

The Instrument Collection of the Gesellschaft der  
Musikfreunde (The Society of Friends of Music)  
in Vienna from 1938 until 1991

# Abbreviations

- **The Society**

Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde

The Society of the Friends of Music

- **The MFA**

Kunsthistorische Museum / Museum of Fine Arts

Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente / Collection of  
Old Musical Instruments

Museum of the  
instrument  
collection of the  
Society 1937

# The Society's Collection of Instruments

- Historically evolved and steadily enlarged collection founded in 1812
- 524 musical instruments (1938)
  - Donations by Emperor Francis Joseph and other Hapsburgs
  - Instruments with sentimental value from the ownership of composers such as Haydn, Brahms, Schumann etc.
  - One of the earliest Cembali from 1546
  - Octobass
  - Lyra guitars
  - Beethoven hearing aids
- etc.

# The Collection of Old Musical Instruments

- Public collection
- Administered by the MFA
- Founded in 1916 and opened in 1921
- Appr. 380 instruments from former Hapsburg ownership
- Closed and put in the museum's depository in 1934
- Contemplations to enlarge the collection by **merging** it with other instrument collections in Vienna already before 1938.

# Historical Outline after the “Anschluss”

- May 1938
  - The private association of the Society was **dissolved and nationalized**
  - Put under provisional administration and incorporated into the ***State Theater and Stage Academy***
- November 1938
  - The collection of instruments of the Society was **removed** from the Musikverein building and **transferred** to the MFA
- October 1939
  - Grand opening of new collection in Palais Pallavicini

# Palais Pallavicini

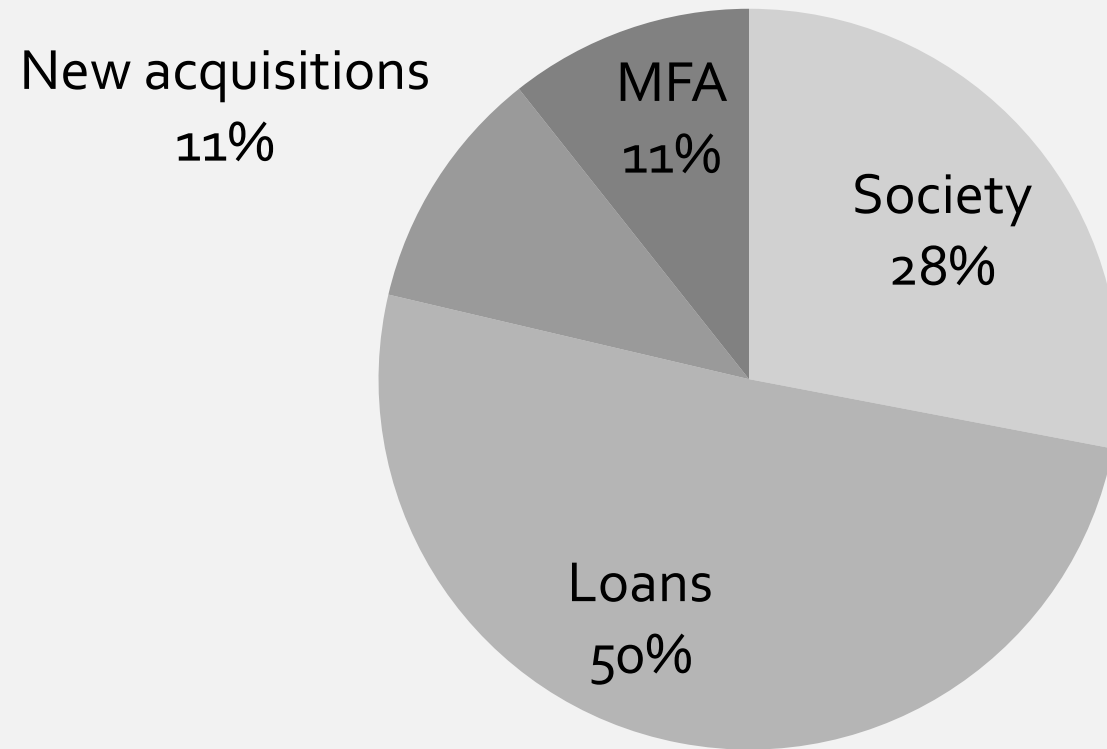
Collection of Old Musical Instruments 1939-1945

Palais Pallavicini 1939

Image: Archive of MFA



# The Origin of the Objects in the Exhibition 1939



# The Reinstatement of the Society in 1945

- The Society **regained** its status as a **private association**
- Noticeable number of **high-level officials** were voted or co-opted in into the directorial board
- Excursus: Dr. Karl Wisoko-Meytsky

## Excursus:

### Dr. Karl Wisoko-Meytsky (\*1885 †1965)

- 1908 Public service
- 1921 State theater administration
- 1924 Ministry of education
- 1924/25 Senior civil servant at the state academia for music
- 1940-1945 Civil servant until revoked
- 1940-1944 Music writer for the Society
- 1946 **Head of the section** of arts at the ministry of education  
Member of the directorate of the Society
- 1949 **General manager** of public cultural and arts collections (MFA, Belvedere etc.)

(Image: Austrian National Library)

# The Road to the 1<sup>st</sup> Agreement 1950

- First reclaims of instruments by the Society in 1945/46 fail
- Informal talks between ministry and MFA under **exclusion** of the Society in 1949
- Both parties showed reluctance in retransferring the collection to the building of the Society
- Weak resistance by the Society since the directorate was manned with high-level officials
- Early draft of agreement **justified in retrospect** the actions imposed on the Society during Austria under National Socialism
- **Sub-committee** to overrule the president's power
- Moments of governmental hold down or suppression of the Society

# The Cancellation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Agreement

- In 1968 MFA **refused** to grant the Society access to their instruments
- MFA obtained legal opinion to reaffirm their position
- Revision of the collection uncovers **negligent conduct** by MFA
- Question of value and liability
- A third of exhibited instruments at the MFA were from the Society
- End of year 1968 the Society eventually **terminates** the agreement
- The Society felt treated like a supplicant or petitioner

# Return and Loss

- 1970 ministerial order to **completely return** the collection to the Society
- 474 out of 526 instruments were still extant
- 268 instruments were returned in 1971
- The director of Society was appointed general director of Vienna state opera
- Avoidance of medial reporting of “tearing apart” an instrument collection?

# Loan Agreement 1991

- Press conference in 1987 by the MFA backfired
- Once again **negligent conduct and disregard of ownership**
- Head of the instruments collection of the MFA was **silenced** after appalling statements
- Genuine interest on all sides for a new contract of loan

# 52 years, 4 months, 15 days

Instruction to hand over the  
instruments (November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1938):

Signed Loan agreement  
(April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1991):



# Summary

“...unified collection of musical instruments in the music city of Vienna...”

„...einer einheitlichen Musikinstrumentensammlung in der Musikstadt Wien...”

Source: **ASM 5/1947:**

Argument by the ministry of education and the MFA for not returning the instruments