



Image: <https://hermannleopoldi.at/>, accessed December 29, 2025.

## HERMANN LEOPOLDI

(1888—1959)

by Ruth Jolanda Weinberger

### Executive Summary



Image:

<https://www.buchenwald.de/en/geschichte/biografien/ltg-ausstellung/hermann-leopoldi>, accessed December 29, 2025.

Hermann Leopoldi, born Hersch Kohn on August 15, 1888, in Vienna, Austria, was a composer and cabaret pianist. He was one of Vienna's best-known interwar musical humorists, as well as a songwriter and performer whose ear for the *Wienerlied* made him a household name. After the March 1938 *Anschluss*, Austria's annexation with Germany, he was arrested and deported first to Dachau and then to the Buchenwald concentration camp. In 1939 he was released and escaped to the United States.

Austria's *Anschluss* severed him from his livelihood by excluding him, along with all Jewish composers, from Austria's performing-rights system (AKM), a bureaucratic form of cultural expropriation that cut off royalties and visibility. In addition to physical persecution and forced career restrictions, some of his cultural and artistic belongings were confiscated by the Nazis, including his *Bösendorfer* piano.

After the war, in 1947, Leopoldi resumed his career and decided to return to Vienna. His return led to a postwar career that became a symbol of cultural reconstruction, with the official state of Austria later honoring him with the Decoration of Honor in 1958.

Hermann Leopoldi died on June 28, 1959.

## Biographical Background

Hermann Leopoldi was born Hersch Kohn on August 15, 1888, in Meidling, Vienna's 12<sup>th</sup> district. Early on he learned to play the piano from his musician father, Leopold, and began performing as a bar pianist in his teens. His father performed under the stage name “*Leopold Leopoldi*.”

In 1911, Hermann Leopoldi married his wife Eugenie Kraus (1894–1982). A year later, in 1912, his son Norbert (1912–1992) was born, followed by his daughter Gertrude (1915–1992). His third son, Ronald Leopoldi, was born ten years after the war, in 1955, to his partner Helly Möslein, with whom he returned to Vienna after having emigrated to New York. Prior to the war, the family lived at Marxergasse 25 in Vienna's 3<sup>rd</sup> district.

In 1914, during World War I, Hermann Leopoldi was drafted into the army, specifically to the Imperial and Royal Infantry Regiment number 4, labeled the “*Hoch— und Deutschmeister*”.<sup>1</sup> There, he soon began performing as a piano humorist and bandleader in frontline variety shows.

Two years after the beginning of World War I, in 1916, Leopoldi gave his first major performance at the Vienna establishment “Ronacher.”<sup>2</sup>



Image: "Tag der Österreichischen Legion" - Wien, Heldenplatz, 2. April 1938. Source: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek/Bildarchiv) - 6/6

In 1921, the Leopoldis officially changed their name from Kohn to Leopoldi, a change that affected all family members<sup>3</sup> and was—in part—to obscure the family's Jewish origins.<sup>4</sup> A year later, in 1922, together with his brother Ferdinand, Hermann co—founded the cabaret “Leopoldi—Wiesenthal,” and became a leading composer and performer of the *Wienerlied* (Vienna song). Aside from Leopoldi, other cabaretists also performed there, including Fritz Grünbaum<sup>5</sup>, Karl Valentin and Armin

<sup>1</sup> Gedenkort, *Hermann Leopoldi*, <https://gedenkort.at/personen/9f679905-3f57-41ee-93c0-18ce680e21ca?>, accessed October 27, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the musical theatre Ronacher, see: <https://www.musicalvienna.at/en-us/about-us/ronacher>

<sup>3</sup> Österreichisches Kabarettarchiv, *Hermann Leopoldi*, <https://www.kabarettarchiv.at/Biografie-Hermann-Leopoldi>, accessed October 24, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Moser, “Hermann Leopoldi: The Life of a Viennese Pianist Humorist by Georg Traska and Christoph Lind (review),” *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 47.1 (Spring 2014): 159-160.

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Grünbaum (1880, Brno-1941, Dachau) was an Austrian-Jewish cabaret performer, librettist, songwriter, actor and master of ceremonies. He amassed a prominent art collection in the inter-war years, which the Nazis looted. He was later deported and murdered during the Holocaust. For more information, see: Christoph Wagner-Trenkwitz, Marie-Theres Arnbom, “*Griß mich Gott! Fritz Grünbaum 1880-1941*,” Vienna: Brandstätter Vienna, 2005; <https://www.lexikon-provenienzforschung.org/en/grunbaum-franz-friedrich>, accessed October 27, 2025.

