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Losing their religion? The place of music in Viennese women's lives up to 1860

Abstract. This paper discusses the meanings and significations of women's music making and dancing in Biedermeier Vienna with the aim to demonstrate the specific changes and differentiations this cultural practice underwent in the course of urban bourgeois music life development by means of a set of sources standing for different aspects of daily life (music publishing, female education, journalism).

This study discusses the meanings and significations of women's music making with the aim to demonstrate the specific changes and differentiations this cultural practice underwent in the course of urban bourgeois development of musical life by means of a set of printed sources standing for different aspects of daily life (music publishing, female education, journalism) and for the history of Austrian feminist movement.¹

The earliest text of the ones mentioned in this paper is a chapter from a book on household known in several editions from the 1790s to 1828.² We can conclude that this manual has been a widely received standard – which by the way is even more true for its first part, a cookbook for the wide distribution of which evidence can be found in numerous editions from the middle of the eighteenth century up to the middle of the nineteenth – from 1768 bearing the title 'established Viennese cookbook' and with new editions done by subsequently two new editors.³

A look into the manual's table of content shows that its six parts cover a broad variety of subjects of female life and before dealing with her practical role in the household in taking care for the bodies by cooking and healing and by cleaning things and raising animals, the ways are described in which to develop and educate her personality. This description starts with 'the necessary awareness of religious truths in relation to the female destination generally and specifically', followed by a chapter of which the first part is devoted to 'the necessary talents and

skills of women' and the second to 'the choice of good books and the art to read them', introduced by the statement that talents are of considerable value for enabling the female to easily and without help from outside provide innocent pastimes for her and others which is regarded as important because by fighting boredom without transgressing the limits of morals it is a certain remedy against frivolous ideas and follies. The heart can feel all other pleasures and is more in good spirits when accomplishing business, i. e. duties. And the first of these necessary talents and skills is said to be – music.⁴

Now this is as such not a real surprise if we remember the consequences of the eighteenth-century uprising of the enlightened citizen for music making and for female role models. A look into Peter Schleuning's longtime standard helps to set the basic conditions of this process:⁵ while the audience of complimentary concerts attachment of some male visitor and for reasons of morality reduced in music making to keyboard instruments, harp and singing, with special, simplified compositions offered by publishers from the middle of the eighteenth century on, women are nevertheless thought to be predestined for playing and even more for singing, an opinion which – after people like Rousseau had claimed the necessity of female education in general – gives music making an important part in it. But admittedly this has not been done in order to provide female emancipation, but to meet the fundamental goal of female education, that is, to take care of male family members. According to a German book from 1789, Schleuning documents the contemporary assumption that a talent is just an ornament to a wife's 'primal profession', to her real value and merits.⁶

Gartler's opinion in this matter shows considerable differentiation. Talents, as the author claims, have to be distinguished from skills because they ask for 'a more tender composition of the body' and a more refined organisation to be able to be acquired or substituted by effort and study. Talents are also more of a blowoff, are rather subject to 'noisy praise' and can therefore further vanity more than skills.⁷

For this reason – by at the same time expressively stating that he does not disapprove the

highest significance of music in a good education – Ignaz Gattler states the necessity to make some comments to both parents and the maids. He starts with a warning about possible results when a daughter realises that her music teacher is better and more willingly paid off than the teacher for virtue, religion and true wisdom, or that her parents are more concerned about her progress in music and are more inclined to make them a point of pride sometimes leading to her presentation in a wider circle or even in public against her will and ‘at least at the beginning against her natural shyness’, where she has to sing arias she has learned by heart, resulting in ‘ambiguous but nevertheless intoxicating applause’.⁸ The result of such experience, as the author states, is a double risk: first of all, the daughter tends to believe that music has a higher value and has a higher influence on the prosperity of life than ‘enlightenment of the mind, nobleness of the soul and useful talents’, and it teaches her to make the peace of her heart dependent from public esteem.⁹ The bad effects of such behaviour are that she is made a fashion victim, as we call this today, and that she loses the purity and innocence of her heart, the precondition to coin good deeds with virtue. Music, the author states, is the most common field to teach girls to be dependent from public opinion and to judge everything by its appearance, both qualities being the basis for their unhappiness in later years when public opinion does not any more care for them – which reduces them either to their prayer book, to the habit of taunting or to the effect made by their granddaughters.¹⁰

