one of the

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<sup>19</sup> 'Verschwundene Mädchen', p. 9; 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 20 October 1895, p. 2. For comparison, see, e.g., Koivisto, p. 150 (table 5).

<sup>20</sup> Koivisto, pp. 44–49.

<sup>21</sup> 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Bagge, pp. 17 and 22.

<sup>23</sup> 'Verschwundene Mädchen', p. 9; 'In den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> 'Entführte Mädchen', p. 8; 'Zum Fall des Musikdirektors Onczay', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 16 October 1895 p. 2; 'Nochmals der Fall Onczay', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 17 October 1895, p. 2; 'Der Fall Onczay', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 10 March 1896, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> The information is based on *Hamburger Anzeiger*'s articles ('Verschwundene Mädchen', p. 9; 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2).

<sup>26</sup> Litoměřice, 70/29, fol. 155; Brno, 17083, fol. 646; 16897, fol. 205; 1360, fol. 273; 2197, fol. 227.

<sup>27</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2.

leading music cities in late nineteenth-century Europe, it is no wonder that this promise sounded appealing.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 1:** The members of Wiener Damen-Capelle Maiglöckchen (1895)<sup>30</sup>

| Name   | Age  | Hometown      | Father's occupation                                |
|--|------|---------------|--|
| Marie Mischkowska                              | 18   | Prague        | Higher functionary (at a sugar mill) <sup>31</sup> |
| Wilhelmine Reth                                | 17   | Prague        | [-]  |
| Ida Nosswitz                                   | 17   | Brno          | [-]  |
| Lola [Aloisia] Frey                            | 16   | Modřice       | [State official] <sup>32</sup>                     |
| Caroline Fonda                                 | 16   | Vienna        | Musician   |
| Julie Faltinek<br>[Faltynek] <sup>33</sup>     | 15   | Židlochovice  | [-]  |
| Hedvig Schwab                                  | 14   | Brno          | Professor [Private instructor]                     |
| Marie Böhm<br>[Eduard Czajaneck] <sup>34</sup> | 13   | Jirkov        | [Confectioner]                                     |
|  | 21   | Frýdek-Místek | Conductor [Music teacher]                          |
| [Hermine Doležal] <sup>35</sup>                | [13] | [Olomouc]     | [Conductor]  |

<sup>29</sup> On the Leipzig conservatory, see Yvonne Wasserloos, *Das Leipziger Konservatorium der Musik im 19. Jahrhundert: Anziehungs- und Ausstrahlungskraft eines musikpädagogischen Modells auf das internationale Musikleben* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> I have provided additional or corrected information derived from church books (available for Lola Frey, Julie Faltynek, Marie Böhm, Hedwig Schwab, and Eduard Czajaneck) in square brackets. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use the correct family name forms indicated in original documents instead of systematic misspellings in the press (Faltynek instead of Faltinek, Doležal instead of Dolézal).

<sup>31</sup> Austrian newspapers tell us that there one K. Mischkowsky owned a sugar mill in Bečváry, situated in the Kolín district near Prague ('Fremdenliste', *Prager Tagblatt*, 28 April 1877, p. 7). However, I have not been successful in finding any information on Marie Mischkowska in local birth record registers so far.

<sup>32</sup> The birth records state Frey's father's profession as *Rathausaufseher*, which literally translates to 'town hall overseer' and thus indicates a rather high-ranking position. Brno, 1360, fol. 273.

<sup>33</sup> Faltynek's father's profession is unclear due to faded ink and the author's poor proficiency in Czech. However, both her mother and father came from families of shoemakers (*obuvník*), i.e., craftspeople. It is also worth stressing that Faltynek's birth record is written in Czech in a bilingual church book, which might indicate that Czech was her mother tongue. Brno, 2197, fol. 227.

<sup>34</sup> 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2. It is not entirely clear whether Czajaneck was working in the orchestra before Onczay's arrest. Czajaneck was referred to as a conductor's son in the press, but local census records from Místek list his father as a music teacher (*Musiklehrer*); see Opava, NAD 825/489, 1007–1012.