Berg. By 1925, the establishment had to close for financial reasons.<sup>6</sup>

From that time onwards, Leopoldi focused on composition and worked with librettists such as Fritz Löhner-Beda.<sup>7</sup> As of 1929, his performance partner was Betja Milskaja, with whom he performed in Berlin, Paris, Budapest, Bucharest, Prague and Vienna.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1930s, he began to record his songs and toured widely. Among his better-known compositions were the songs “In einem kleinen Café in Hernals” (The Little Café Down the Street), “Schnucki, ach Schnucki,” and many others. His style epitomized Viennese culture, humor and wit - a cosmopolitan cabaret world that Nazism sought to erase.

In 1937, just one year prior to Austria’s March 13, 1938 *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany, Leopoldi was awarded the Silver Medal of Merit.<sup>9</sup>

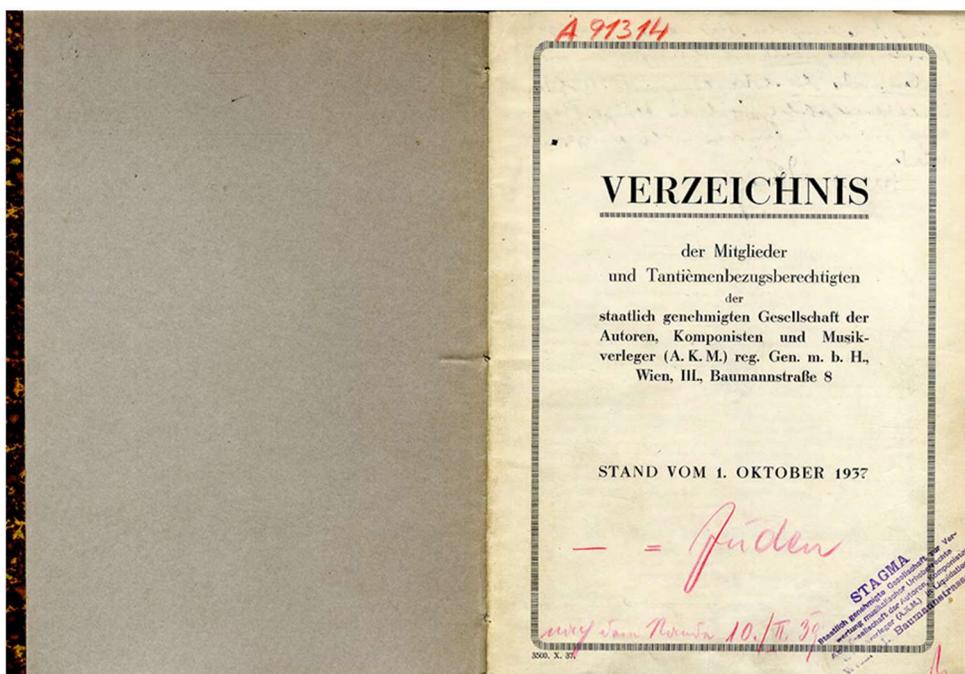


Image.

[https://orelfoundation.org/images/articles/AKMSTAGMA\\_Blacklist\\_City\\_of\\_Vienna\\_Library\\_Shapre\\_au.pdf](https://orelfoundation.org/images/articles/AKMSTAGMA_Blacklist_City_of_Vienna_Library_Shapre_au.pdf), accessed December 29, 2025.

To escape the imminent invasion of the German Wehrmacht and the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany, Hermann Leopoldi left during the night of March 11, 1938, for an already planned performance in Brno on March 12. The train, which was reportedly crowded with refugees, including the performer and art collector Fritz

<sup>6</sup> Österreichisches Kabarettarchiv, *Hermann Leopoldi*, <https://www.kabarettarchiv.at/Biografie-Hermann-Leopoldi>, accessed October 24, 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Fritz Löhner-Beda (born Bedřich Löwy) (1883 in Ústí nad Orlicí, Bohemia–1942, Auschwitz) was an Austrian Jewish librettist, lyricist and writer whose popular song-lyrics and operetta libretti made him one of Vienna’s most successful light-culture figures of the 1920s. Following the *Anschluss*, he was arrested in April 1938, and transported first to Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camp, and in December 1942 beaten to death in Auschwitz. For more information see: <https://www.buchenwald.de/en/geschichte/biografien/ltg-ausstellung/fritz-loehner-beda>, accessed October 27, 2025; <https://gedenkort.at/en/persons/62207298-79b3-41c4-93f2-9296ce50f961?>, accessed October 27, 2025; <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/central-europe/buchenwald/lhner-bedafritz/>, accessed October 27, 2025.

