

# TRANSATLANTIC CONNECTIONS: US-AMERICAN MUSIC STUDENTS AT GERMAN CONSERVATORIES, 1843–1918

Veronika Keller

## Abstract

This article provides a brief summary of the method and major findings of my dissertation about the US-American student migration to the German states between 1843 and 1918. The dissertation is entitled “*Here I am in my Mecca*”. *Die US-amerikanische Musikschülermigration nach Deutschland, 1843-1918* and will be published in German in 2022 at Olms Verlag.

As most of the studies about participants in the transatlantic music transfer still concentrate on individuals or, in recent years, networks around certain teachers and music ensembles, the first goal of the dissertation was to show the overall dimensions of the migration. Therefore, student lists were put together, based on handwritten and printed student rosters and other sources by the researched music institutes. Through this process it was possible to find the names of over 3,500 US-American students, both male and female, who studied at German music institutes until 1918.

In a second step, these findings were put into the context of the political, social and, of course, musical histories of both the United States and the German lands, the history of the individual institutes and general questions of gender and music education, and gender and music professions. This was done by focusing more on the macro level than on individual biographies, with the objective of highlighting groups often marginalized in research, such as women or music teachers, who accounted for a large proportion of music students.

The consistent question in this macro-study was why US-American students came in such large numbers to study music in Germany, a time-intensive and, even more important, quite expensive undertaking. In the course of the dissertation, multiple reasons could be identified: on a personal level, many students either had ancestors in Germany or followed their German-educated teachers; on a societal level there was the requirement of music study in Europe, and especially Germany as the home of so many well-known composers and musicians, to experience the unique “musical atmosphere”, something repeated quite often in both individual accounts and the press. Up until the turn of the century this was a basic requirement for taking up a career both on stage as well as in music institutes in the United States. And on the musical level there was the hope of studying under famous teachers (though this ultimately did not come true for many students), to garner initial experiences on stage in student orchestras or vocal ensembles and finally maybe even debut on the German stage.

## Keywords

History of music education – vocal education – conservatories – transatlantic student migration

## Introduction

“Here I am in my Mecca” is not only the title of my dissertation about the US-American student migration to German conservatories between 1843 and 1918, but also the opening sentence of Mabel Daniel’s book *An American Girl in Munich* (Daniels 1905: 5). In this partly fictional, partly factional memoir about her year of study at the *Akademie der Tonkunst* in Munich 1902/1903, she describes both her daily life at the *Akademie* as well as in the Bavarian capital. With her experiences of having to fight for recognition as a woman in class, her daily exchanges with other English-speaking students and sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes very critical commentaries of Munich’s music scene, she is a many-faceted representative of the massive music student migration from the United States to Germany between 1843 and 1918.

The quote also illustrates one of the most important reasons why Americans went to Germany to study music: in their eyes Germany was the center of (classical) music, especially orchestral. For a genuine understanding of this art it was necessary to spend at least some months in the homeland of Mendelssohn, Bach or Wagner. Thus it became something of a requirement for many US-American musicians and music teachers to study at least some months in Germany, either with private teachers or at institutions. In the course of my research, I found the names of over 3,500 people who came to Germany to study music at a conservatory, an academy or *Musikhochschule*. I would argue that this represents only around half of the actual number because student lists of institutes which were known for their huge numbers of US-Americans, like the *Neue Akademie der Tonkunst* in Berlin, have been lost.

## Method of the Dissertation

Up until now most studies approaching transatlantic student migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been centered either around influential composers and musicians who came to Germany such as George W. Chadwick (for his biography see Faucett 2012, esp. 44–72), or describe the international students of famous teachers like Josef Rheinberger in Munich (see Bomberger 1995). In his dissertation about the said student migration, Elam D. Bomberger (1991) also mostly focuses on the biographies of famous teachers and students, which results in an underrepresentation of women, who, from the 1880s onwards, accounted for nearly half of the US-American students coming to Germany. It was therefore the main focus of my dissertation to draw a bigger picture of this transatlantic student migration and highlight its marginalized participants like women in general or music teachers, going beyond mere biographical and anecdotal approaches.

