

Special Issue: “Visualizing Music Histories? The 1892 International Exhibition of Music and Drama and Beyond”: Editorial Introduction

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Melanie Strumbl (ed.), Special Issue, “Visualizing Music Histories? The 1892 International Exhibition of Music and Drama and Beyond”

Overview of all articles

- Elisabeth Magesacher, [The Sound of Museums: On the Role of Music and Silence in Music Exhibitions](#)
- Christopher Campo Bowen, [“This the Czechs Can Teach Us”: Transnational Opera and Habsburg Imperial Control at the 1892 International Exhibition of Music and Theater](#)
- Melanie Strumbl, [Spatializing Music Histor\(iograph\)y: Exhibiting Guido Adler’s Musico-Historical Model at the International Exhibition of Music and Drama, Vienna 1892](#)

The challenge of this special issue is to bring together different perspectives, approaches, and methodologies demonstrating the necessity of interdisciplinary research in examining the display and visualization of art forms such as music and its histories. More specifically, this special issue takes the 1892 International Exhibition of Music and Drama in Vienna as a point of departure for investigating the multifaceted perspectives of music exhibitions, with special focus on the medium’s display practices and sociopolitical implications. However, exhibiting music as a tangible and as an intangible object in museums or venues specifically designed for the display of music is still today a common cultural practice. Thus, the primary aim of this special issue is to examine music exhibitions as historical and contemporary subjects of research, going beyond the disciplinary realms of musicology itself.

(1) Elisabeth Magesacher

Current music exhibitions at European museums focus on various music-related topics, such as musical instruments, composers, musicians, and sounds. Surprisingly, many music exhibitions

provide visitors few opportunities to learn how the musical objects on display actually sound. As museums historically build on the trope of visual narratives, this lack of sound relates to issues of presenting the ephemeral cultural practice of making and listening to music at various levels. Elisabeth Magesacher's article "[The Sound of Museums: On the Role of Music and Silence in Music Exhibitions](#)" discusses the role of sound and silence in current music exhibitions in Europe and thereby problematizes the issue of displaying the intangible "object" of music. On the basis of field research conducted in music-related and ethnological museums in Paris, Brussels, Munich, Berlin, and Amsterdam, this article describes the technical possibilities that audio guide systems, sound installations, and interactive stations offer for integrating music and sound into exhibitions. By juxtaposing the perspectives of visitors, curators, and museum staff, Magesacher argues how these sound and music samples form and affect the exhibition narrative, the atmosphere, the learning experience, and the communication and interaction among visitors in the exhibition space. What are the potentials and effects of learning about musical sound, particularly of instruments visitors are not familiar with, for example via interactive stations or instruments they may touch or even play? What are the structural, curatorial, and economic reasons for avoiding sounds in a music exhibition, and what is the potential of an absence of sound in a music exhibition? On the basis of this analysis, this article illustrates how the implementation of actual sound in music exhibitions contributes to the mediation of topics beyond historical timelines and inert musical objects. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how music exhibitions can also offer the possibility to gain a sensory awareness of one's own perception, self-reflection, listening habits, and auditive skills in order to create museums that mediate complex cultural contexts through auditive experience.



Elisabeth Magesacher, [The Sound of Museums: On the Role of Music and Silence in Music Exhibitions](#)

(2) Christopher Campo Bowen

The 1892 Vienna International Exhibition of Music and Theater drew the attention of commentators from across Europe, both for the stage works it hosted and for its political theater. A complex issue lying at the heart of the 1892 exhibition was how the politics of theatrical representation could reflect and influence nationalist political conflicts, especially within the Habsburg Monarchy. In his article "[‘This the Czechs Can Teach Us’: Transnational Opera and Habsburg Imperial Control at the 1892 International Exhibition of Music and Theater](#),” Christopher Campo Bowen explores how national conflicts were defined, negotiated, and resolved (or not) during the 1892 exhibition through two central case studies. The first case study analyzes how

Habsburg administrators organized the exhibition, co-opting pre-existing institutions that straddled imperial and national lines—such as the Prague National Theater—and how the Viennese press helped position the Habsburg elite as benevolent, paternalistic, and necessary to the success of the exhibition. The second case study explores the transnational resonances of the Czech delegation’s wildly successful residency at the exhibition and how groups both within and outside the Austro-Hungarian Empire used the Czechs’ triumphs and recast them with an eye toward advancing their own national narratives. Ultimately, this research shows that, while approaches to nationalist issues may have differed greatly among the various stakeholders at the 1892 exhibition, they all agreed on one thing: the power of theater to potentially upend the political status quo.



Christopher Campo Bowen, ‘This the Czechs Can Teach Us’: Transnational Opera and Habsburg Imperial Control at the 1892 International Exhibition of Music and Theater

(3) Melanie Strumbl

My article, “[Spatializing Music Histor\(iograph\)y: Exhibiting Guido Adler’s Musico-Historical Model at the International Exhibition of Music and Drama, Vienna 1892](#),” focuses on the visualization and display of music historiography at the International Exhibition of Music and Drama, Vienna 1892, against the backdrop of nineteenth-century exhibition and visual culture. As part of the analysis, I scrutinize the collections and artifacts that were used to create these narratives as well as the key themes and topics that structured the musico-historical section. Second, the article compares these “visual narratives” with written works of music history and general historiographical conventions and models in the nineteenth century and shows that Guido Adler had a pivotal curating function and was engaged to design specific sections of the exhibition. Here, I put particular emphasis on the musico-historical concept based on style periods that Adler later delineated in his treatises *Der Stil in der Musik* (Style in music, 1911), *Methode der Musikgeschichte* (Method of music history, 1919), and *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* (Handbook of music history, 1930), which already served as the basic principle of narrating and visualizing music history at Vienna 1892. The display of music history on the basis of scholarly paradigms also became visible in his attempts to transpose his model of periodization—a history of music based on style—to the exhibitionary realm; but this could not be fully realized because the given spatial configurations forced him to make adaptations and alterations. In the remainder of this article, I explore the interiors dedicated to various composers within the musico-historical section

that told the biographies of the displayed individuals visually with different types of objects and paraphernalia, functioning as “visualized biographies” or “visual anecdotes,” as well as standard exhibitionary devices used in museums around that time that involved creating arrangements of objects to display music histor(iograph)y.



Melanie Strumbl, Spatializing Music Histor(iograph)y: Exhibiting Guido Adler’s Musico-Historical Model at the International Exhibition of Music and Drama, Vienna 1892

Cover picture: composite by Alexander Wilfing of photographs of (1) a display case in the Musée de la musique (Cité de la musique – Philharmonie de Paris) by Elisabeth Magesacher, (2), a set design to Bedřich Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride*, act I (Prague National Theatre, 1883), by courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#), and (3) the Hall of the Gibichungs as depicted in Siegmund Schneider, *Die Internationale Ausstellung für Musik- und Theaterwesen Wien 1892* (Vienna: Moritz Perles, 1894), 153.