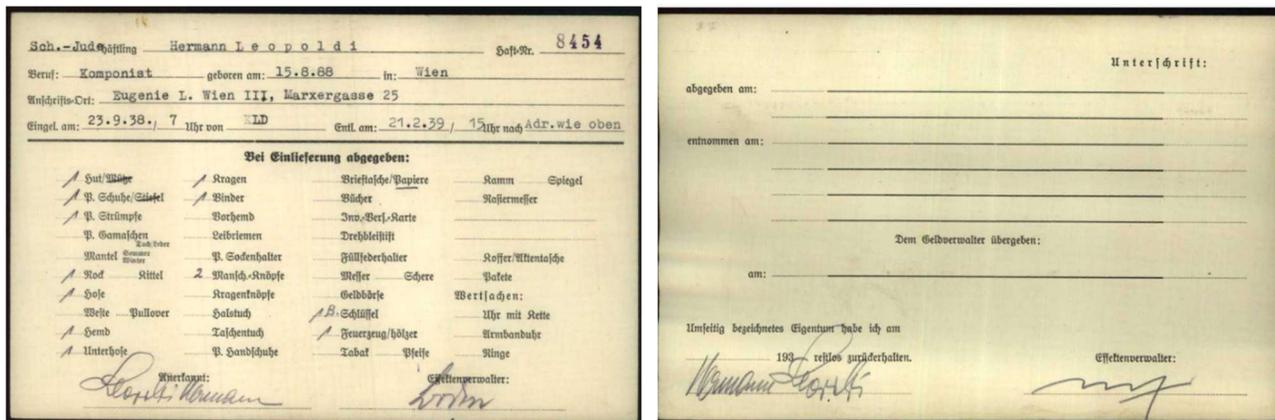
<sup>8</sup> Gedenkort, *Hermann Leopoldi*, <https://gedenkort.at/personen/9f679905-3f57-41ee-93c0-18ce680e21ca?>, accessed October 27, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Österreichisches Kabarettarchiv, *Hermann Leopoldi*, <https://www.kabarettarchiv.at/Biografie-Hermann-Leopoldi>, accessed October 24, 2025.



During the Nazi era STAGMA generally banned Jews from membership. It was administered by the Reich Culture Chamber (*Reichskulturkammer*), and its Reich Music Chamber (*Reichsmusikkammer*), all under the direction of Joseph Goebbels and the Ministry of Propaganda.<sup>6</sup>

For artists like Leopoldi, this meant immediate loss of royalties, performance clearances, and legal standing in the music field, an expropriation of intellectual property income.



Images: Individuelle Unterlagen Männer Buchenwald, Doc ID: 6474877 (HERMANN LEOPOLDI), online at: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/de/document/6474877>, accessed December 29, 2025.

### Confiscation of Herman Leopoldi’s cultural property and subsequent arrest

Approximately a month prior to Hermann Leopoldi’s arrest and subsequent imprisonment, the Nazis promulgated the so-called *Vermögenserkklärungsgesetz* (“Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden”) on April 26, 1938, which obligated Jews to declare their property.<sup>13</sup>

Even though detailed household inventories for Hermann Leopoldi’s apartment and the subsequent looting of it have not (yet) surfaced publicly, his case fits with other documented Aryanization and looting patterns in which arrests coincided with property seizures. It is likely that at the time of his arrest, some of his cultural property was looted, including his *Bösendorfer* piano.