Therefore, ten institutes for professional music education<sup>1</sup>, founded between 1843 and 1883, were selected as the core of the study. These are (as for now) the only conservatories with surviving student lists, either in their printed year books and *Festschriften* or hand-written student rosters and certificates. All these lists included, aside from student names, either their place of birth or last residence and major instruments, sometimes also their

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<sup>1</sup>The terms used by German music institutes (*Musikschule*, *Conservatorium*, *Akademie*) were interchangeable and most of the time only reflected preferences of certain places and times. In this text the English word “conservatory” will therefore be used as a selective term.

teachers and minor subjects. Thus it was possible to follow the fluctuations of numbers of US-American inscriptions throughout the history of the individual conservatories, as well as preferred instruments and teachers, and connect them to the institutions' history. In the end multiple factors were identified regarding why US-Americans came to Germany; these will be presented in the third chapter.

## Professional music education in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany<sup>2</sup>

Up until the modern era, professional music training in German speaking countries mostly took place in monasteries or other clerical institutes, at royal courts, in towns within the so called *Stadt Pfeifer* (town wind bands) and in families (Huschke 2006: 15). With new ideas of the importance of music theory and history, more demanding orchestral pieces by Romantic composers (especially the *Neudeutsche Schule* with composers like Franz Liszt or Richard Wagner) and the increasing cultural and artistic influences by the rising middle class, there were multiple ideas of the institutionalization of the music education in the first half of the 19th century (see Fellerer 1976 and Kapp 2007).

The major turning point of institutionalized music education in Germany was the founding of the *Conservatorium der Musik* in Leipzig 1843. It distinguished itself from other already existing institutions for professional musicians by integrating humanistic ideas of education into its musical curriculum and offering a so-called "full course", which meant adding classes in music theory and history to the usual instrumental and vocal instructions (see Grotjahn 2002). This structure became a model for many later conservatories in German and English-speaking countries as well as in Scandinavia (see Wasserloos 2004). Especially Ernst Friedrich Richter's<sup>3</sup>, *Lehrbuch der Harmonie* (1853) was internationally used and even translated into English by his student John P. Morgan, entitled *Richter's Manual of Harmony* (1867). This is one of the many examples of cultural transfer not only by people themselves but through objects (books) and theories (Keller 2017: 219).

From the beginning, the *Conservatorium* in Leipzig also welcomed female and international students (Leipzig Statuten 1843: § 2 (S. 6), § 7 (S. 8) and § 10 (S. 9)), which is also true of every other conservatory in my study. Only institutes for church music did not allow female students. International students, and therefore also US-Americans, even became a huge economic factor for many German music institutes, as oftentimes they had to pay more for the tuition, or they increased the overall numbers of students.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, some institutes, like the conservatory in Stuttgart, offered English classes in music theory, advertised in US-American music magazines, or teachers on tour in the United States offering auditions for prospective students.

Thanks to the non-centralized character of the German Confederation, dozens of institutes for professional musical education were founded from the 1850s to the 1880s, all of them with a combination of music theory and praxis. Many became internationally known, mainly thanks to important teachers and their methods: at the *Konservatorium* in Stuttgart (founded in 1857) Sigmund Lebert and Ludwig Stark taught their *Clavierschule*, a piano

<sup>2</sup> The term refers to both the German Confederation with its sovereign states and cities until 1871 and the German Empire.

<sup>3</sup> He taught at the Leipzig conservatory from its founding year 1843 till his death in 1879.

<sup>4</sup> For example, at the (privately owned) *Stern'sche Konservatorium* in Berlin, foreigners made up to 25% of the student body at the turn of the century; at the (state financed) *Hochschule* it was still 30% in 1911.

method used in the United States up until the turn of the century; the *Hochschule für Musik* in Berlin (1868) became a center for string players thanks to Joseph Joachim; the *Hoch'sche Konservatorium* in Frankfurt (1878) was famously the school where Clara Schumann and her two daughters taught, which attracted many international female students, especially from Great Britain; for singers, the *Stern'sche Konservatorium* (1850) in Berlin and the *Königliche Conservatorium für Musik* in Dresden (1856) became the most important schools, which will be discussed in chapter four.

## Reasons for studying abroad

There were multiple reasons for students from the United States to take up at least part of their professional music education in Germany. They generally fall into three categories: private, societal and musical/educational.

From both biographies of individual musicians, as well as information in the student rosters about the students' parents or their place of residence, it became clear that many US-born students already had connections to Germany or even the city they chose for their study. Some parents or grandparents were German immigrants and there were also hints of relatives still living Germany. Sometimes students also came to the former schools of their teachers at home, multiple people from one family or town, came to a conservatory together or whole music ensembles. Therefore, word-of-mouth advertising or articles in the press about local students in Germany played a role in the decision to study abroad. Based on the term 'chain migration' I call this phenomenon *Kettenstudium* (chain study).