<sup>35</sup> On Hermine Doležal, see page 13 below.

The orchestra members' social backgrounds were varied. As has been suggested elsewhere, ladies' orchestras were typically family enterprises originating from small, rural towns specialised in music-making.<sup>36</sup> Most of the young women came from relatively modest backgrounds, families of craftspeople or musicians – a strongly hereditary profession in the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Thus, at least three of the Maiglöckchen orchestra's members were daughters or sons of musicians and conductors. What catches the researcher's eye, however, is the relatively high social status of some of the orchestra members. Marie Mischkowska and Lola Frey came from the family of state officials and business functionaries, and Hedwig Schwab's father was a private instructor.<sup>38</sup> As middle-class and well-off women flooded European conservatories in the late nineteenth century to become music teachers and musicians, it is likely that Mischkowska, Frey, Schwab, and the other orchestra members were hoping to pursue this career path to financial independence. This must have made Onczay's promises about Leipzig especially alluring. Another important feature is that, apart from Caroline Fonda, the young women were recruited from different parts of Bohemia and Moravia (see map 1), not only from the north-western parts of the kingdom, which formed a veritable hub of the whole ladies' orchestra phenomenon. Considering the brutality of Onczay's behaviour, it might have been a conscious tactic not to hire too many mutually acquainted musicians. If this was the case, his plan backfired, uniting young women of different circumstances and regional backgrounds to rebel against patriarchal violence.

**Map 1:** Hometowns of the Maiglöckchen orchestra members (Google Maps, <<https://www.google.com/>>, created 12 April 2022)

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<sup>36</sup> Koivisto, pp. 76–80. See also Babbe.

<sup>37</sup> Koivisto, p. 77 (table 1). See also Myers, p. 145; Babbe, p. 316.

<sup>38</sup> *Privatlehrer*; Brno, 17083, fol. 646; 16897, fol. 205. In the newspapers, he is – apparently erroneously – referred to as a university professor.



Many ladies' orchestras toured for years on end.<sup>39</sup> The Maiglöckchen orchestra, in contrast, only existed for a couple of years. The ensemble started its work around 1893 or 1894, at a time when ladies' orchestras were rapidly gaining popularity throughout Europe.<sup>40</sup> Onczay founded his ensemble in the Austrian Empire, the centre of the booming ladies' orchestra culture.<sup>41</sup> Later, the orchestra took on a tour in Central Europe, travelling from Brno to Silesia via Saxony, continuing to Belgium via Aachen.<sup>42</sup> At this point, the orchestra's traces vanish, after Onczay found out that one of the musicians had managed to send a secret postcard to her worried parents, alerting them about the bandleader's violent behaviour.<sup>43</sup> In October 1895, the orchestra could, at last, be traced to Hamburg, where Onczay was taken into custody by the police. The rest of the ensemble continued their journey to Lübeck, where they had secured an engagement for the upcoming weeks.<sup>44</sup> After a few days, Josephine Preissig was detained as Onczay's mistress and partner in crime.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Monika Kornberger, *Grünner (Grüner), Familie* (2019), in Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon online, <[www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik\\_G/Gruenner\\_Familie.xml](http://www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik_G/Gruenner_Familie.xml)> [accessed 26 April 2020].

<sup>40</sup> 'Damy muzykalne', *Kurjer Lwowski*, 14 January 1894, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> During 1893 and 1894, Onczay stayed in Graz ('Fremden-Liste', *Grazer Tagblatt*, 27 October 1893, p. 7) and in Bukowina ('Im Glaspavillon des "Hotel Weiss"', *Bukowinaer Post*, 12 April 1894, p. 6).

<sup>42</sup> 'Verschwundene Mädchen', p. 9; 'Zum Fall des Musikdirektors Onczay', p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> 'Verschwundene Mädchen', p. 9; 'Ein verhafteter Musikdirektor', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 12 October 1895, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> 'Zum Fall des Musikdirektors Onczay', p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> 'Zum Fall des Musikdirektors Onczay', p. 2; 'Nochmals der Fall Onczay', p. 2.