The main point of criticism concerning female musical education is the fact that most women never learn or feel the real value of music as they never learnt the art of music but were only trained – ‘like a gold finch’ – to repeat some arias or sonatas: ‘And so, as she cannot sing or play first sight, she stops making music as soon as she is married, which means that a lot of money and time are wasted and the vain need to be applauded has become a lifelong habit, without ever having learnt or felt music's real benefits’.¹¹

True value of music is described by a whole list of qualities that show this treatise's aesthetic tradition: it is said to be a certain remedy against boredom, providing a ‘pure pleasure’, working as a ‘refreshment and relief, melting anger to cheeriness and grief to easing complaints’.¹² Music

elevates the calm pleasure of merry feelings and doubles them, and it can be an agreeable distraction for others and relate people of similar disposition. But it asks for talents, study and exercise and it should neither be furthered instead of necessary skills and attributes, nor with passion, as it should never be 'business of life', but recreation from business as it belongs to pastimes in the sense of the word. Virtuosi of both sexes may provide instant pleasure, but are rarely useful.

As a consequence, the author asks that the physical qualifications of a certain girl for music making or singing be checked, as they are necessary to reproduce not only correct notes, but also the special expression, depending from the flexibility of throat or fingers and from the virtuoso's inner feeling:

'I know all too well that this requires a refinement of organization and a tender agility of feelings that not every girl possesses; but I also know, that if both or just one of those are missing, the girl will not be able to make progress in real music, it will learn to play or sing notes, but this will be it. It will never express ideas and feelings in a way that they also awake in the listener's heart; the titillation of the ear will never reach to the soul and she will also remain a botcher.'¹³

This is almost literally a central statement published more than half a century earlier, in the first part of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* ('An essay on the true art of playing keyboard instruments, 1753). Its third chapter dealing with matters of performance criticises the fact that virtuosi often impress their audience by the quick fingers, while the ear is not pleased and the mind not catered – quite opposite to the merits of good music making, that moves the heart.¹⁴ When the second son of Johann Sebastian Bach published the first volume of his method, the radical social changes linked to the rise of the citizen in this time gave music a sudden importance which changed both, its meaning and its recognition. Music above all the other arts was appreciated as a sign of prosperity and civilisation. Making music was seen as an essential way of self-actualisation, and as the realisation of the new ideals of civil society – freedom, equality and brotherhood. Good private teachers could rarely be found and therefore the

books on ‘how to play’ certain instrument were needed, as many private people, wanting to make music for their own pleasure, had to be taught the right way of performing it. The aim of Bach’s method was therefore not to teach technical skills in the sense of virtuosity, but to teach the right way of expressing the feelings through music. The feelings were not any longer imagined as instant emotions (as in the Baroque tradition), but were thought to be both at the same time – individual and universal, touching every single listener and the whole humanity. And Bach consequently added that the performer must communicate the piece with his body as well as his fingers.

Being moved by music and thus moving the audience – what a revolutionary artistic conception, appropriate to the ideals of civil emancipation developed at the same time. The basic idea of expressing the whole range of human feelings made listening to music a tremendously new adventure rather appealing to sensitivity than to rational reflection. Thus instrumental music gave way to the freedom of an individual approach for every listener and every performer.

