

THE CITY WITHOUT JEWS – 100 YEARS FROM PREMIERE

Monday, October 7, 2024, 7:30 pm

Studio Hrdinů

The City Without Jews / Die Stadt ohne Juden (1924, Austria, director: Hans Karl Breslauer)
silent film based on the novel of the same name by Hugo Maximilian Bettauer

music: **Petr Wajsar** (2014)

BERG Orchestra

Anna Jouzová Sommerová, Marko Ferenc, Gabriela Barillová – violin, Kateřina Lískovcová – viola, Helena Velická – cello, Jan Tengler – bass guitar & double bass, Jana Jarkovská – flute, Veronika Coganová – clarinet, Tomáš Bürger – French horn, Tomáš Bialko – trombone, Antonín Procházka – percussion instruments

Petr Wajsar – piano & live electronics

Peter Vrábel – conductor

Michal Hodan – sound design

With many thanks to The Jewish Museum in Prague and Memorial of Silence.

FILM

The film **The City Without Jews** (*Die Stadt ohne Juden*), made by Austrian director and producer Hans Karl Breslauer (1888–1965), was based on the novel of the same name by author, journalist, and bon vivant Maximilian Hugo Bettauer (1872–1925). For decades it was assumed to be lost, until an incomplete copy was discovered at the Nederlands Filmmuseum in 1991.

The film premiered in 1924 in two phases, and in neither case did it have much luck. Its first release to movie theaters in July met with technical difficulties, which ended with a falling out between Breslauer and Bettauer, who immediately thereafter distanced himself from the film. A second premiere took place on October 11, 1924, in a movie theater in the Vienna suburb of Neustadt. This showing was met by a violent protest from the local Hakenkreuzler who attacked attendees and disrupted the event by throwing stink bombs into the theater. The premiere in Berlin in 1926 provoked protests as well, and the film was also excoriated in the liberal press as tendentious and promoting negative stereotypes. The Berlin fiasco and the prior public protests and scandals eventually led to the film being banned in the United States and the cancellation of its New York premiere planned for 1928.

The City Without Jews got a second life in Amsterdam in 1933 shortly after the advent of sound film. What fortuitous circumstances revived interest in a silent movie? It was not a marketing ploy but the radical transformation of the political situation in Germany that provided the impetus. The Theater Carré, which staged operettas and cabarets, decided in mid-July 1933 to respond to events in Germany by holding a series of public screenings of the film that

included an opening recital by the chief cantor of Warsaw Gershon Sirota. The program was explicitly conceived to rouse the Dutch public from their indifference toward the growing threat of the anti-Semitism that had officially become a part of German politics and state propaganda. The critics naturally did not give the initiative a positive reception. They accused the organizers of doing a disservice by showing a badly acted, old German silent film larded with folkloric motifs and intertitles hastily translated into poor Dutch. The critics complained that the film's reputed low production values, its scenes coming off as comical rather than tragic, made light of the gravity of the situation German Jews found themselves in, and as such it was counterproductive. The only bright spot, they said, was that by a fluke the author of the novel on which the film was based, Hugo Bettauer, had the foresight years ago to predict what was actually coming to pass...

Whether this was indeed a fluke is debatable, but it's clear that Bettauer considered this first of his four "grand Vienna novels" that he wrote and published between 1922 and 1924 a satire. As he explained in *Die Börse*, one of the many periodicals he regularly contributed to, his immediate motivation to write the novel was graffiti on the walls of one of Vienna's public toilets that said, "Hinaus mit den Juden!" (Jews out!). This anonymous eruption of zeal was the trigger that activated Bettauer's imagination. As he put it: "The image of this jovial young man, the kind we often see on posters adorned with a jaunty swastika, the kind we often hear on the tram commenting aloud on what the *Wiener Stimmen* has to say about the Christian-German purification program, put the idea in my head of what would happen to Vienna if all the Jews actually took the calls for them to leave seriously."

And what would happen? The film satirically answers this, and save a couple of unnecessary modifications its plot is largely faithful to the novel, which teases out all the implications of such an exodus down to the last detail.

