



Anne Smith, *Ina Lohr (1903-1983). Transcending the Boundaries of Early Music* (Basel, Schwabe, 2020, ISBN: 9783796541063)

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Basel

This is a book that *had* to be written. And that is meant in a thoroughly positive way. Ina Lohr, ‘Paul Sacher’s assistant’, is a well-known figure in insider circles, who contributed immensely to the creation of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, one of the most important international teaching institutions for Early Music and historically informed performance practice. Lohr made a significant contribution to the emergence of the Basel Chamber Orchestra, which made a name for itself not only in Early Music but also, through regular commissions from the Sacher-family, in the field of New Music as yet another unique Basel contribution to the international music life. However, the exact nature of the contributions of Lohr is not entirely clear even to locals and insiders who did have the privilege of meeting her themselves. Especially, her own compositional activity has so far been carefully left out of the prevailing ‘image’ of the conservatively dressed and coiffed Lohr who taught ‘house music courses’ (the name of teacher training at the time).

Underpinned by extensive archival work in Switzerland and abroad, this Lohr biography, which emerged from an SNF research project led by Jeremy Llewellyn, with the participation of Jed Wentz and Kelly Landerkin, is rich in new knowledge and previously unknown details. At the same time, the biography does not at all claim to react reflectively to new findings in biographical research or life writing. It presents an outline that, according to the introduction, arose more or less automatically from the abundance of the material: Smith’s realization that the ‘structure of the book must of necessity reflect that of [Lohr’s] life’ (XXIV) led to its formal layout: ‘the present order suggested itself’ (XXIV). The impetus behind the book is justifiably reminiscent, of the endeavor to fill ‘gaps’ in historiography that

characterized the academic work of the Second Women's Movement: the book, according to Smith, 'is intended to be a biography of a remarkable woman, one almost forgotten today, who unknowingly served as a link between various of the important musical movements of the first half of the 20th century' (XXI). Whether the emphasis on Lohr's unconscious approach right at the outset of the book does not reinforce prejudices against 'female' activity in music emerges as a fundamental question. Anne Smith, a specialist in 16th-century performance practice and herself a former student and recorder teacher at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, opened up many archive and source material that would not have been available to others. Smith rightly acknowledges that this brings with it a certain bias of perspective, that, according to herself, she was able to overcome during the work whilst getting to know Lohr better.

The book is structured chronologically in eight chapters over more than 500 pages with several appendices which include Lohr's 'Excuse on Solmization for the Intrepid', a compilation of the activities of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis during the years 1933-1939, a list of Lohr's books and articles, and an – impressively long – list of her compositions. It is by and large a retelling of the stages of Lohr's life, 'documented' with numerous quotations from text sources, reaching from her youth in Haarlem, Amsterdam and Nijmegen and her education at the Muziek-Lyceum in Amsterdam, which was influenced by the reform efforts of the singing movement, to her first years in Basel, the war years and finally a reorientation of the SCB after a period of consolidation after the Second World War. The two final chapters are devoted to Lohr's slow detachment from the SCB, her retirement 'in stages' and her reorientation in social work. Chapters 2, 3 and 6 are designed to cross this chronology to some extent. On the one hand they deal with Lohr's religious attitudes, which were closely linked to her musical views, and with her musical 'convictions', which 'locate' her in the midst of the cecilianist currents of the youth music and singing movement, in which religious functionalisation, lay training by singing and pedagogical approaches played a central role. On the other hand, they thematize Lohr's students from Sweden and the Netherlands, with whom she was particularly close and thus contributed to specific dynamics in the Early Music movements in their home countries.

It is pointless to criticize a book that so obviously makes no claim to reflecting recent biographical research or research on life writing on this level - especially since the knowledge gained from reading it nevertheless emerges openly: the biography 'shifts' the image of the emergence of the renowned SCB away from the brilliant,

