Einstein on Music: A Unique Source for Musical Life in the Twentieth Century

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THE REVIEWS written by Alfred Einstein (1880–1952) record the musical life of early twentieth-century Germany[1] and form a major portion of the Alfred Einstein Collection in the music library of the University of California at Berkeley. The Einstein family has since 1952 contributed Einstein materials to many other libraries. To Smith College, where he held the William Allan Neilson Research Professorship (1939–1950), and founded the Smith College Archives, were given 120 manuscript sources of Italian vocal and instrumental music of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (which he had copied in Italian libraries for his book on the Italian Madrigal). This collection of source material for the study of Italian Renaissance music still remains one of the world's largest and most important.

The Library of Congress obtained his copy of Rossini's *Die Seemänner*, a duet for tenor and bass with orchestral accompaniment, arranged in 1838 by Richard Wagner but not published, as well as Einstein's collection of 441 libretti of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (LC also has most of his extensive correspondence with Nicolas Slonimsky.)

Princeton University, which in 1949 published Einstein's magnum opus, *The Italian Madrigal* (and gave him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree), has copies of the correspondence between Alfred and Albert Einstein. The University of Georgia owns correspondence in the Guido Adler Papers and Olin Downes Papers. At Columbia University there are letters between W. W. Norton and Einstein. At Stamford, Connecticut, the Friderike Zweig Archives own correspondence between Einstein and both Friderike and Stephan Zweig. There are also books, letters, or other materials at Brandeis University, where he was a member of the Advisory Committee; at the New York Public Library; Harvard University; UCLA; and in the Metropolitan Opera Archives.[2] The Academy of the Arts (Akademie der Künste) in Berlin started an Einstein Collection in 1966.

The largest collection, however, remains that at Berkeley. Through the years, the UCB library has acquired materials of Manfred Bukofzer, Ernest Bloch, and others, but, according to now deceased UCB music librarian Vincent Duckles, Einstein's library "forms the nucleus of the musicology collection at Berkeley."[3] In 1954 when it was acquired from Einstein's widow, Duckles described it as not only an important collection of papers by one of the world's most famous music scholars, but also "the single most important purchase in the history of the

[1] My forthcoming book, *Einstein on Music*, will include a large number of these (in translation).

[2] See John Spalek, *Guide to the Archival Materials of the German-speaking Emigration to the United States After 1933* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1978).

[3] Vincent Duckles, "Recent Gifts to the Music Library," *C.U. NEWS*, 25/22 (June 11, 1970), 5.

Berkeley Music Library."[4] Numbering more than 3,000 items at that time, it was a scholar's library, reflecting Einstein's special interest in Mozart research, music lexicography, music of the Romantic era, and the Italian madrigal—in all of which areas he was an acknowledged world-class authority. Already in 1938 when Percy Scholes wrote to the British Consulate in Zurich in support of Einstein's application for a visa to Britain, he rated Einstein as "one of the most learned writers on subjects of musical research at present living."[5]

In addition to the Einstein Mozart Collection at Berkeley (15 archive boxes) of which a 28-page inventory is available (John Emerson, *Materials for Mozart Research: An Inventory of the Mozart Nachlass of Alfred Einstein*), the UCB Einstein collection has since the original gift been augmented with archival materials (preserved on acid-free paper) that were the gift of Einstein's daughter, Eva. The collection now includes his early study, *Zur deutschen Literatur für Viola da Gamba* (1905), which helped establish him as an important research scholar[6]; his Mozart Nachlass, assembled in connection with his monumental work: the revision of Köchel's *Chronologisch-thematisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Tonwerke Wolfgang Amadé Mozarts (1947)*; and his interleaved copy of Emil Vogel's *Bibliothek der gedruckten weltlichen Vocalmusik Italiens (1500–1700)*—acquired by Einstein in 1903 with a view to preparing a new edition. Vogel's two volumes are full of his corrections, annotations, and additions. All of these were in due time to be incorporated into the new edition prepared by Claudio Sartori. Further enriching the UCB holdings are the scores of letters from such renowned figures as Casella, Lowinsky, Hoboken, Slonimsky, Szell, Sessions, Dent, Klemperer, Stiedry, Schering, and Adler.

Fortunately, the formidable scholarly apparatus at his command did not prevent Einstein's prose from being touched with humor "that only the oneness of scholarship and human warmth can impart."[7] To show that his knowledge did not depend on laboriously taken notes, his *Geschichte der Musik* [Short History of Music] was written during a mere six weeks spent in a military hospital without access to books.