The author of the treatise on female education, Ignaz Gartler, remains nevertheless firm in his opinion that, in spite of these rather demanding preconditions for real music making, its importance for a woman should never transgress the limits of pastime, beyond which the activity stops to be – as he calls it – innocent. He states that for music making the girl should never neglect the learning and exertion of those skills and works by which she will once have to be necessary for her husband and for her children. If she misses to cultivate and educate her mind or heart, which have to produce knowledge, ideas and feelings necessary for the different fields of her future life, then she ‘changes coloured glass for diamonds’.¹⁵ If music has its place after work, or ‘in times of displeasure, grief or tumescent joy’ that always prevent from working, it is recreation and condiment and only in these cases the girl may get the ‘innocent advantages’ of her crop – in every other case ‘one hour devoted to music is robbery of her own peace’, interrupting work or duty.¹⁶

Consequently, this text (even more when the passages on dancing and the introduction on ‘religious truths’ are considered as well) can be contextualised with the mentality related to music making and listening for the book’s target audience, i. e. female middle class, in early nineteenth-

century Vienna and is – because of its popular character – a good starting point for its description. It basically mixes civil society's – i.e. enlightened – judgments on the social importance of music with traditional assumptions on this art as 'innocent luxury', an attitude that can be found as a characteristic of bourgeois culture as early as in Johann Georg Mattheson's *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre*, published in Hamburg in 1713 as his first volume on music with the aim to enable the 'galant homme' to make conversation on this matter.¹⁷

It seems that, in spite of the prominent position this art achieved in romantic aesthetics, the notion of music as mere pastime is kept when it comes to judge female activities in this field. In 1846 the Austrian writer and painter Marie Countess of Augustin under one of her pen names published a book on 'the natural female rights',¹⁸ stressing time and again that women's talents are to be furthered and basing the reasons for this demand on economical, social and educational arguments. She also claims that only a woman with mental abilities may attract the otherwise erratic male for a longer time, which is shown by the appeal dancers or singers have on intellectuals, even if they are neither beautiful nor moral, because their talent gives them an aura outshining their imperfection.¹⁹ Within her tripartite system of education – housekeeping, subjects and recreation – music and dancing, along with outdoor activities that are most important, make part of the latter. Therefore a girl should only cultivate these talents when she is already a perfect and experienced housekeeper, which means that by this time she has already reached an age of fifteen or sixteen. When it comes to the arts including music, the author probably out of autobiographical experience takes a strong part in describing their importance in life. Music has an ambiguous role as it is, on one hand, described as the romantic power on human souls and spirits, but on the other as an art requiring 'fantasy' but little to no intellect which is proved by the many child prodigies in that field. The enthusiastic description of music effects when an artist performs 'out of his soul' is obviously dictated by the contemporary fascination with virtuoso players – a fascination that explicitly does not apply on (young) females. On this matter there is the same firm position as in Hikman-Gartler's 1811 manual dealt with above, i.e. that girls never are to be allowed to be virtuosos, repeating also

this text's main arguments, the bad effect of flattery (or disapproval), the excitement caused by noisy applause, of which is said to be destructive for a child's 'fragile organism' as well as for his or her morals. If women decide to take an artistic career, they should therefore never cease to be good in housekeeping and if they leave this track, they will have to meet much higher requirements and will also raise a lot of enviousness from their sisters. There is obviously a clear limit to what in terms of (musical) art a woman may achieve. While the author's enthusiasm for virtuosi regards playing from sheet as something inferior,²⁰ it is one of the abilities appropriate to the female musician 'to perform a historical composition adequate to her force', others being to play piano, harp or guitar, to sing or to declaim.²¹ According to that gendered view on the value of making music the introductory passage on its place in female education has none of the impressive phrases about transcendence and genius, but besides mere recreation a smaller aim is pronounced. Making music or even creating 'a small song' should elevate her, should make her 'more feeling, more spiritual, more noble'²² and thus raise her personal attraction. In opposite to the above mentioned dangers for the personality of a female virtuoso performing artist, such music making has moral qualities that fit well to yet another essential female attribute that had also been mentioned in the 1811 manual, that is, the importance given to religion in female education, the idea that religion is one of her best qualities.²³

