

Politiker und Impresario. Landeshauptmann Dr. Franz Rehr und die Salzburger Festspiele

By Robert Kriechbaumer. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2021. Pp. 564. Cloth €55.00. ISBN: 978-3205212614.

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The prestigious Salzburg Festival, now such a fixture of the Austrian cultural calendar, was launched in the most inauspicious circumstances, in the wake of the First World War and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, and survived the political and economic vicissitudes of the First Republic, from revolution to fascism and from hyperinflation to Depression. Robert Kriechbaumer's study of the festival's origins, its establishment after the First World War, and its survival for two decades despite precarious circumstances is located in the broader context of the cultural history of those years, with a focus on Franz Rehr's key role in enabling the festival to survive and flourish.

The story begins with the prehistory of the festival itself among the music clubs and Mozart enthusiasts of Salzburg, and the organisation of summer music festivals which were described by a critic as a protest against the gloomy stuffiness of Bayreuth, although it was Bayreuth that provided the initial inspiration for the construction of a Mozart *Festspielhaus*. The young Max Reinhardt was an early player, appearing, fresh from Vienna, at the opening premiere of the new Salzburg city theatre in 1893. Prewar ideas for a Salzburg theatre festival foundered for financial reasons, and although a *Festspielhaus Gemeinde* was established in 1917, it was not until after the war that the festival was finally established amid the grim conditions of the early republic. Quite apart from the economic difficulties of the postwar crisis, the festival's early years were beleaguered by personal vanities and political rivalries, and not least by the virulent and pervasive antisemitism which saw the ("purely Aryan") festival committee condemned as "Jewish" in the local press, and members bombarded with threatening letters. It meant too, as Hugo von Hoffmannsthal put it in a letter to Richard Strauss, that the citizens of Salzburg with their narrowminded provincial prejudices would never accept Reinhardt as president of the association, whom they hated three- or fourfold, "as a Jew, as lord of the manor, as an artist, and as a loner they did not understand" (78).

Rehr himself makes an early appearance as a background figure, a politician with ambitious plans for the modernisation of Salzburg, but is introduced only later as a significant player in the securing of the festival's future. Determined to "de-provincialise" Salzburg, Rehr recognised that the town had few resources beyond its rich cultural heritage, and resolved to promote the festival and the reopening of the university. The festival's future was by no means assured, however, despite the economic recovery that came with the stabilisation of the economy, not least because rich (and, for the most part, unloved) foreign tourists were put off by the new exchange rate, while politicians at the local, regional, and national level continued to squabble over who should foot the bill. The festival continued to be beleaguered by such squabbles despite its international success, and there was no let-up in rabble-rousing attacks from the radical right, including the so-called Moissi scandal, the persecution of the (Gentile) actor Alexander Moissi by antisemites, ostensibly for passing himself off as a doctor, arguably as a means of attacking Rehr. Things only got worse in 1932, when the Nazis succeeded in regional elections across Austria on a scale that almost matched their breakthrough in Germany itself (24 percent in elections to the Salzburg *Landtag*). But Rehr was a survivor and managed to keep the show on the road despite escalating attacks from that quarter, and more seriously despite Germany's punitive imposition of a thousand-Mark charge on Reich citizens entering Austria, designed to

undermine a tourist economy heavily reliant on German visitors. Salzburg, which is closer to Munich than Vienna, was a prime target for this sanction, but the festival's cosmopolitan audiences held up, and there was some recognition in Vienna that the festival was of sufficient national importance to merit support despite the straitened economic circumstances. Rehr was eventually removed from his position only following the German annexation of Austria in 1938. He survived the war, despite an indirect association with the 1944 bomb plot that landed him in Ravensbrück. He returned to Salzburg after the war, re-engaged with local politics despite his health problems, and died in 1947 leaving a tremendous legacy.

This is a meticulously researched and comprehensive study of the Salzburg Festival's origins and early development over a period of some twenty years between the wars. The history itself occupies some 400 pages and is followed by extensive appendices containing pictures and documents. It is one of the book's strengths that the detailed account of plans and negotiations is interwoven with the turbulent political and economic history of Austria (and Europe) between the wars. Amidst all this, it sometimes seems that – despite his prominence in the title – Rehr gets less of a look-in, and we get little sense of him as a man, still less as a politician. The main narrative ends with a testament to his commitment, under Gestapo interrogation, to Austria and to democracy. That commitment was presumably tested in 1933, when Rehr responded to the government's use of procedural chicanery to suppress parliament with a pious speech blaming opposition “obstruction,” a position echoed in the text by an explanation setting out – albeit in the subjunctive mood – the “difficult” choices facing the Austrian chancellor. We get little or no sense of Rehr's response to the violent coup d'état of the following February, and as party leader in Salzburg Rehr remained an important figure in the dictatorship.

Even so, Kriechbaumer's study of the festival's early years is, in many respects, a model of cultural history and deserves a wide readership.

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Bestsellers of the Third Reich: Readers, Writers, and the Politics of Literature

By Christian Adam. Translated by Anne Stokes. New York: Berghahn Books, 2021. Pp. xii + 297. Cloth \$135.00. ISBN: 978-1800730397.

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One of the most widely-known facts about books in Nazi Germany is that many were publicly burned or banned. The book market underwent tremendous upheaval in 1933, as scores of Germany's best authors and publishers were forced to leave or found themselves unable to work. But although many Nazi authorities issued lists of banned books, the market remained largely in the hands of non-state actors. Christian Adam examines this period of literary *Gleichschaltung* from a different angle, asking what books were available between 1933 and 1945, and which genres and authors were widely read and popular. Adam also evaluates the success of Nazi leaders' attempts to create their own literature, asking to what degree this period saw the emergence of literature reflecting Nazi values, which was both popular and critically well-received. Adam's study was originally published in German in 2010 under the title *Lesen unter Hitler*, and is now available in a lively, very readable English translation.