A STEINWAY FOR EUGEN D'ALBERT?

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Photo credit: Close up of the Steinway grand piano. Haus Schlesien, Free access - no reuse

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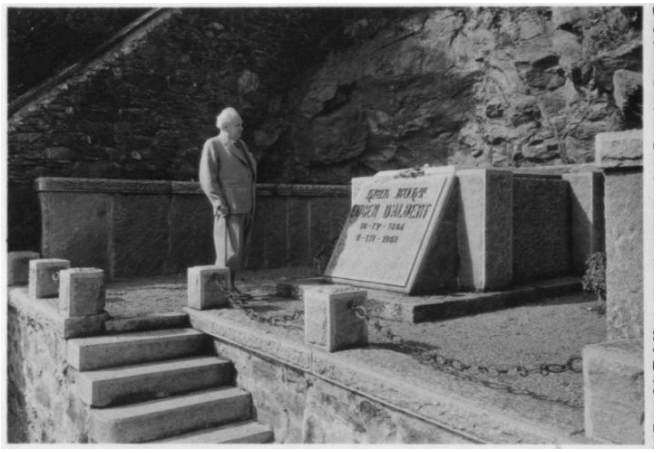
In the “Eichendorff Hall” of Haus Schlesien in Königswinter there is a Steinway grand piano made of lemon wood. It is a noteworthy museum object not only because the famous Steinway & Sons lettering is emblazoned on it, but also, and above all, because it was owned by Gerhart Hauptmann, the 1912 Nobel Prize winner for literature.

Gerhart Hauptmann, who had been involved with the violinist Margarete Marschalk since 1893, purchased the Steinway grand piano in 1898, initially for his Berlin apartment at the time. That same year, on February 8, he had met the composer and pianist Eugen d'Albert, who is best known as the composer of the opera *Tiefland*. One day later, he expressed his admiration for the musician, who was at that time considered a “miracle pianist”, in his diary: “D'Albert is a superpower”. The fact that Hauptmann acquired the grand piano so soon after this first encounter suggests that it was not only for himself – he had learned the violin and piano in his youth – but also for musicians like d'Albert whom he had befriended.

The grand piano in its present place in Haus Schlesien. Haus Schlesien, Free access - no reuse



Gerhart Hauptmann at the grave of d'Albert on 10.10.1936. Chr. Schiefer / Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Free access - no reuse

After Gerhart Hauptmann moved into Haus Wiesenstein in the Silesian Krkonoše Mountains in 1901, he decorated the so-called “Musiksaal” (music hall). When he married Margarete Marschalk’s and moved to Agnetendorf, the Krkonoše Mountains became not only a center of literature, but also of music. Apart from Eugen d'Albert, the cellist Heinrich Grünfeld and the Hungarian pianist Arpard Sandor, who played together with Margarete on the occasion of the annual "Grünfeld Week" at Wiesenstein, deserve special mention. The Hauptmanns’ circle of friends also included musicians and composers such as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler and Alban Berg.

Margarete and Gerhart Hauptmann in the music hall of the Wiesenstein house in Agnetendorf (today Jagniątów) in March 1941. René Fossag / Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Free access - no reuse

After Gerhart Hauptmann’s death, the grand piano, like many other pieces of furniture from Haus Wiesenstein, was transported to Berlin by the so-called “Hauptmann transport”. From there it accompanied Margarete Hauptmann to Ebenhausen near Munich. When she died, the piano passed first into the possession of her son Benvenuto Hauptmann, then into that of her granddaughter Anja Hauptmann. The latter in turn gifted it to her son, the musician Emanuel Hauptmann.

The fact that the piano is now housed at Haus Schlesien is thanks to the Erika Simon Foundation, which acquired it from Emanuel Hauptmann and donated it to Haus Schlesien.

English translation: William Connor ↗

Literature

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