



# The Role of Conservatories in the Process of the Professionalisation and Specialisation of Musical Activity

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The purpose of this monograph is to reflect on the conceptual, organisational and substantive aspects of music education in Central Europe and among the southern Slavs in the light of general and ethnically specific trends in musical development after 1918, with a particular focus on the circulation of knowledge and institutions providing public music education. The primary focus of research interest in this fourth monograph in the *Studia musicologica Labacensia* collection, entitled *The conservatories: professionalisation and specialisation of musical activity: On the centenary of the founding of the Ljubljana Conservatory and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Music Academy in Ljubljana*, is the activity of the Conservatory in Ljubljana, founded in 1919, and its successor the Music Academy, founded two decades later, and of similar musical institutions in Europe before and between the two world wars.

The papers in the monograph are divided into three thematic groups. The first group (*The functioning of music conservatories in Europe before and between the two world wars*) looks at some important milestones in the development of conservatories before and after the First World War, with a primary focus on the development of higher music education in the light of the societal changes that took place in the interwar period. It also considers degrees of institutionalisation and state control and examines pedagogical approaches and the concert repertoire of conservatory productions.

The second group (*The development of post-secondary and higher music education between the two world wars in Slovenia*) devotes particular attention to institutions providing higher music education in Slovenia in this period and their role in the development of individual subject fields. It also examines pedagogical concepts and approaches to teaching and the institutional changes that saw the Conservatory become the Music Academy.

The third group (*Higher music education among the southern Slavs after 1918*) focuses its attention on connections or differences within the “new” higher education area encompassing the lands of the southern Slavs and examines teaching methods within individual music disciplines.

The end of 1918 was one of the key turning points in the recent history of Europe. The period was marked by the political transformation of Europe and the emergence of a number of new states. For Slovenes, too, this period was of historic importance at multiple levels. The break with the old monarchy was symbolically illustrated by the events surrounding the final concert of the “German” Philharmonic Society at the *Tonhalle* (today the home of the Slovenian Philharmonic) on 25 October 1918. Three days later, the constituent assembly of the National Council, the body that was to lead the Slovenes into the new era, took place just across the square in the palace of the provincial government, today the seat of the University of Ljubljana. Then, on 29 October 1918, at a vast gathering in Congress Square, the Slovenes bade farewell to the disintegrating monarchy to which they had belonged for more than 600 years, and, together with the Croats and Serbs, formed a new State of the South Slavs, which became the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 1 December of the same year.

The end of ties with the Habsburgs and the resulting new geographical, political, economic, cultural and linguistic environment also had a significant impact on the organisation and functioning of Slovene cultural and academic institutions. The changed conditions after the end of the First World War accelerated the institutionalisation of cultural and academic interests on a national footing. In the years immediately following the Great War, Slovenia’s capital gained several long-awaited professional academic and cultural institutions of key national importance, including a university, a national theatre and a conservatory of music. For Slovenes, these represented a decisive step into the circle of culturally developed nations.

September 2019 marks the centenary of the founding of the Conservatory of the Glasbena Matica music society in Ljubljana. The establishment of the Conservatory, which was nationalised in 1926 and reorganised as the

Music Academy in 1939, has historic significance for Slovene musical culture. Its founding was the fruit of long years of efforts by Slovenes to raise the level of music education in Ljubljana, the heart of the nation.

These efforts were revived after the Great War by a man who was undoubtedly one of the most influential musicians of that period in Slovenia: Matej Hubad, the concert director of the Glasbena Matica and later director of the Conservatory. He believed that the numbers enrolled at the Glasbena Matica school and the existing teaching staff already met the necessary conditions to raise the school to a higher level, and began discussions to this end with the newly appointed Provincial Government for Slovenia. His ambitious plan was for the Conservatory to become a gathering place for all Yugoslavs. “*The Conservatory should be a cultural temple of the musical, operatic and dramatic arts,*” wrote Hubad. He saw this as a necessary condition for establishing Yugoslav culture as the equal of others, “*able to compete with the cultural nations of the world.*”<sup>1</sup> The aim was to raise music education to a higher level capable of satisfying the new state’s needs with regard to the development of musical creativity.<sup>2</sup> The Glasbena Matica unquestionably played a central role in the early years of the Conservatory’s existence, providing significant financial support for its activities, as well as personnel.

The purpose of music education at the Conservatory in Ljubljana was the same as elsewhere in Europe: to provide the necessary foundations for professional musical activity through adequate vocal, instrumental and theoretical training for music teachers, concert and opera singers, opera and concert conductors, and orchestral musicians. Its activities after the First World War accelerated the professionalisation and specialisation of Slovene musical life. The Conservatory was established along the lines of those in Prague and Vienna, while its management also took as a model the activities of the Zagreb Conservatory – founded three years earlier and the first conservatory in any of the southern Slav nations.

Owing to the great interest from pupils, the lack of suitably qualified teachers was a major difficulty right from the start. Distinguished composers and performers who had themselves studied at some of the most important educational institutions abroad were appointed to the teaching staff. They included: Janko Ravnik, Josip Vedral and Jan Šlais (all three of them

1 Matej Hubad, “Jugoslovanski konservatorij Glasbene Matice v Ljubljani” [The Yugoslav Conservatory of the Glasbena Matica in Ljubljana]. *Učiteljski tovariš* 59, no. 35 (27 August 1919), 1.

2 Ibid.

graduates of the State Conservatory in Prague) and, a little later, Julij Betetto, Dana Kobler, Karel Jeraj and Lucijan Marija Škerjanc, among others. Despite the initial difficulties, they succeeded – with great enthusiasm – in training the first generation of Slovene musicians to be educated in their home country, who went on to occupy some of the most responsible positions in the musical life of the nation. Among the first to complete their studies at the Conservatory in Ljubljana were the violinist Karlo Rupel, the voice teacher Angela Trost and the composers Pavel Šivic, Marijan Lipovšek and Franc Šturm, along with numerous other superlative artists such as Anton Dermota, who was for many years the *primo uomo* at the Vienna State Opera.

Thanks to their efforts, in as early as the 1920s awareness began to grow of the need to modernise the Conservatory, expand music education to the postgraduate level and introduce various academic disciplines. Josp Mantuani, one of the first teachers at the Conservatory and the father of Slovene musicology, was already making efforts to establish an independent Department of Musicology in 1922, but was unfortunately unable to realise his plans. Following nationalisation, the Conservatory's management lobbied with increasing intensity to obtain the status of a higher education institution. After lengthy negotiations with the highest authorities in Belgrade, this ambition was eventually realised in 1939 with the establishment of the Music Academy in Ljubljana (today's Ljubljana Academy of Music).

The establishment of the Conservatory in itself represented a first important contact with contemporary pedagogical achievements in other countries at the higher levels of music education. Despite its modest financial and material conditions and lack of staff, the Conservatory achieved significant and indeed enviable successes in some fields (such as Janko Ravnik's piano class, Jan Šlais's violin class or Julij Betetto's vocal class). Right up until the Second World War, it was the only arts education institution in Slovenia to award state-approved diplomas, since plans to establish similar schools for the theatre and fine arts were not realised until after the war. Its existence laid the foundations for professional musical activities in this country and gave Slovene musical culture new opportunities and stimuli that revealed themselves both in musical production and performance and in the development of teaching methods within individual musical disciplines.