

EDITORIAL

EXILE AND EMIGRATION IN MUSIC CULTURE

TATJANA MARKOVIĆ

AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, VIENNA

Exile is usually related to a personal or collective tragedy resulting from politics, as “the condition of someone being sent or kept away from their own country, village, etc., especially for political reasons”.¹ Edward Said defined it in similar terms: “exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement”.² Along with politics, exile and emigration can also be the result of economic and educational circumstances. Migrations are therefore related to cosmopolitan, meta-national, and national perspectives, which are the focus of this volume.

Six contributions to the current issue of the journal thematize various kinds of exile and emigration in music culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. On the one hand, the exile of composers, musicians, or a film director – some of them Jewish – was a migration forced by political threats before and during World War II. On the other hand, there were also instances of voluntary exile, seeking freedom for a creative self-expression that for various reasons was not possible in the homeland. This latter case also encompasses the cultural mobility of contemporary composers from various places who were educated and worked in the leading European centers outside of their homelands. While some artists had very successful careers abroad, others experienced great difficulties trying to adjust to a new music scene. In both cases, some of them never returned to their homeland (Samuel Billy Wilder, Vytautas Bacevičius, Dimitris Mitropoulos); some did so occasionally as honored guests (Györgi Ligeti, Uroš Rojko); and some were forced to remain in their homeland with significantly limited creative opportunities (Nikos

1 See <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/exile>. Accessed 10 August 2020.

2 Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2013), 212.

Skalkottas). There is also at least one case of the cultural transfer of music itself, which emigrated from Iran around the world (Nour Ali Elahi). Two composers adapted to a different musical career and achieved international fame (Globokar, Mitropoulos), while a third abandoned his earlier career as a violinist to become a composer (Skalkottas).

The volume begins with the story of two emigrants: the internationally renowned composer and Polish-born film director Samuel Billy Wilder (1906–2002) and the Lithuanian composer Vytautas Bacevičius (1905–1970), who both emigrated to the United States before or at the beginning of World War II.³ This is followed by an article on another two artists, a composer and a painter and scenery designer, who lived in countries where for different reasons they did not feel they belonged: the Transylvanian Hungarian Jew Györgi Ligeti (1923–2006) and the Lithuanian-born German Aliute Mecys (1943–2013). Furthermore, like Ligeti, two Greek composers also found their creative paths into exile from a lack of the possibility to compose avant-garde music in their homeland: Dimtiris Mitropoulos (1896–1960) and Nikos Skalkottas (1904–1949). One contribution considers the cultural transfer of music in connection with the legacy of the Persian Kurdish musician Nour Ali Elahi (1895–1974) in Europe and the United States. The issue concludes with a study of Slovene music emigration after World War I and investigates, among other things, the cultural mobility of the contemporary Slovenian composers Vinko Globokar (*b.* 1934) and Uroš Rojko (*b.* 1954). Except for Wilder, Mitropoulos, and Bacevičius, who emigrated to the United States, younger musicians and artists have been working in Austria or Germany, and also in France (Globokar).

Vytautas Bacevičius (1905–1970) was the most prominent Lithuanian composer of his generation in exile. As Ruta Staneviciute's research shows, after trying to adjust to the New York scene without significant success, from the late 1950s Bacevičius followed his own creative way through "a unique conception of cosmic music". His most important work, *Graphique* for symphony orchestra (1964), is considered in the context of the work of Olivier Messiaen and Edgard Varèse.

Ligeti left Hungary in 1956 and moved to Vienna, where became an Austrian citizen in 1968, then went to Germany, where he worked for decades. Aiute Mecys was born in Germany and lived there, marked by her father's activities during World War II. As Vita Gruodyté concluded after researching their correspondence and

3 Samuel Billy Wilder was born in Galicia, then a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and before he emigrated to the United States, his family moved to Vienna, from where he went further to Berlin. Vytautas Bacevičius was born in Poland to a Polish mother and a Lithuanian father. Unlike his well-known younger sister, the composer Grażyna Bacewicz, he did not keep the original Polish family name but adopted its Lithuanian form.

discovering new details about their cooperation and personal relationship, neither Ligeti nor Mécys felt accepted in their German environment. A peculiar creative product of two great artists in a passionate relationship, the anti-anti-opera *Le Grand Macabre* (1977) with a libretto in German by Michel de Ghelderode, explicates their life experiences against the background of their earlier traumas. Gruodyté presents rare archival material – the correspondence and creative dialogue of Ligeti and Mécys – relying on secondary literature to determine whether this stage work by the couple could be considered as an autobiographical ‘document’.

‘Inner exile’ is explored through the difficulties of modernist composers like Nikos Skalkottas (1904–1949) in Greece in the first half of the twentieth century, when Manolis Kalomiris and representatives of the so-called National School dominated music culture with their ‘sentimental national’ music, as Alexandros Charkiolakis points out. Skalkottas fulfilled his creative credo while working with professors of composition in Berlin: at the Music University (Hochschule für Musik), the Prussian Academy of Arts, and privately, with Kurt Weill, Philipp Jarnach, and Arnold Schoenberg. Unable to return to Berlin after visiting Athens, Skalkottas suffered as a composer and found inspiration in Greek traditional music, while longing to continue his modernist path as a member of the Second Viennese School.

As Anita Mayer-Hirzberger’s contribution shows, Nour Ali Elahi’s music was widely disseminated after his death in 1974, and foundations named after him were established in New York City, in Paris, and also in Vienna. The author examines varieties of the cultural transfer of Elahi’s music through the festival in Shiraz and in the context of numerous Iranian expatriates in Europe.