His great moments of recognition were legion: among them Riemann's designating him in his will as the man to edit his dictionary; Guido Adler's selecting him to write a chapter in his *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*; and his being selected as editor of the *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*.[8]

Such appointments did not free him from the pettiness of those who demanded space in *Riemann* or who clamored for good reviews in the newspapers for which he wrote. A typical complainer was Franz Schreker. When sending Einstein his biographical data for the "next" edition of Riemann, he protested that in comparison with entries on others who were included, "I find mine was not just."[9] Heinrich Schenker wrote that he would like to have a new article in Riemann, updating the information already included.[10]

Einstein was born at Munich December 30, 1880. From earliest youth, his potential was recognized by his teachers. Among them, violinist Paul Strohbach not only took him to concerts, but at their close introduced him to both performers and conductors.[11] With Strohbach's encouragement, he started studying and collecting musical scores, and also in his own right developed considerable skill as a violinist.[12] Even after the passage of years, Strohbach never wearied of discussing at great length the programs that they heard.[13]

Shortly after obtaining a Ph.D. from the University of Munich in 1903, he felt that his teacher, Adolph Sandberger, prevented him from procuring a professorship in a German university.[14] To prove how wrong was Sandberger's judgment, he determined to make of himself a peerless musicologist, and to that end he labored in libraries for countless hours copying and transcribing music of various

[4] Duckles, "The University of California, Berkeley, Music Library," *Notes*, xxxvi/1 (September, 1979), 12.

[5] Letter dated at Chamby sur Montreux, Switzerland, November 15, 1938.

[6] Otto Kinkeldey, "To Alfred Einstein, 30 December 1950," *Notes*, viii/1 (December, 1950), 34.

[7] Curt Sachs, "Alfred Einstein, 1880–1952," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v/1 (Spring, 1952), 3.

[8] Edward Lowinsky letter to Eva Einstein, January 15, 1980.

[9] Born at Monaco, March 23, 1878, Franz Schreker died at Berlin March 21, 1934. Already in 1928, he was rated in the third edition of *Grove's Dictionary* (1928), iv, 577, as "the most conspicuous melodramatic figure since Wagner."

[10] June 28, 1928.

[11] Alfred Einstein, "Straight and Curved Paths," Chapter I, typescript, p. 6.

[12] Eva Einstein, *Autobiography*, typescript, p. 7.

[13] Alfred Einstein, "Straight and Curved Paths," p. 6.

[14] Edward Lowinsky letter to Eva Einstein, January 15, 1980.

periods.[15] His resultant discoveries were of far-reaching importance. Even so, they did not earn him the immediate offer of a chair. His first appointment (in the summer of 1929) was instead that of a lecturer at the German Institute of Music for Foreigners, in Berlin.[16]

In 1915 Sandberger did at last reward his zeal by recommending him for the editorship of the *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (1918–1933). Concurrently, Einstein wrote reviews for the *Münchner Post* (1917–1927). Later he worked for the *Berliner Tageblatt* (1927–1933), and during the 1920's he was also German music correspondent for the *New York Times* and a contributor to the London *Daily Telegraph*, *The Observer*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Meanwhile, however, he did not allow his paid newspaper journalism to diminish the quality of his services to the *Zeitschrift*. Documenting his editorial prowess, *Notes* in 1952 declared that Einstein "had contributed so extensively from his tremendous store of knowledge that he was influential in setting its tone, and part of any continued success the magazine [*Zeitschrift*] has had should be credited to him."[17]

In his newspaper reviews, "his refined musical taste coupled with a strong feeling for responsibility made him a music critic of the very highest rank . . . acknowledged equally by professionals and the general public."[18] By way of contrast with scholars interested solely in the remote past, he befriended contemporary composers whom he deemed worthy. He was open-minded to new music and his discernment helped a great deal to make it intelligible to a larger public.[19] He personified not only the finest musical and cultural scholarship but also a nobility of mind that is rare among professional writers and scholars.[20]

Although humble enough to be aware of his own linguistic limitations,[21] he wrote both Latin and Greek, and never shirked from other languages.[22]

Coupled with his erudition, he was always a gracious host. Sunday afternoons in Munich, the Einsteins held open-house for musicians, painters, and writers. They were served tea or coffee and cake, and sometimes discussions lasted until midnight.[23] But in 1927 the time came for leaving Munich. After being interviewed by the owner and editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Einstein became its music critic, moving to Berlin. Anti-semitism was, however, increasing in Germany, and one evening Einstein was refused lodging after having reviewed a concert; he had to cross the Czech border to spend the night.[24] Even Jewish conductors and performers did not take kindly to him after unfavorable press notices. Bruno Walter, for instance, tried to get him removed as the music critic of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and went so far as to send the editor a letter demanding that Einstein be discharged.[25] Einstein offered to discuss the matter in the newspaper, but Walter declined. When Polixene Mathey, the pianist, received an unfavorable review, she responded quite differently. She wrote Einstein: "You were right, it was terrible and when I improved in the second half of the concert, you had already fled."[26] Like Mathey, Leo Blech was also comprehending. When Einstein wrote that he was too explosive, Blech replied that he would mend his ways.[27] But when Einstein while still in Munich reviewed Furtwängler unfavorably, Furtwängler wrote Einstein that he did not wish to conduct when he felt "hostility."[28] Einstein responded with the suggestion that he conduct a program for the working class. (Furtwängler did return to conduct one in Munich.)