Pre-industrial Catholic traditions of thinking²⁴ are characteristic for the specific mentality of Biedermeier Vienna and were challenged by and a challenge for the German romantics, 'invading' Vienna during those years. Remarkably and in spite of that, the challenging the concepts of female education keeps tradition alive for many decades. According to this, an explicitly Catholic treatise from 1859,²⁵ written for 'young wives and prospective governesses', the main concern is again perfect housekeeping and moral edification. The place of music is closely related to religious education – sacred songs appealing best to children's sensual and not intellectual character – and to the female mission to give pleasure to her family, for which purpose virtuosity is as needless as 'labourosly learnt arias'.²⁶ Remarkably almost the same passage makes part of an article published

as late as 1880,²⁷ written to stress the advantages of public schooling for 'daughters' in terms of a better chance to be chosen as a good husband's wife. It is again 'some' ability for 'a modest' performance the husband 'might perhaps not see reluctantly', while he will not chose his bride for her virtuosity,²⁸ but for her practical skills and her moral attitude.

Ethic and spiritual edification, and moral improvement are thus something modest, domestic music making and religious practices are said to share. They both are considered strongly related matters in female education which means that instead of 'loosing their religion' through music, music gets 'their religion' a backup in times of increasing secularisation. In other words, the emancipatory quality of music making in bourgeois culture does not apply for the same role of practice in female education, where it gets a kind of domesticated form with 'small forms' or 'easy songs'. It seems that the close link of music and religion helps to build this different meaning.

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¹ For further details related to this topic cf. the project ‘Frauen in Bewegung’ on the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Austrian National Library) Ariadne catalogue

<www2.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/index.htm> (accessed 28 July 2008)

² Ignaz Gartler, *Nützliches Hausbuch für Frauen und Mädchen in sechs Absätzen. Enthält: aus Erfahrung gegründete Dinge für jede Haushaltung auf alle Fälle; Ein Gegenstück zum wienerischen bewährten Kochbuche* (Wien: Joseph Gerold, 1797). Cf. also Ignaz Gartler and Barbara Hickmann, *Die Wiener Hausfrau in allen ihren Geschäften oder Nützliches Handbuch für Frauen und Mädchen, welches in sieben Abschnitten viele bewährte und auf Erfahrung gegründete Lehren, Wirtschaftsregeln, ökonomische Kunststücke, wie auch Vorsichtsregeln zur Erhaltung der Gesundheit und Schönheit des schönen Geschlechts enthält. Des bewährten Wiener Kochbuches Zweyter Theil*. 5th edn. (Wien: Carl Gerold, 1811). Following editions were published in Vienna in 1818 and 1828.

³ Ignaz Gartler, *Bewehrtes Koch-Buch, in sechs Absätz vertheilet: in welchen zu finden: wie man verschiedene Speisen von allerhand Wildprät, Fleisch, Geflügelwerck, Fisch und Garten-gewächsen, wie auch Torten, Pastetten und anderes Gebackenes niedlich zurichten könne; wegen guter und sicher-gestellten Eintheilung dienet jedermann, besonders der in der Kocherey sich übenden Jugend*, rev. 3rd edn. (Wien: Kalliwoda, 1750), 5th edn. ca. 1759. From 1768 the title changes to: *Wienerisches bewährtes Koch-Buch in sechs Absätze vertheilet in welchem zu finden: Wie man verschiedene Speisen, von allerhand Wild-Prät, Fleisch, Geflügelwerk [...] Wie auch Torten, Pasteten und anderes Gebackenes, niedlich zurichten könne* (Bamberg and Würzburg: Göbhardische Buchhandlung, 1768). A new edition ‘with a register of the unknown Austrian terms’ in 1772; then Vienna: Gerold, 1785; 12th edn, Vienna 1787; 14th edn, Vienna 1790; 27th edn, Vienna 1807; 30th edn, Vienna 1812; 36th edn, ‘improved’ by F. G. Zenker, Vienna 1839; 37th edn, Vienna 1844; 38th edn, Vienna 1850. For the latter, cf. the bibliography by Franz Maier-Bruck, *Das grosse Sacher-Kochbuch* (Munich: Schuler Verlagsgesellschaft GmbH, 1975), 581.