The amount of power Onczay possessed in the Maiglöckchen orchestra needs to be emphasised. As Dorothea Kaufmann has shown, a late nineteenth-century ladies' salon orchestra was by no means an equal or democratic community.<sup>46</sup> In fact, it could be described as a hierarchical, family-like body of musicians, the head of which was the director or conductor. This is not to imply that every bandmaster was an abuser, but to point out that musicians working in ladies' orchestras were at the mercy of their director. Legal supervision for potential mistreatments was rendered problematic due to the itinerant nature of the orchestras.<sup>47</sup> There was no labour union for women musicians, and activists in women's and temperance movements were not especially interested in visiting musicians from abroad.<sup>48</sup> All in all, it is important to keep in mind that the Maiglöckchen orchestra was rather a typical ladies' salon orchestra of its time. Since the orchestra's tours concentrated on the German and Austrian Empires and since the victims were white, European women, Onczay's violence was happening in the heart of Europe. This will help us explain the extraordinary proportions of the international scandal surrounding the Event of this study, Onczay's trial, which, in turn, is indicative of the underlying imperialist and racist thinking prevalent in the European middle classes and press at the time.

### **The Event: Julius Onczay's Trial**

Six months after his arrest, in March 1896, Julius Onczay appeared before the Hamburg Circuit Court. He was accused of 'deprivation of liberty', 'assault', as well as 'moral crimes'. The trial was public – except for the 'moral' charges, referring to sexual misconduct and violence and therefore handled behind shut doors. The event was, of course, closely followed by local reporters.<sup>49</sup>

Onczay's violence had taken both physical and psychological forms. Not only had he caused severe bodily harm to the young women,<sup>50</sup> he had also taken total control of their contacts with the outside world.<sup>51</sup> Some of the women had been slandered and sexually assaulted.<sup>52</sup> Based on this evidence, Onczay was convicted to penitentiary for eighteen months for slander and acts of

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<sup>46</sup> Kaufmann, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> Koivisto, p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> Koivisto, pp. 194–210.

<sup>49</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5. Onczay's case received attention in *Der Artist* as well: see 'Ein Mann Namens Julius Onczay', *Der Artist*, 20 October 1895, p. 12; 'Wie bereits gemeldet', *Der Artist*, 27 October 1895, pp. 12–13; 'Die Capelle des verhafteten Capellmeisters Julius Onczay', *Der Artist*, 3 November 1895, p. 14; 'Process Onczay', *Der Artist*, 15 March 1896, pp. 13–14.

<sup>50</sup> 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> 'Kunstproletariat', *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung*, 7 November 1895, p. 8; 'Entführte Mädchen', p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

violence. He disputed all accusations, claiming that the court case had been staged by professional rivals.<sup>53</sup> His complaints continued months after the incarceration.<sup>54</sup>

The Event of 1896 was not the first time Onczay appeared before a court of law. It is, therefore, necessary to take a look at his personal history. According to the trial reports, Julius Onczay had been born into the family of an attorney in 1854 in the town of Kaschau (Košice).<sup>55</sup> In his youth, he had worked for a railway company and for the Ministry of Communications as a revenue officer and clerk, settling in Pest.<sup>56</sup> By the beginning of the 1880s, however, Onczay had been fired from both jobs for forging train tickets and official documents.<sup>57</sup> Onczay's illegal activities were not limited to his professional life. In 1881, he tried to resolve his financial problems by marrying a country girl with a sizeable dowry and luring her to Pest to take care of a café he had bought.<sup>58</sup> Once the couple had settled in, it turned out Onczay had committed bigamy.<sup>59</sup> Threatened with legal consequences, he decided to make a run for it, stealing some money and his wife's trinkets.<sup>60</sup> After a few weeks, Onczay was found and convicted to prison for eighteen months.<sup>61</sup>

Although Onczay had managed a café in the early 1880s, it was only after this first prison sentence that he fully started his career as an impresario. His professional reputation had now been tarnished, which probably increased the attraction of a career change in his eyes. In fact, one of Onczay's first enterprises was a ladies' orchestra of sixteen musicians, performing in Prague and Budapest in 1885.<sup>62</sup> The project quickly fell through, and Onczay was again soon held in custody for theft.<sup>63</sup> By 1887 he had moved to Saint Petersburg, trying to make a living as a circus impresario in the Russian Empire.<sup>64</sup> His name turns up again in Austria with the founding of the Maiglöckchen orchestra in 1893.