A narcissistic, rather inept politician, the populist chancellor of the fictional Republic of Utopia, is under pressure by mass street protests and the anti-Jewish mood of conservative parliamentarians, who fashion themselves as defenders of Christian morality and traditional values while vehemently promoting the idea of Greater Germany disseminated mostly in louche pubs. In a confidential conversation with the head of the Church, the chancellor mentions that the situation has become intolerable and one way to quickly resolve it would be for the government to heed the vox populi calling for the expulsion of Jews. When he enacts this plan, however, it gradually becomes clear that those who lent the capital city of Utopia, which is easily recognizable as 20th-century Vienna, its unmistakable cosmopolitan élan and bolstered its position as a political, commercial, and cultural center, were the Jews. And these were not only the wealthiest Jews, but Jews of all social strata. Without them, the city loses more than its allure and diversity, it also suffers economic and intellectual decline and ends up politically isolated. With provincial philistinism now rampant and the theaters putting on the tacky farces written by parochial moralists for a cast of earthy soubrettes and country boys, with the show windows of boutiques that once displayed the latest in Parisian fashion now filled with long johns and shapeless bodices of fustian and loden, and the elegant cafés now dives serving cheap booze and beer, the news reaching the chancellery paints an ever more dire picture. Business and trade were dwindling, inflation was on the rise, and the currency was mired in a downward spiral. The plot thickens and culminates in the madhouse scenes in which the obstinate anti-Semite and parliamentarian from the Greater German Party

begins to deliriously rave that he is a Zionist. Though it has been lost, the film, like the book, has a happy ending (the final sequence has been reconstructed with stills and text). Unfortunately Bettauer's otherwise chillingly prescient vision in reality did not have a happy end.

The digitized version of the film was reconstructed from an incomplete release print that was found in the Film Museum in Amsterdam. It totaled six reels of celluloid measuring 1 635m in length. When compared with the archival records that list the Vienna release print at 2 400m, then clearly about 750m of film have been lost. The film was composed in "virage," a process of color tinting, soaking the film in dye and staining with emulsion, or toning, which replaced the silver particles in the emulsion with color pigments. Particular sequences of the film have their own particular tint, and this color coding becomes an integral component of the narrative. The German intertitles are new, and in some cases they are taken directly from the novel. The Czech and English intertitles were translated specifically for the screening in Prague. The restored version of the film was reconstructed and digitized by the Filmarchiv Austria, which concurrently published a comprehensive study as part of their series Film und Text: Guntram Geser, and Armin Loacker, eds. *Die Stadt ohne Juden*. Vienna: Filmarchiv Austria, 2000.

MAXIMILIAN HUGO BETTAUER: LIFE AS AN ADVENTURE NOVEL

Hugo Bettauer (1872–1925) was born in Baden bei Wien the youngest of three children of the Jewish stockbroker Arnold Bettauer and his wife Anna, née Wecker. Bettauer's father died when he was only a year old, and his mother moved with the children to Vienna, where from 1886 he attended the Kaiser-Franz-Joseph Gymnasium. Upon reaching the age of eighteen in 1890, he converted to Protestantism and volunteered for a year of service with the Imperial Tyrolean Rifle Regiments. Evidently subjected to bullying, he deserted after five months. After this episode, the entire family relocated to Zürich. It was here that Bettauer became interested in journalism, and in short order he began his studies in this field. In 1896, he married the love of his life from Vienna, Olga Steiner, and after Bettauer's mother died the two traveled to the United States. This first trip to America marked the beginning of his quick rise in the ranks of journalists and writers, yet not without its share of scandals and dramatic twists and turns.

At the beginning of 1899, Hugo and Olga Bettauer returned to Europe and settled in Berlin, where he tried to make a name for himself as a journalist. His son, Gustav Heinrich, was born in the middle of that year, but his marriage was falling apart, caused to some extent by the fact that he had lost nearly all his wealth on bad investments. During his time as a journalist for the *Berliner Morgenpost* he was involved in a scandal that ultimately led to his being sued in 1901 for defamation, and when found guilty, he was banished from Prussia.