After the war ended, Hermann Leopoldi recalled the initial confiscations as “...one day, we were sitting at home as usual, four men, three with mounted bayonets, forced their way into our apartment and confiscated everything of any value. My wife even had to remove the rings from her fingers and hand them over. After they had stolen the last money straight from my pocket, they left, making a dreadful racket.”<sup>14</sup>

Shortly before Leopoldi’s imprisonment, he and his wife requested permits to emigrate to the United States. Considering that Eugenie’s parents had already emigrated in 1930, their application

<sup>13</sup> NS-Quellen-Materialien zum Nationalsozialismus, *Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden*, [http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz\\_anzeigen\\_detail.php?gesetz\\_id=29310&action=B\\_Read](http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz_anzeigen_detail.php?gesetz_id=29310&action=B_Read), accessed October 27, 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth Leopoldi, *Herman Leopoldi. Composer, Viennese Cabaret Pianist and Incurable Optimist*, Berlin, Leipzig, Hentrich & Hentrich – Centrum Judaicum, pp. 37-38.

status was relatively straightforward, as Eugenie's parents could provide necessary assurances and travel permits.<sup>15</sup>

However, on May 24, 1938, shortly before the Leopoldis were finally able to escape, Hermann Leopoldi was taken from his apartment at 6 am to the police station for "questioning" and from there to the emergency prison in Karajangasse.<sup>16</sup> His arrest was partly because he was believed to be a sympathizer, if not supporter, of Austria's regime under its chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg.<sup>17</sup>

At the police station, he was questioned regarding the latter. Leopoldi later recalled how he was asked if he sang for the *Fatherland Front*, or if he had intimate relationships with Aryan women. "I'm sure it mattered none what answer I gave to any of these questions," he later remembered.<sup>18</sup>

Leopoldi remained at the emergency prison until May 31, 1938, after which he was sent to the Dachau concentration camp, where he remained until September 22, 1938. Following that, he was transferred to the Buchenwald concentration camp and registered with the number 8454.

Hermann Leopoldi later described his transport to Dachau as, "Then followed the murderous ride to Dachau. What took place on this trip, the sorts of tortures, is, in its inhumanity, indescribable, but nevertheless the following incidents should make clear to you just how favored I was by good fortune in everything I undertook. Jammed into a compartment with closed windows, drawn curtains and no air to breathe, we had to sit for hours there, continuously staring into the light. Anyone whose eyes fell closed from exhaustion was simply beaten bloody. Later on, each of us were interrogated: 'What are you in civilian life?' If you said 'merchant', you were brutalized as a swindler, and if you were a doctor, the worst thing of all, you quite simply got all your teeth bashed out. When they came to me, I spontaneously said 'Volkssänger,' whereupon they left me unmolested. That was my first stroke of luck on this trip. Despite everything, the singing continued and became a permanent arrangement in Dachau."<sup>19</sup>

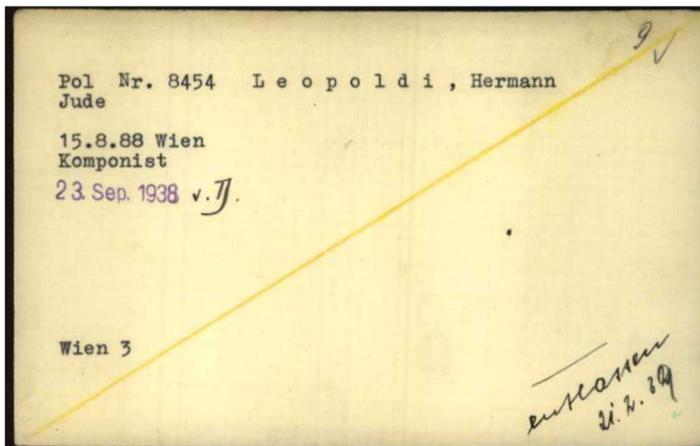


Image: Individuelle Unterlagen Männer Buchenwald, Doc ID: 6474878 (HERMANN LEOPOLDI), online at: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/de/document/6474878>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Georg Traska, Christoph Lond, *Hermann Leopoldi. Hersch Kohn. Eine Biographie*, Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2012, p. 198.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Leopoldi, "Hermann Leopoldi and the Buchenwald Hymn," *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*, 133 (2021): 97-99, online at: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/10446>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Holocaust Encyclopedia, "Nazi Territorial Aggression: The Anschluss," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-territorial-aggression-the-anschluss>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>18</sup> Traska, *Hermann Leopoldi*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Leopoldi, "Hermann Leopoldi and the Buchenwald Hymn," *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*, 133 (2021): 97-99, online at: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/10446>, accessed December 29, 2025.