⁴ The following paragraphs deal with the other prominent female cultural activity, with dancing that is said to be still sometimes rejected by parents or teachers but should be allowed under certain conditions.

⁵ Peter Schleuning, *Der Bürger erhebt sich. Geschichte der deutschen Musik im 18. Jahrhundert*, 2nd rev. edn. (Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler 2000), 179–222.

⁶ Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter* (Braunschweig: Verlag der Schulbuchhandlung 1789), 125; cf. Schleuning, *Der Bürger*, 193.

⁷ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 75.

⁸ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 75.

⁹ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 79.

¹⁰ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 75.

¹¹ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 75.

¹² Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 76.

¹³ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 76ff.

¹⁴ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, part 1 (Berlin: Christian Friedrich Henning 1753); manuscript reprint, ed. Wolfgang Horn (Kassel-Basel-London: Bärenreiter, 1994), 115.

¹⁵ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 78.

¹⁶ Gartler, *Hausbuch* (fn. 2), 78.

¹⁷ Johann Heinrich Mattheson, *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: published by the author, 1713).

¹⁸ Marie von Thurnberg, *Gedanken einer Frau über die angeborenen Rechte des Frauengeschlechtes* (Wien: Anton Doll's Enkel, 1846). Opposite to Gartler und Hikman, there is the biographical information on this author, cf. Sophie Pataky, ed. *Lexikon deutscher Frauen der Feder. Eine Zusammenstellung der seit dem Jahre 1840 erschienenen Werke weiblicher Autoren, nebst*

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¹⁹ Cf. Marie von Thurnberg, *Gedanken einer Frau* (fn. 18), 20ff.

²⁰ Marie von Thurnberg, *Gedanken einer Frau* (fn. 18), 55. The author stresses the necessity of being able to improvise, i.e. to perform ‘beyond’ the musical notation, a statement, that strongly reminds on Franz Liszt’s sensational performing career during the same years, mostly based on pieces showing a lot of extempore elements.

²¹ Marie von Thurnberg, *Gedanken einer Frau* (fn. 18), 82. The list of activities regarded as not appropriate for women comments with some irony the changing standards – currently even violin or violoncello in public being accepted.

²² Marie von Thurnberg, *Gedanken einer Frau* (fn. 18), 22.

²³ Marie von Thurnberg, *Gedanken einer Frau* (fn. 18), 142ff.

²⁴ Cf. Christian Aspalter, Wolfgang Müller-Funk and others, eds. *Paradoxien der Romantik*. Wien: WUV, 2006.

²⁵ Anonym, *Winke über Erziehung besonders der weiblichen Jugend nach katholischen Grundsätzen gegeben von einer Erzieherin* (Wien: Mayer & Compagnie, 1859). It is also available online: <http://www.literature.at/viewer.alo?viewmode=fullscreen&objid=13186>, <accessed 10 january 2014>

²⁶ Anonym, *Winke über Erziehung*, 162.

²⁷ L. Strauß, ‘Der höhere Mädchenunterricht und die Abnahme der Heiraten’, in *Die Mädchenschule. Ein Organ für die gesamten Interessen des Mädchen-Schulwesens und der weiblichen Erziehung*, ed. Ferdinand Maria Wendt and Hermine Lintemer, 5/1, 1880, 3–6.

²⁸ Strauß, ‘Der höhere Mädchenunterricht und die Abnahme der Heiraten’, 4ff.