internationally radiating perfectionism of its founder Paul Sacher (who was also director of the BKO), towards the literally transformative pedagogical and religious work that Ina Lohr carried out for and within the institution. Anne Smith claims to have been involved herself in this transforming effect through her work on the biography, writing that she had to re-perspectivize her old 'pioneering spirit, as if we were discovering the essence of music anew' (XVIII). The fact that the professional demands on the end product of historical performance practice stemmed from a conservatory tradition that was fundamentally opposed to many of the goals of the Early Music movements, is a finding that leaves a strong imprint on this biography from its outset. Its impetus to describe Lohr as someone who opposed several aspects we nowadays automatically associate with the Early Music movement is convincingly conceived and utterly realized. She positioned herself against Early Music's 'scientificity' without a sense of mission, its perfect concert music without a missionary core, its claim of an approximation to the 'intentions of the composer' in favour of a quite Calvinistically influenced inwardness. And again and again Smith successfully attempts to relate Lohr's specific life situation and the specific life conflicts between her own mission, the religious functionalisation of all musical practice and her work as an assistant, to her existence as a woman in a gender-specific way.

It is in this context that, despite the wealth of new insights and materials on Lohr, the greatest criticism arises. Resulting from the often paraphrased and not source-critically classified correspondence between Paul Sacher and Ina Lohr, that documents their 50 year long 'musical marriage' (as they themselves called their partnership), which comprises the longest passages of the biography, the image of Lohr as a 'difficult' person emerges. This material seems to present a woman who repeatedly questions the collaboration with Sacher, who gives herself fully to her work only to collapse physically and psychologically again and again but who cannot exist without it. How condensed and superficial this impression of a 'troubled relationship' really is only gets revealed rather late in the book. The European dimension of Lohr's work only comes into view on p. 297. This places her in the field of New Music on an equal level with Nadia Boulanger, considering her friendships and working relationships with Honegger, Stravinskij, Bartók, Martinů and others. Finally on pp. 340ff, the immense workload she undertook within a period of 6 weeks, assisting, composing, teaching and being socially active, is described in its full extent. Earlier, the impression might have been created that Sacher had involved her in his work on the BKO and SCB together with Lohr's father, who financially

contributed, in a kind of alliance for social security for the unmarried musician. A matter that is finally fundamentally set right by Maja Sacher, Paul's wife, as a birthday greeting to Lohr on her 70th birthday in 1973: 'I believe that the entire measure of your assistance has only completely dawned on Paul in recent years' (422).

As is the case with many histories of traditional institutions generated in-house, the biography simmers for quite a long time in its own juices of an internal Basel perspective. Therefore, although it attempts to fundamentally overwrite the limitations of the traditional image of Ina Lohr, it unfortunately implicitly replicates many of these prejudices about her as a person due to the chosen weighting and the availability of source material. Because the biography 'evades' the gender perspective over long passages, it does not always do justice to the balancing act of describing and exploring the possibilities of female life plans of the 20th century as social 'realities' without simultaneously reinforcing preformed stereotypes.

Given the length of the book, it cannot really be faulted that many aspects of Lohr's personality remain obscure. Nevertheless, it is precisely these perspectives that would have challenged the image of Lohr's 'feminine' bourgeoisie. How did she deal with her family's colonial Indonesian past? What did her illness-related childlessness and unmarried status, which she outspokenly compensated for in her pedagogical work, mean for her profession? Was she really as at peace with the - typically female - anonymity of her contribution to SCB and BKO as she seemed to pretend - not least out of fear of 'gossip'? Was her rejection of professionalism and academic approaches - she impressed the musicological professor in Basel, Karl Nef, to the utmost and was a trained professional musician - not least due to a female self-relegation to her role, which she agonizingly worked on? All this remains unsaid. Contemplating these issues would have enormously enriched this biography of Ina Lohr, which also remains strangely blurred due to only a few photographs and an extremely restrained description of her activity as a composer. Thus, unfortunately, the reading impression is mainly the story of a close, 'troubled working-relationship' between Sacher and Lohr. This portrait of her does not always adequately capture Lohr's impetus and busy life, and leaves some other potential sources of conflict completely out of the picture. For example, the name Wulf Arlt does not appear at all, that of Peter Reidemeister only once. The points of contact with the formative leaders of the SCB after Paul Sacher are, thus, almost completely omitted.

Nevertheless, Anne Smith's biography is, despite quite a few misprints and redundancies, an enriching read, which is perhaps necessary to lead us to more

essential questions concerning Ina Lohr and the beginnings of Early and New Music in Switzerland. It took a long time - too long perhaps - for this book to be written, but it is a captivating and important step in exploring the life of this important multi-faceted artist.