But it was not only through personal accounts that Germany seemed to be one of the most desirable places to study music for so many US-Americans, as previously described. Many US-American musicians, as well as audiences and the press, thought of Germany as the best place for learning about (classical and especially instrumental) music. This perception was based on German speaking composers and musicians which dominated the concert halls in the United States since the 1850s as well as the widely known concept of a German *Universalmusik*. This axiom of the domination of German instrumental music started to decrease in the 1890s, when a growing number of American musicians and especially composers, such as the afore-mentioned George W. Chadwick, tried to establish their own musical styles independently of European traditions. Fueled by nationalist outbursts in the course of the US-Spanish War in 1898, the music study at the domestic conservatories and colleges became more recognized and fewer students decided to study in Germany. Therefore, it has to be emphasized that the very low numbers of US-American students after 1914 were not caused exclusively by the outbreak of the First World War; they were also the end result of a downward trend which started at the turn of the century (see figure 1). This process of becoming independent from European and especially German traditions can be seen not only in compositions but also in the music educational system in the United States: From the 1840s till the early 1870s there were basically no domestic music institutes, so the first US-American students came to Germany out of pure necessity. Only after the Civil War (1861–1865) more and more music institutes were founded, many of which, such as the *Oberlin Conservatory* or *Boston Conservatory*, were based on German models with tuition by either German or German-educated teachers (see Keller 2017: 216–223). These new conservatories and instrumental schools, as well as music courses at

colleges, universities and so-called normal schools (teacher's seminars) initially increased the demand for well-educated teachers (see Howe 2014: 222–224, 230–232). Together with job opportunities in newly founded orchestras in the 1870s and 1880s, there was a growing demand for well-educated teachers and musicians, leading to rising numbers of US-students at German conservatories between around 1875 and 1895 in all the researched institutes. (See the examples of student numbers at the conservatory in Leipzig and the *Hochschule* in Berlin, figure 1). Only when universities and conservatories started to model their curriculum around the US-American college system rather than that of German *Konservatorien*, did students start to prefer studying in their own country. As a result, first the numbers of students coming to Germany for a full study of three or more years dwindled, and since the turn of the century, so did the numbers of US-Americans coming for an additional refining year to Germany (as Mabel Daniels did).

However, the most important reason for coming to Germany, at least stemming from personal accounts and articles in the media, was the opportunity to study under famous teachers. Nevertheless, and this is one of the main findings of my dissertation, even if these names apparently attracted international students to certain conservatories, not everyone was able to take lessons with the desired teachers. Sometimes students (both international and national) had to take lessons with other instructors first, at the *Hochs'che Konservatorium*, for example, with Clara Schumann's daughters, and if there was insufficient time or money to stay in Germany for a longer time, students had to leave without taking lessons with the bigger names. An analysis of student rosters which also include teachers' names makes it quite clear that only some of the US-American students studied with famous teachers for at least part of their time in Germany. However, in some cases they also could have taken private lessons, which would not be recorded in student rosters or other sources used in the dissertation. Mabel Daniels, for example, studied composition with Ludwig Thuille privately; her official major at the *Akademie* in Munich was singing.

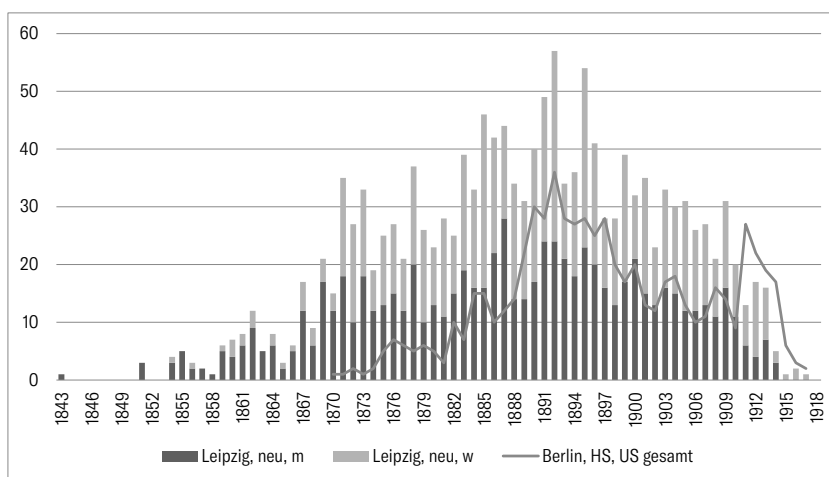


Figure 1: Student enrollment at the conservatory in Leipzig and the *Hochschule* in Berlin. For Leipzig the numbers show the new students for every year, divided into male and female. For the Hochschule it shows the numbers of all US-American students enrolled at once.