It is deceptively easy to write Onczay's biography as the stereotyped story of a vicious scoundrel, descending from petty crime to inhuman cruelty. Such simplifications should, however, be avoided in order to properly understand and do justice to the structural and institutional nature of

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<sup>53</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> 'Etwas vom "Musikdirektor" Onczay', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 28 October 1896, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> 'Nochmals der Fall Onczay', p. 2; 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5; 'Bigamie', *Die Presse*, 1 July 1881, p. 9. Onczay's mother tongue was Hungarian, although he spoke Slovak and German; see HU BFL VII.106, Register of convicted prisoners (1881, no 0875); Registers of prisoners on remand (1881, no 825; 1885, no 1998).

<sup>56</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> 'Bigamie', p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> 'Bigamie', p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> 'Zweifache Ehe', *Neuigkeits-Welt-Blatt*, 5 November 1881, p. 9; 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> 'Bigamie', p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> 'Zweifache Ehe', p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> 'Während der Durchreise', *Prager Tagblatt*, 19 April 1885, p. 14; 'Damen, musikalisch', *Prager Abendblatt*, 23 May 1885, p. 6; 'Damen, musikalisch', *Prager Abendblatt*, 21 September 1885, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> HU BFL VII.106, Register of prisoners on remand (1885, no 1998).

<sup>64</sup> 'Jules Onczay', *Der Artist*, 17 July 1887, p. 16; 'Мѣстный отдѣль', *Лифляндские губернские ведомости*, 18 March 1888, p. 2; 'Matkustavaisia', *Hämäläinen*, 25 June 1890, p. 4.

misogynist practices and gender-based violence in late nineteenth-century Europe. Although Onczay's violent behaviour took shocking forms, he was by no means the only abusive man in the industry. On some occasions, ladies' orchestras could be used as fronts for trafficking young women. As the number of ladies' orchestras grew during the 1890s, newspapers started to get wind of agents and impresarios coaxing young women into sex work with promises of a musical career. In 1898, for example, a ladies' orchestra director called Jakob Ehrlich was tried in Krakow for trafficking teenage girls to Thessaloniki, forcing them to work as prostitutes.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have enough quantitative data on how widespread human trafficking was in late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestras. Nevertheless, public debates on the issue were animated. Warnings for so-called 'girl trafficking' in the entertainment business remained a standard feature in the Austrian press well until the 1910s. They were especially common in the Eastern parts of the Empire, such as Bukowina – where Onczay had tried to recruit musicians – and Galicia, which were considered the worst areas for human trafficking in Eastern Europe.<sup>66</sup> The articles often contained racist and antisemitic undertones, especially against (Hungarian) Jews. Certain regions abroad, such as Buenos Aires or Russian cities, also enjoyed a questionable reputation.<sup>67</sup> The problem was thus 'externalised' to the Eastern parts of Europe, as well as the neighbouring Ottoman and Russian Empires by the German-language press, which diverted attention from the abuse and violence happening at the core regions. In the late 1890s, the problems of *Mädchenhandel* were taken up in *Der Artist*, advocating for the foundation of a labour union for ladies' orchestras.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the Maiglöckchen ensemble became a typical example of the social problems associated with ladies' orchestras; in short, of their austere Everyday. One reporter for *Reichspost* even commented that Onczay's abominable actions demonstrated 'how profoundly the spectator has been misled when he assumes that he could find happy, high-spirited creatures behind the white-clad maidens in "ladies' orchestras"'.<sup>69</sup> Although Onczay was not accused of procuring *per se*, his behaviour ticked out all the boxes for 'girl trafficking' in the eyes of his contemporaries. The shock value of the Event, therefore, was to be found mostly in the fact that everything had happened at least partly in Western and Central European towns and, more importantly, right under the noses of German and Austrian authorities, who had been incapable of tracking Onczay's movements.