After leaving Berlin, Bettauer first went to Munich, where he worked for the cabaret Die elf Scharfrichter, and then to Hamburg, where he wrote for a food magazine. He met his second wife, Helene Müller, at this time, and after the wedding they went overseas, settling in New York where he worked as a reporter for two German newspapers, *Deutsche Zeitung* and the *New Yorker Staatszeitung*. He became a father for the second time in 1904 when another son, Reginald Parker, was born. In February 1907 Bettauer began to contribute to the *New Yorker Morgen-Journal*, which targeted German-speaking immigrants and serialized several of his

popular novels: *Im Kampf ums Glück* (The Struggle for Happiness); *Im Schatten des Todes* (In the Shadow of Death); *Aus den Tiefen der Welstadt* (From the Depths of the Metropolis).

Bettauer returned to Vienna in 1910 as a correspondent for the *New Yorker Morgen-Journal* while also writing for the newspaper *Die Zeit*. He tried to enlist in the army in 1914 but was rejected on grounds that he was an American citizen. He spent the years 1914–1918 as editor of the liberal daily *Neue Freie Presse*, and after the war he continued his work as a correspondent for *New York American* and *New Yorker Staatszeitung*, also working with the American Relief Committee for Sufferers in Austria. The apex of Bettauer's career as both a journalist and novelist was in 1920. Even though his literary output no doubt belongs in the entertainment genre, not all of his work can be called pulp, as it was labeled by the literary and a few of the film critics of the day. During this period Bettauer was pumping out three to five novels a year, which were first released in magazine installments and then later in book form, with many being adapted for film (for example, *Faustrecht* (Law of the Jungle) and *Hemmungslos* (Unscrupulous), both from 1920).

Between 1922 and 1924 Bettauer published in succession four of his "grand Vienna novels". *The City Without Jews* came out first and was followed by *Der Kampf um Wien* (Fight for Vienna, 1922), *Die freudlose Gasse* (The Joyless Street, 1923), and *Das entfesselte Wien* (Vienna Unleashed, 1924). In February 1924, he and Rudolf Olden (1885–1940), a fellow journalist, writer, human rights activist, and pacifist, began to publish their own magazine *Er und Sie. Wochenschrift für Lebenskultur und Erotik* (He and She: A Magazine for Lifestyle and Eroticism), which uniquely for that time addressed generally ignored taboo topics such as prostitution, homosexuality, abortion, as well as unemployment, homelessness, and other acute social problems faced by the young Austrian state exhausted by the First World War.

As soon as this magazine began to appear, Bettauer became the target of rank anti-Semitic attacks. A representative of the Christian Socialists, Anton Orel, wrote this about him in March 1924: "The Jew Bettauer has begun to publish his filthy Jewish magazine, which much like a profiteer exploits the squalor of others, and only deepens it and in typically Jewish fashion makes money off it." Indeed, similar attacks on Bettauer were not isolated. Another such text appeared in April 1925 on the pages of the anti-Semitic fortnightly *Der Weltkampf*, published by one of the later chief ideologues of the Third Reich, Alfred Rosenberg. The squib was titled "Der Fall Bettauer: Ein Musterbeispiel jüdischer Zersetzungstätigkeit" (The Case of Bettauer: A Perfect Example of Subversive Jewish Activity). Rosenberg wrote that Bettauer was a "typical example of Jewish degeneracy and perversion".

Unfortunately the increasing assaults both verbal and in print did not stop there. On March 10, 1925, Bettauer was attacked at the magazine's office by Otto Rothstock, a dental technician and fanatical supporter of the NSDAP. He shot Bettauer several times, and after two weeks of fighting for his life in a Vienna hospital, Bettauer died of his wounds. Though there was plenty of speculation as to the motives, they were never entirely made clear. Rothstock stated that he was incensed by Bettauer's evident moral laxness and, as he literally put it, impertinence. Rothstock was convicted, but the court determined that he had been insane at the time he committed the murder. He was therefore sent to a psychiatric hospital and at the end of May 1927 was given his unconditional release without further explanation.

MUSIC

The new score for *The City Without Jews* was created in 2014. It was commissioned by BERG Orchestra from composer Petr Wajsar for the “Amsterdam” version of the film and it was premiered in collaboration with The Jewish Museum in Prague on October 13, 2014 at the Spanish Synagogue. For this year's centenary of the film's premiere, the music for the originally missing footage was to be added, but this turned out to be completely impossible – the Paris copy is so different in dozens of small details that a new score would have to be created for the entire film. Thus, also in the centenary year of the premiere, we decided to screen again the shorter version of the 1933 film.