In the spring of 1933, when he was assigned to cover the Bayreuth Festival, Einstein's family left for Florence and he tried to get a substitute; but Winifred, Wagner's daughter-in-law, specified that he must not send a substitute. Permission for the tickets for him had been granted by Goebbels himself.[29] Nonetheless, Einstein neither then nor later could reconcile himself to seeing his fellow countrymen reduced to nothing more than puppets in brown uniforms.[30]

[15] Alfred Einstein in the London *Daily Telegraph*, April 29, 1939.

[16] "Germany," in 1929 booklet of the German Institute of Music for Foreigners in Berlin, 26–27.

[17] "Notes for NOTES," *Notes*, IX/2 (March, 1952), 228.

[18] Erich Hertzmann, "Alfred Einstein and Curt Sachs," *The Musical Quarterly*, XXVII/3 (July, 1941), 270.

[19] *Ibid.*, 271.

[20] Lowinsky letter to Eva Einstein, March 1, 1979.

[21] Winton Dean, "Criticism," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, V (London: Macmillan, 1980), 48.

[22] Eva Einstein, 7–8.

[23] *Ibid.*, 10.

[24] Richard Capell in the *Daily Telegraph*, February 21, 1953.

[25] March 11, 1929.

[26] December 5, 1929.

[27] May 5, 1929.

[28] May 20, 1923.

[29] Eva Einstein, 33.

[30] "A Store of Knowledge," *Time*, 55 (April 24, 1950), 104–105.

Johannes Wolf had earlier warned the Einsteins to get their belongings together and escape from Germany, and on June 25, 1933, Einstein received notification that he was being fired from the *Zeitschrift*. In a letter dated October 28, 1933, Wolf begged Einstein: "Please stay my friend and I will always be yours." Before having been fired from the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Einstein wrote to the editor that he was unable to review mediocrities favorably just because they belonged to the Nazi Party.[11] He left Germany, and after spending time in Italy and England, in 1939 he and his family settled in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he became William Allan Neilson Professor of Music at Smith College.

During his eleven years at Smith, he made weekend trips to Princeton, where he lectured and visited his famous close friend, Albert Einstein.[12] He also lectured frequently at Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and Michigan, and at the Hartt College of Music (now of the University of Hartford). In the summer of 1950, after a three-day celebration at Smith in honor of his contributions to the musicological world, he moved from Northampton to a retirement home in El Cerrito, California, expecting to teach at the University of California at Berkeley. However, while driving through Oklahoma, he suffered a severe heart attack which incapacitated him. He died February 13, 1952, in El Cerrito.

Edward Lowinsky wrote Eva on January 15, 1980, that Einstein's criticisms should be translated and published for the English-reading public

> not only because of their intrinsic and permanent value, but also because Einstein's musicology is what is needed today in a field which more and more becomes so specialized and mechanized that both music and musicians vanish behind computers, watermarks, paper studies, scribes, and merely technical analyses of the kind that a computer can deal with. . . . I am immensely impressed by your father's reviews. I am convinced that they deserve a book on *Alfred Einstein als Musikkritiker*.

His criticisms touched on the widest concerns. After a performance of *Figaro* under Klemperer's direction, for example, Einstein wondered why in the garden scene no one had thought of having Susanna sing her aria hidden behind the bushes and having the countess visible to the audience, making Figaro's illusion a perfect one.[13] He also had comments that could benefit the composer. He warned young Egon Wellesz after the première of *Alkestis*: "Trying to elude emotion means also to elude music." After the première of *Die Bürgschaft*—an opera which Einstein proclaimed the "serious opera of our day"—he asked Kurt Weill "whether extreme simplicity is not identical with extreme ingenuity."[14]

His reviews of both opera and concert repertoire remain still today unmatched for their display of historical knowledge in a context pleasing to the general reader. So much so, that one day, according to Dr. Anneliese Landau, his criticisms will be

> collected and reprinted, and will document an authentic 20th century approach to the various periods of music. . . . His dictum was awaited by performers and audience alike with excited anticipation similar to that of an ambitious student waiting for his marks. This was because Einstein demanded and fought for the best, and whatever he said was based on unbribed honesty.[15]

One easily accessible review, typical of his work, was written at Berlin February 5, 1930, for the *New York Times*.[16] Headed "Heute auf Morgen, Schönberg's New Opera Has Its World Première in Frankfort," it fortunately typifies all that was profound, gracious, and yet witty in Einstein's vast mass of criticisms that now await their much needed collected edition.

[11] Eva Einstein, 29.

[12] According to Eva Einstein, the Einsteins are not related. They lived adjacently in Berlin and often received each other's mail. They were always close friends.

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[13] Dr. Anneliese Landau in "Mildred Norton," *Daily News*, [Los Angeles] (December 29, 1950), 27.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*; also Curt Sachs, "Alfred Einstein, 1880-1952," p. 3 (see note 7).

[16] *New York Times*, VIII (February 23, 1930), 8:7.

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