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<sup>65</sup> 'Der Impresario einer Krakauer Damen-Capelle vor Gericht', *Der Artist*, 24 April 1898, pp. 16–17.

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., 'Oesterreichische Liga zur Bekämpfung des Mädchenhandels', *Czernowitzer Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 March 1908, p. 5. See also Nancy M. Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 199. This phenomenon was also referred to as 'white slave trade' (*weiße Sklaverei*) in the Press.

<sup>67</sup> Wingfield, p. 176, pp. 241–243; Kaufmann, pp. 102–105.

<sup>68</sup> Kaufmann, pp. 175–177.

<sup>69</sup> "[...] wie sehr man getäuscht ist, wenn man hinter den weissgekleideten Mädchen einer 'Damencapelle' glückliche, lebensfrohe Geschöpfe vermuthet." 'Ein musikalischer Sklavenhalter', *Reichspost*, 24 October 1895, p. 9.

By the time of Onczay's trial, the Maiglöckchen orchestra had already been disbanded. After the director's and Josephine Preissig's arrests, the rest of the ensemble had been permitted to continue performing in Lübeck under the direction of Eduard Czajaneck.<sup>70</sup> However, this arrangement soon turned out to be impossible, as the public flocked to gawp at the musicians 'who had been treated like animals'.<sup>71</sup> Subsequently, the orchestra broke up and the members were told to return to their hometowns, after having given their testimonies.<sup>72</sup> It is now time to give the floor to them.

### **Resistance and Rebellion: Surviving Violence in the Everyday**

Evidently, Julius Onczay's goal had been to recruit adolescent girls, who were easier to subjugate than adult musicians. Nevertheless, the orchestra members rebelled – it seems that Onczay seriously underestimated them in this respect. Their testimonies include several instances of active, physical resistance. In July 1895, Julie Faltynek had even managed a brief escape in Hamburg.<sup>73</sup> Another musician, Hermine Doležal, had succeeded in securing a position in another orchestra, which had allowed her to leave the Maiglöckchen ensemble before Onczay's arrest.<sup>74</sup> The resistance had taken verbal forms as well. Several witnesses stated that the musicians had openly complained about Onczay's behaviour to outsiders, but since no physical evidence such as wounds had been shown, nobody had intervened.<sup>75</sup>

In most cases, the orchestra members backed up each other in their acts of resistance. This is not surprising in terms of the close-knit Everyday they intensely shared. As was customary in ladies' orchestras, the musicians shared their rooms and spent every day together under the supervision of the bandmaster and Josephine Preissig.<sup>76</sup> Their austere domestic circumstances were described at length by the *Hamburger Anzeiger's* reporter who visited and interviewed the band in October 1895:

[In the second floor], in a room 3 meters long and 1 ½ meters wide, lives Onczay's ladies' orchestra. A cupboard, a three-legged table, a chair which utters groaning sounds when sat on, a washing table wholly without legs, and three wide beds, there is the wretched equipment of this ladies' orchestra's lodgings.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 'Das letzte Kapitel', *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 27 October 1895, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> "Die gleich Thieren behandelt [...] wurden". 'Das letzte Kapitel', p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> 'Zum Falle Onczay', *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 26 October 1895, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> 'Entführte Mädchen', p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> 'Kunstproletariat', p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Kaufmann, p. 100.