Petr Wajsar on the score for *The City Without Jews*:

Like many of my colleagues, I've been asked by a number of Prague's film clubs to accompany a silent-film screening on the piano. So when BERG Orchestra commissioned a score for this film, it did not take long for the entire concept of the evening to come to me (actually, it did, but it sounds much better to say it didn't). The idea came to me at a music festival where there was a sound installation with an old upright piano that you could play. I spent many long intimate moments with the piano nostalgically recalling bygone eras, and caught in its spell, I decided it should have a solo part in the score. The composition literally calls for an out-of-tune piano so that the authenticity of the sound would have the greatest effect.

Composer, singer, and instrumentalist **Petr Wajsar** (*1978) moves freely across a number of musical genres. He is a sought-after composer and in addition to his compositional work, he plays the piano and bass guitar, he is a singer, lyricist and arranger. musician. He studied composition at the Prague Conservatory, the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory, and HAMU. His collaborators include the Czech Philharmonic, the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, or the Prague Spring Festival. He has received several awards for his work with the a capella vocal sextet Skety, the Czech Lion Award for his film music for the film *Hastrman* and was nominated for the Alfréd Radok Award for his music for the musical *Pornohvězdy*. This September, Václav Petr and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra gave the premiere of *Violoncelloops*, his concerto for cello and symphony orchestra at the Dvořák Prague Festival. The BERG Orchestra has already commissioned and premiered eleven of his compositions and a number of arrangements. To name but a few, his composition *Eight Movements on Fans* on texts by Paul Claudel (2012, NUBERG competition – main prize and public prize), his orchestral work with video *Drum'n'Berg* (2007, NUBERG competition – public prize) or his composition *Infantaria* for ensemble and electronics (2022).

www.wajsar.cz

BERG Orchestra, one of the leading Czech music ensembles, has a specific mission of promoting new music and attracting new audiences to it. It also mixes music with other arts like dance, theatre, film etc. The orchestra was founded on initiative of conductor Peter Vrábek and performs not only at regular concert halls but is constantly searching for new spaces for music. Its events took place for example at a future metro station or a former sewage plant. So far it has presented more than two hundred new works in world premieres commissioned primarily with the very best Czech composers of younger generations and gave even many more Czech premieres by internationally renowned composers (eg. *Black on White* by Goebbels, *An Index of Metals* by Romitelli, *Poeme symphonique* by Ligeti etc.). It also searches for new event formats, presents soundwalks or

educational activities for all generations. BERG Orchestra collaborates with great artists and important organizations including the National Theater in Prague or the Czech Radio. In 2021 it won the prestigious Prix Italia prize for its inventive and playful Music for Sirens project.

www.berg.cz

A native of Slovakia, conductor **Peter Vrábek** lives and works in the Czech Republic. He founded BERG Orchestra in 1995, which thanks to him has become a respected ensemble of contemporary and twentieth-century music. Collaborating with the very best Czech composers on various projects, Vrábek has created opportunities for a younger generation of composers and performers. He is the recipient of the Gideon Klein Prize. In 2010, BERG Orchestra and its artistic director Peter Vrábek were commended for artistic excellence and the promotion of Czech music by the Czech section of the International Music Council of UNESCO.

COME TO THE NEXT EVENT OF OUR 2024 SEASON!

THE FABRICATION OF LIGHT | ... from darkness into light
Monday, November 4 @ 7:30pm, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University

Chaya Czernowin – The Fabrication of Light (Czech premiere)
BERG Orchestra & Peter Vrábek – conductor

"This is not a piece. It's a monster. But it's so amazing!"
(Enno Poppe, composer and conductor of the world premiere performance)

An exceptional hour-long composition by composer Chaya Czernowin in the pure space of the atrium of the Faculty of Humanities. Created during the time of the covid shock, the work embodies the artist's strong connection to nature and has been performed in many countries in the short time since its creation in 2020. BERG Orchestra will present the Czech premiere of this sound meditation, which leads the listener from darkness into light.

This concert takes place in collaboration with the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University.

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texts: Michaela Sidenberg / The Jewish Museum in Prague (on film and H. Bettauer) and Eva Kesslová

English translation: Howard Sidenberg