

Report on the
International Bilingual Conference
The European Salon: Nineteenth-Century Salonmusik

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Three entire days (Oct. 2-4, 2015) were recently dedicated to exploring the musical salon in the long nineteenth century as an undervalued socio-cultural institution with great political and artistic impact on the history of the nineteenth century. Neither entirely public nor entirely private, the European salons and their important musical and cultural functions have been underestimated in the writing of 19th-century music history. Because European salons were mostly organized by well-to-do women, much of the salon history concerns important, and yet in many cases largely unknown, women: Salonnières, women performers, and women composers. The type of genres and the aesthetic of salon music also contributed to the relative neglect with which the salon has been treated in music history.

With this conference a paramount contribution has been made to salon research. The organizers -- Anja Bunzel, the main driving force and chair of the conference committee, Dr. Lorraine Byrne Bodley, senior lecturer at the University of Maynooth and president of the Society for Musicology in Ireland and an entire team – spectacularly succeeded at reviving the salon in its amazing diversity.

Seventy presentations brought together a manifold of cultural perspectives on the salons in at least twelve countries. These presentations featured interdisciplinary approaches joining musicology, literary, cultural and gender studies. What might sound like a very heterogeneous topic was beautifully unified by one factor that spanned all talks, and all lecture-recitals: music. The music performed in, and/or composed for, the salon as well as its rich extra-musical and cultural associations constituted the central focus of each presentation, with only one or two exceptions where the salon played merely a tangential role.

The bilingual nature of the conference was especially stimulating. Among the participants one heard almost as much German as English and eight of the twenty-three panels were given entirely in German. The bilingual nature of the convention highlighted the refreshingly different musicological approaches between Anglophone musicology and the German tradition of Musikwissenschaft, which was highly enriching for both sides.

The charming surroundings deserve special mention: Maynooth University and the music department, located on the historical grounds of St. Patrick's College, including its beautiful old gardens, provided an ideal location with fantastic infrastructure, with the idyllic town of Maynooth accessible by foot. The accommodation on and off campus was very pleasant. Meals and coffee breaks were provided for as part of the conference registration package, thereby maximizing the time and opportunity for lively discussion and inspired conversation with fellow participants.

Speakers from fifteen countries treated topics related to the salon in Ireland, Germany, Austria, Bohemia, England, France, Italy, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and America. Most participants would probably agree that two of the absolute highlights of this conference were the two keynote addresses: a marvellous presentation by Susan Youens, titled "'Der Mensch ist zur Geselligkeit geboren': Salon Culture, Night Thoughts, and a Schubert Song." Her masterly talk proved that it is possible to get the text-music balance just right in the discussion of Lieder. And Harald Krebs's final address, "Women Composers of Song and the Salon in Southern Germany, with Emphasis on Josephine Lang (1815-1880)", showed that in the world of salon music and research unpublished precious gems by undervalued women composers still exist. Speakers discussed Salonnières ranging from Johanna Kinkel (Anja Bunzel) to Bettine von Arnim (Jennifer Ronyak) and Josephine Lang (Harald Krebs), and from Marie d'Agoult (Arline Cravens) to Jessie Laussot (Michael Uhde) and Malla Silfverstolpe (Kirsten Santos Rutschman).

The program included seven lecture recitals ranging from Italian operatic arias transferred to the intimacy of the salon (Simone Laghi) to the exploration of duet salon literature by "women composing for women" (Tammy Hensrud, Korliss Uecker, and Harald Krebs) and to "English Salon Culture around 1800" (Maren Bagge, Clemens Kreutzfeld, Elisabeth Reda, and Anastasia Wendler). Two of the lecture recitals were plenary sessions: Michael Uhde, Johanna Vargas, and Katharina Uhde spoke about and performed music related to the salon of Jessie Laussot in Florence of the 1870s; R. Larry Todd and Katharina Uhde discussed Joseph Joachim's private "salon" performances and performed the FAE sonata by Dietrich, Brahms, and Schumann as well as Joseph Joachim's "Abendglocken" Op. 5.

Two further highlights were, on the one hand, the plenary talk by Harry White, whose paper "Promiscuity, Propriety and the Piano: A Cinematic Representation of the Victorian Salon" was

both witty and elegant and featured exquisite use of technology in form of evocative film excerpts. On the other hand, there was a wonderful plenary talk by Sabine Kemna on the history of the Furore Verlag, entitled “The unique history of the Furore publisher: Fanny Hensel, Bettine von Arnim, Josephine Lang, and many other women composers.”

Presentation styles included some freely spoken presentations, many read papers, and enlightening analytical investigations, such as in James William Sobaskie's paper "Unsuspected Sophistication: Quiet Innovation in the Vocal and Chamber Music of Gabriel Fauré". They also included enlivening and surprising unannounced performance demonstrations, such as Sylvie Douche's superb melodramatic piano performance in her paper "The Insertion of the Melodrama in the Théâtre-Musical Programs of the Parisian Salons (1870-1910)" and Kirsten Santos Rutschman's beautiful singing in her brilliant paper "Fridays with Malla: Musical Repertoire in the Swedish Salon of Malla Silfverstolpe."

The conference program also included a Lieder Recital on the theme of Pauline Viardot Garcia (by acclaimed Irish soprano Sylvia O'Brien and pianist Dearbhla Collins), a book launch of *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied* (by Aisling Kenny and Susan Wollenberg) introduced by R. Larry Todd, and a conference dinner-- surely one of the social highlights of the conference.

Because three panels were running in parallel (except for the keynotes and plenary sessions) it remained an illusion to hear all papers, which at the same time afforded exciting albeit difficult choices.

By the end of the conference the salon as an important topic within scholarship on the long nineteenth century had very clearly materialized as a graspable, highly fascinating, and diverse cultural concept, with significant contributions to gender studies in musicology and the clearly highlighted virtue of interdisciplinary research and cultural diversity.