Already in Dachau, Leopoldi, together with other known prisoners, such as Fritz Grünbaum, Paul Morgan and Fritz Löhner-Beda, performed music. He later recalled that they went from block to block to entertain their companions on their days off work.<sup>20</sup>

### From Dachau to Buchenwald

On September 22, 1938, Leopoldi was transferred to the Buchenwald concentration camp. He later recalled that Buchenwald was “*the absolute opposite*” from Dachau, as it “*was impossible to know from one day to the next whether you had done something punishable, and so you always lived in fear of doing something that you could or would be penalized for, even if this fear was an unconscious one.*” He further remembered how Buchenwald—again, as opposed to Dachau—had no norms, and was “*run with unbridled arbitrariness*”<sup>21</sup> by Commander Karl Koch<sup>22</sup> and Arthur Rödl.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, it was in the Buchenwald concentration camp where he composed, together with lyricist Fritz Löhner-Beda, the “Buchenwald March.”<sup>24</sup> The march-style song, although written and composed by Jews at the behest of a supposed competition ordered in December 1938 by Lagerführer Arthur Rödl<sup>25</sup>, was embraced by the SS guards, who ordered the camp band to play it as prisoners marched to and from forced labor. Hermann Leopoldi later recalled that “*we couldn’t believe our ears. Once over our astonishment, we engaged in a camp-wide competition that was without parallel. Among other things, I wrote, together with Dr. Beda, the Buchenwald march, which the commandant liked best and which he accepted. No doubt that won us the competition, but we never did get the promised prize of 10 marks. This march now became his favorite song, so that we had to sing it at all times and on all occasions. Naturally, my comrades and I sang the song with tremendous enthusiasm, feeling the revolutionary spirit within it.*”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Leopoldi, *Herman Leopoldi*, p. 49.

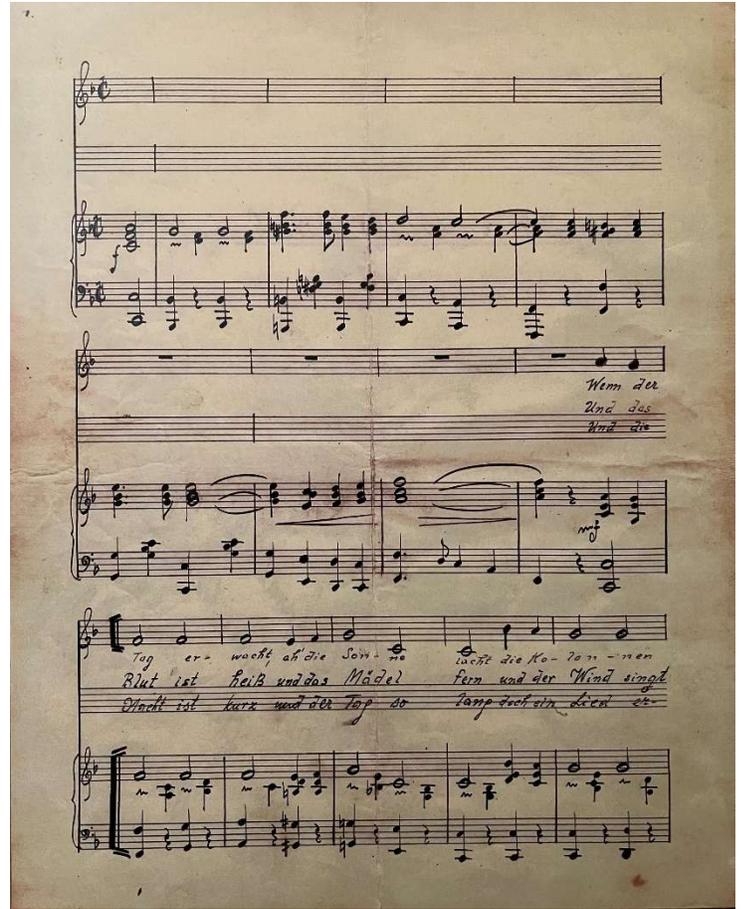
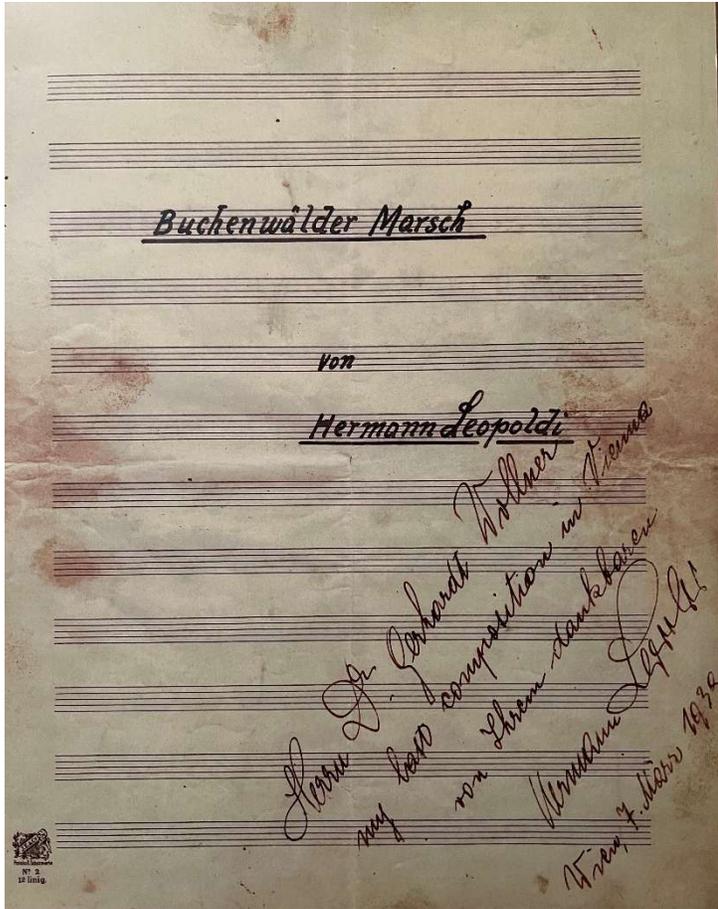
<sup>22</sup> <https://www.buchenwald.de/en/geschichte/historischer-ort/konzentrationslager/ss-fuehrersiedlung>, accessed January 13, 2026.