<sup>77</sup> "Dort haust in einem nur kleinen, etwa 3 Meter langen und 1½ Meter breiten Zimmer die Onczay'sche Damenkapelle. Ein Schrank, ein dreibeiniger Tisch, ein Stuhl, der ächzende Töne von sich giebt, wenn man sich auf denselben niederläßt,

Curiously enough, the musicians' feelings of compassion extended to Josephine Preissig. Although she had taken part in punishing the musicians by depriving them of food or money, the orchestra members lamented that 'it had always been disheartening for them to see "Madam Conductor" beaten'.<sup>78</sup> She was seen as a fellow victim, and the fact that she had been responsible for all actual music-making probably made her more approachable. Unlike Onczay, who 'could not distinguish an oboe from a double bass', Preissig had performed alongside the musicians and taught them their instruments.<sup>79</sup>

In the violent Everyday of the Maiglöckchen orchestra, it was not easy to maintain this network of solidarity. Julie Faltynek had, after her escape, appealed to the local police forces in Hamburg-Stankt Pauli, informing them of the orchestra's whereabouts. When interviewed by the officers, however, the musicians had denied any accusations against their bandleader. Later, the musicians testified that Onczay had, in fact, forced them to lie by threatening and intimidating them beforehand.<sup>80</sup> This incident serves as an excellent illustration of why abusive and violent behaviour was so difficult to track in late nineteenth-century ladies' orchestras. Young, unprotected women were in a legally weak position to press any charges on their own, especially if they did not have a reliable male guardian at hand.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, abuse was easily hidden behind the private realm of everyday life. Domestic violence was not universally condemned or criminalised to the extent it is now in most countries.<sup>82</sup> Even the forms of social and financial control exerted by Onczay, although taken to extreme measures, were not untypical in ladies' orchestras. Young women musicians on tour were dependent on the orchestra's director. If a musician wished to go out, she needed a chaperone just to maintain her reputation.<sup>83</sup> The bandmaster often had total authority over the musicians' meals and paychecks.<sup>84</sup> Working in restaurants, where their audience mostly consisted of more or less

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ein Waschtisch, fast ganz ohne FüÙe, und drei breite Betten, das ist die armselige Ausstattung der Wohnung dieser Damenkapelle." 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> "[...] doch hat es ihnen [...] immer leid gethan, wenn die 'Frau Direktor' SchläÙe erhielt". 'Aus den Geheimnissen der Damenkapellen', p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> "[...] kaum eine Oboe von einer Bassgeige unterscheiden kann [...]". *Arbeiter Zeitung* 15.3.1896 (no 74) p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> 'Der Fall Onczay', p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> There were, of course, differences in women's legal position in different states. On the situation in Germany around 1900, see Marion Röwekamp, 'Women's Admission to the Legal Profession in Germany between 1900 and 1933', in *Women in Law and Lawmaking in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. by Eva Schandevyl (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 77.

<sup>82</sup> Rachel G. Fuchs & Victoria E. Thompson, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Marie Stütz, 'Mitteilungen über reisende Musiker im Erzgebirge', in *Marie Stütz: Aufzeichnungen einer reisenden Musikerin: Quellentexte und Kommentare*, ed. Monika Tibbe (Oldenburg: BIS Verlag, 2012), p. 89.

<sup>84</sup> Kaufmann, p. 92.

drunken men, the orchestra members were used to dealing with what we call sexual harassment, even assault.<sup>85</sup>

Considering these power hierarchies, the Maiglöckchen orchestra starts to seem more and more like the tip of the iceberg. One cannot help but ask how many cases went unreported. For this reason, it is important to emphasise the active, mutual resistance expressed by the band members. This has crucial implications for our theoretical dynamic of the Event and the Everyday. Instead of the dramatic press-narrative of a deranged monster and his pitiable victims, we are offered a glimpse of daily life overshadowed by patriarchal power structures as experienced by the musicians themselves.

One crucial question remains: what became of the Maiglöckchen orchestra members after the Event? Information on the musicians is not easy to track down, but parish registers, newspapers, and other sources shed some light on their later careers. At least some of the musicians managed to continue their professional careers. Hedwig Schwab, for instance, returned to her hometown of Brno, where she is listed as a piano teacher, at least until marrying a state official in 1912. Schwab appears to have pursued contacts with the variety show industry even in Brno, as her marriage contract was witnessed by the owners of a local café and a music hall.<sup>86</sup> The Brno parish registers also hint at Julie Faltynek's marriage in 1909, although not much else on her later life is known.<sup>87</sup>