## US-American singers at German conservatories

Aside from piano and violin, singing was one of the three core subjects taught at every institute with a “full course”. And though Italy and France were generally more important for vocal education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many US-American singers, both male and female, came to Germany to study and sometimes even debut.

Centers for vocal education were often formed around famous teachers, such as Julius Stern and Jenny Meyer at the *Stern'sche Konservatorium* in Berlin, Maximilian Fleisch at the *Hoch'sche* and the *Raff'sche Konservatorien*, both in Frankfurt, or Anna Schimon-Regan and Auguste Götze in Leipzig. As an example, the vocal education at the *Königliche Conservatorium* in Dresden, for many years taught by Aglaja Orgeni, should be discussed here.

Between the founding year 1857 and 1919, 241 US-students (90 male, 151 female) came to the conservatory in Dresden. Of these, 93 (19 m, 74 f) majored in piano, followed by 66 (17 m, 49 f) in singing and 30 (21 m, 9 f) in Violin. As can be read in the *Prospect* of 1897, vocal students were able to study every branch in Dresden: concert, church, opera, drama and singing instruction (*Prospect* 1897: 5). This wide range was unusual for German institutes and probably a result of the rivalry with the other major conservatory in Saxony, Leipzig, which was internationally known for music theory and its organ classes.

A major focus of vocal education at the conservatory in Dresden, aside from individual voice training, was “Zusammengesang” (literally “singing together”, Dresden *Prospect* 1897: 5), performance practices of ensemble numbers either from operas or oratorios. Advanced students also had the opportunity to perform operas or separate numbers in a subject called “Opern-Bühnenübung” (opera stage practice, Dresden *Satzung* 1891: 37). These ensemble practices were one of the major advantages of studying both at a conservatory as well as in Germany, as many US-American institutes did not offer them up until the turn of the century or did not have such facilities as a concert house or stages. (This is also true for instrumental ensembles and student orchestras.) From these student stages, for some US-Americans it was then just a small leap to debut on the big stage, as exemplified by the career of Edyth Walker (1867–1950): Born in Hopewell (NY), Walker is best known for singing the titular role of Elektra in the UK premiere of Richard Strauss' opera of the same name. From 1890 till 1893 she studied opera and oratorio singing under Aglaja Orgeni and made her opera debut in 1894 in Berlin before being engaged at the *Hofoper* in Vienna. In 1903 she returned to her home country and debuted at the *Metropolitan Opera* in the roles of Amneris in Verdi's *Aida* and Ortrud in Wagner's *Lohengrin*.<sup>5</sup> She had performed both these roles in student productions in Dresden ten years previously (Dresden *Jahresbericht* 1893/1894: 59), which shows how important the repertoire learned at the conservatory was for her later career.

## Conclusion

In my dissertation I was able to show the dimensions of the US-American student migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the major role female students had in this. On a macro-level the work answers the question as to why so many students took upon themselves the long journey over the Atlantic, despite the huge financial expense.

<sup>5</sup> In 1903 she performed as Amneris on 11/30 and 12/5, as Ortrud on 12/12 and 12/18 (<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives>, last accessed 8/30/2021).

While in its method the dissertation has more of a statistical and big(ger) data orientation, it still focuses on only a very narrow research area, namely male and female students from the United States. To put these findings into the bigger picture of both transnational music relations and the history of institutionalized music education, further similar studies regarding students at conservatories in general, women at music institutions or foreigners from different countries would be required. Nonetheless, the current work does suggest some of our perceptions in these areas need modifying, namely that international student exchanges only became a widespread phenomenon after the Second World War and that women did not take part in them or in professional music education in general. The findings also lead to follow-up questions such as why, even though female students have had the opportunity to study music in the same way as male students for over 150 years now, this is not a widely known fact. There is also the issue of why women are still underrepresented when it comes to conducting, composing or playing certain instruments. This shows the continued relevance of the still rather uncharted field of study concerning the history of institutionalized music education and its marginalized participants.

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## About author

**Veronika Keller** is a post doc in Musicology at the University of Koblenz-Landau. In 2017 she finished her dissertation “Here I am in my Mecca” about the US-American music student migration to Germany, 1843–1918 at Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich. Her fields of research include transatlantic cultural connections, music and emotions, reception history and music in media like video games, (Korean) TV-series or movies.

✉ veronikakeller@uni-koblenz.de