<sup>23</sup> <https://gedenkstaette-sachsenburg.de/kompass/taeter/arthur-roedl/>, accessed January 13, 2026.

<sup>24</sup> To listen to the Buchenwaldlied, see: <https://holocaustmusic.org/places/camps/central-europe/buchenwald/buchenwaldlied/>, accessed October 20, 2025.

<sup>25</sup> Music and the Holocaust, *Buchenwaldlied*, <https://holocaustmusic.org/places/camps/central-europe/buchenwald/buchenwaldlied/>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Leopoldi, “Hermann Leopoldi and the Buchenwald Hymn,” *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire* [En ligne], 133.2021 (25 February 2023), online at: <http://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/10446>, accessed October 27, 2025; see also: Georg Traska, Christoph Lond, *Hermann Leopoldi. Hersch Kohn. Eine Biographie*, Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2012, chapter: “Buchenwälder Marsch. Dachau und Buchenwald,” pp. 180-197.



Images: Buchenwälder Marsch, 1938. Source: Private Property, Estate Administration Hermann Leopoldi

The guards, seemingly unaware of the subversive message of the song's final verses, ordered the prisoners to sing the song numerous times a day.<sup>27</sup>

Hermann Leopoldi rarely spoke about his imprisonment. However, in 1949, he recalled his incarceration and concluded that he was only been able to survive nine months of concentration camps due to luck and a guardian angel by his side. He concluded that “*what happened on this journey, the torment, torture and harassment the detainees were put through are unutterable in their inhumaneness.*”<sup>28</sup>

On February 21, 1939, he was released from Buchenwald after his family secured an affidavit enabling him to emigrate to New York. There, he reunited with them and began rebuilding his career, including performing English-language versions of his Viennese songs. Leopoldi reached Ellis Island in New York on March 2, 1939.<sup>29</sup> In New York he also ran a café for émigré artists, before returning to Vienna in 1947 with his stage and life partner Helly Möslein.

<sup>27</sup> Leopoldi, *Hermann Leopoldi*, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Hermann Leopoldi In *Ellis Island and Other New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*, <https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-10512-22071571/hermann-leopoldi-in-ellis-island-other-new-york-passenger-lists>, accessed October 20, 2025.