In the early 1900s, the name of a new, popular operetta and variety singer, Hermine Doležal Ferry pops up in the Viennese press.<sup>88</sup> It is not entirely clear whether she was the same person or merely a namesake of the Maiglöckchen Doležal. However, given the entertainment industry and music context, a connection between the two would seem plausible.<sup>89</sup> The singer-Hermine, furthermore, mostly performed as Hermine Ferry – a choice which might reflect a wish to distance oneself from past events and sensationalist press coverage, although stage names were a common phenomenon in early twentieth-century entertainment industry. In any case, Hermine Doležal Ferry managed to forge a notably successful and long career in various soubrette roles, becoming somewhat of a local celebrity and eventually marrying into a refined Viennese middle-class family, the Nathanskys.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Myers, pp. 178–184, 238–174; Kaufmann, pp. 108–112.

<sup>86</sup> Brno, 17083, fol. 646; 16897, fol. 205.

<sup>87</sup> Brno, 2197, fol. 227.

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., 'Theater an der Wien', *Neues Wiener Journal*, 21 November 1902, p. 10; [Untitled], *Curliste Carlsbad* 16.7.1912, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Late nineteenth-century birth records of the town of Olomouc, sadly, seem to not have survived – although the indexes are consultable on site – and tracing Doležal's family history would thus require more substantial archival work in the Czech Republic.

<sup>90</sup> On Doležal Ferry, see, e.g., her obituary ('Hermine Ferry gestorben', *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*, 6 April 1922, p. 29).

## Conclusions

I suggest that the most fruitful outcome from this case study is not to be found in the source material *per se* – rather, it may be read between the lines. Undeniably, documentation on the Maiglöckchen orchestra remains elusive and fragmented. When contextualised within contemporary discussion of human trafficking as well as the orchestra's standard profile, the anomaly of the Event becomes questionable. This serves to shift attention from the monstrosities committed by Julius Onczay to the bandmembers' agency, from an isolated incident to gendered power hierarchies – in short, from the Event to the Everyday.

Despite the shock value of newspaper articles, I argue that the Maiglöckchen case should be understood as an indicator rather than an exception. This is not to undermine the radical nature Onczay's abusive behaviour, nor am I claiming that all ladies' orchestras were identical in terms of social problems and rigid hierarchies. If anything, the public uproar caused by Onczay's case can be interpreted as a wake-up call; abuse was not only happening in the overseas entertainment industry, but in the heart of Europe. Although there is no direct link, the Onczay scandal seems to have significantly contributed to the budding 'girl trafficking' discussion in late nineteenth-century entertainment industry, increasing public debate and ultimately leading to attempts of creating a labour union for ladies' orchestras specifically. On the other hand, the Maiglöckchen case also invites us to critically consider the uproar caused specifically by the fact that the victims were white, Christian, and European. Thus, a detailed, intersectional analysis of whiteness and structural racism would greatly profit the studies of late nineteenth-century *Mädchenhandel* in the future.

In contemporary press, the prevalent narrative of 'case Onczay' culminated in what I have been calling the Event, his trial and conviction. Even for a historian, it would be all too easy to play the righteous judge and present the narrative as 'a rake's progress' of its kind. This, however, would draw the reader's attention solely on the abuser's personality and biography, making him the anti-hero of the story. In addition, it could serve to divert focus from a large-scale structural problem, creating a false impression of a few 'bad apples' in the industry (see, e.g., Bull et al. 2021, 1320). Since the aim in feminist research is to emphasise the women's perspective, this approach does not serve our purpose. By tracing recurring patterns of violence, on the one hand, and resistance, on the other, another tale starts to take shape, focusing on psychological dynamics and social hierarchies as experienced by Hermine Doležal, Julie Faltynek, and others. This flash of the Everyday in ladies' orchestras helps us discern underlying patriarchal power structures – such as male directors' position of authority and the family-like patterns of daily life – in late nineteenth-century entertainment

industry. Furthermore, the counter-story created by the musicians' strategies of resistance and survival stories serves to highlight active rebellion against patriarchal norms rather than positioning them as passive victims of gendered violence.

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