LIST No. 11

LIST OF IN-BOUND PASSENGERS  
(United States Citizens and Nationals)

Class CABIN from Le Havre May 12, 1950  
(Port of embarkation)  
arriving at port of NEW YORK May 17, 1950  
(Date)

AMERICA

Line No.	Family Name - Other Name Indication of Birth State	Age (Years)	Sex (F-M)	Mar- ried or Single	U. S. Passport No. Place of Issue	Visas and Descriptions of Tickets or Baggage	Year Entered for Use of Mailing Privilege and U. S. Customs
✓	AMER Regina 61 652 Northern Ave M121 Valley, Calif		F	M	10088 Germany	2	U. S. CIT. 21
✓	BRACKLEY Stephen 72 ##### Covington Ky.		M	M	207025 Ky.	3	
✓	BRACKLEY Margaret 61 do		F	M	207025 Ky.		
✓	BILGER Mary 39 9 Park Pl. South River, N. J.		F	M	180002 Germany	3	
✓	BILGER Frank 5 do		M	S	180002 New Jersey		
✓	DICK Eric 48 4316 - 168th. St. Flushing, N.Y.		M	M	210473 Germany	3	
✓	DOGAN John 55 5773 Belmont Ave Cincinnati, Ohio		M	M	199835 Ohio	2	
✓	DOGAN Irene 59 do		F	M	199836 New York		
✓	DORNER Josef 55 2710 Newton Ave Astoria, N. Y.		M	M	190075 Germany	2	
✓	EDWARDS Flora 75 267 Carmita Ave Rutherford, N.J.		F	M	138580 Switz	2	
✓	FERRMAN Fred 60 Clinton, Iowa		M	M	183327 Germany	4	
✓	FERRMAN Frieda 45 Clinton Iowa		F	M	183327 Germany		
✓	HABSTADT Fred 45 606 Bloomfield St. Hoboken, N.J.		M	M	10832 Germany	2	
✓	HEIDER Marguerite 38 P.O. Box 1322 Houston Texas		F	S	279 Texas	4	
✓	HERBER Irvin 65 RFD #12 El. Wayne, Ind		M	M	192937 Indiana	8	
✓	HERBER Nora 67 do		F	M	192937 Indiana		
✓	HEUZEY Velma 29 120 Hillside Ave Eutley, N.J.		F	M	158410 Oklahoma	5	
✓	HEUZEY Peter 3 120 Hillside Ave Eutley, N.J.		M	S	158410 New York		
✓	HAMBURGER Meritz 65 200 Dyckman St. New York, N.Y.		M	M	179256 Germany	10	
✓	HAMBURGER Margot 35 200 Dyckman St. New York, N.Y.		F	M	179257 Germany		
✓	LEOPOLDI Hermann 62 Fleischmanns New York		M	S	59969 Austria	5	
✓	MASLEIN Helene 30 3646 Christiana Ave Chicago, Ill		F	S	55971 Austria	5	
✓	MEIER Christ 48 104 Heckler Dr. Schenectady, N.Y.		M	M	179295 Germany	5	
✓	MEIER Marie 43 do		F	M	179295 Germany		
✓	MEIER Marlene 9 do		F	S	179295 N. Y.		

*Laura J. Hall, Imm. Insp. - 2:45 P.M.*

Image: Ellis Island and Other New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 - Hermann Leopoldi.  
(<https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-10512-28944647/hermann-leopoldi-in-ellis-island-other-new-york-passenger-lists>, accessed 27 October 2025.)

## Ferdinand Leopoldi (20 August 1886 – 20 December 1944)

Name: KOHN-LEOPOLDI		Index Nr. 1492	
Vorname: Ferdinand Leopold		Rufnummern: 14.7.12	
Stand: <i>geb. unv. Maria Theresia</i>		Platten Nr.	
Geburtsort: <i>Wien</i>		Def.-Rkten: <i>TS 4 470718</i>	
<b>Personalbeschreibung:</b>			
(Die zutreffenden Angaben sind zu unterstreichen.)			
1. Größe: <i>1 m 66</i> cm <small>(sehr klein, klein, mittel, groß, sehr groß)</small>	6. Haare: (Farbe: hell, mittel, dunkelblond, -braun, schwarz, rot, grau, grauweiß, weiß)	10. Nase: (Höhen: eingebogen, gradlinig, ausgebeugt, winkelförmig, niedrig)	
2. Gestalt: (Stark, unterlich, schlank, schwächlich)	7. Bart: (Farbe: hell, mittel, dunkelblond, -braun, schwarz, rot, grau, grauweiß, weiß) <i>hell</i>	11. Ohren: (sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr schmal, drei-, vierlöchrig, rund, oval abflachend, sehr anliegend)	
3. Schultertelung: (stark, waagrecht)	8. Augen: (blau, grün, gelb, gelbbraun, hell-, dunkel-, braun, schwarzbraun)	12. Mund: (sehr klein, sehr groß, dünne Lippen, aufgeworfene Lippen)	
4. Gesicht: (Farbe, Form, Größe)	9. Augenbrauen: (wenn dem Kopfhaar abweichend, gefaltet)	13. Zähne: (vollständig, unvollständig, auffallend groß oder klein, festig, gelblich, solches Gebiss oben oder unten, füllungen)	
5. Gehen: (sehr hoch, sehr niedrig, zurückweichend, senkrecht, vortretend)	14. Besondere Kennzeichen:		
Rm:		<i>Krimm Hals (Halsbündel)</i>	

Image: Erkennungsdienstliche Gestapo Kartei, courtesy of the Documentation Center, Vienna.

Unlike Hermann's own luck in escaping Nazi Austria, his brother Ferdinand did not survive the Holocaust.

Up until 1941, Ferdinand, together with his life partner, Margarete von Kiraly, made numerous attempts to escape. In order to successfully flee, he repeatedly appealed to his brother, Hermann, to help finance and arrange a boat ticket to the United States for him and his partner Margarete. To assist his brother, Hermann turned to the Transmigration Bureau, which had been established by JDC in New York to help refugees emigrate from Germany, Austria,

Czechoslovakia, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg, primarily to the U.S.<sup>30</sup> With the help of the Transmigration Bureau, on March 17, 1941, Hermann made \$300 available to support Ferdinand's emigration efforts.

Ferdinand in turn appealed to Hermann, explaining that the money alone was not enough to escape; rather he required an actual ticket in order to obtain an exit visa.<sup>31</sup> About half a year later, in September 1941, Ferdinand sent another letter to his brother thanking him for his tickets, noting that Vienna's Jewish Community had just informed him that Hermann had managed to purchase tickets. However, Ferdinand was not able to leave the country and addressed his brother one last time on November 10, 1941, informing him that he was able to obtain a visa to Mexico and was hopeful that he could escape in this way.

After that, Ferdinand seemed to have stopped living "in the open" and went into hiding. His last residence card is dated 1941, noting that his current

Mitsampliche (Hausmeldung)		<b>Meldezettel für Unterteilungen.</b>		Realität: Schrift mit Titel (Zusatz aus dem Melderegister, von dem Meldungsabteilung)	
1. J. Bez. <i>Schmelz gasse Nr. 7.</i>		Stiege, Stoch, Tür Nr. <i>18</i>			
Vor- und Suname: <i>Ferdinand Leopoldi</i>		<i>Karl Leopoldi</i>			
Geburtsort: <i>Wien</i>		<i>Wien</i>			
Heimats (Sohnbürgerschafts-) ort, -bezirk, -land: <i>Wien</i>		<i>Wien</i>			
Staatsbürgerchaft: <i>ö. St.</i>					
Berufstag, -monat, -jahr; Religion, -kath., -evangel., -sonstige? <i>Wohnung 20 nach 1941</i>				III ausgesprochen am: <i>1941</i>	
Gehilf, auch Nebenname: <i>Wohnung 20 nach 1941</i>					
Kinder unter 18 Jahren: <i>ein Sohn 11.11.40</i>				nach (Ort, Bezirk, Gasse Nr.): <i>Winkelbarn</i>	
Frühere Wohnung in Wien: <i>3. Kumpfbauung gasse Nr. 7 bis 10</i>					
Ordentlicher Wohnst: <i>1. gasse Leopoldi</i>					
Letzter Aufenthaltsort: <i>1. gasse Leopoldi</i>					
Wenn zugereist: (Name, Datum der Reiseabmeldung, welche des Offiz. Passbüchens: <i>abschickt</i> )					
Wien, am <i>28.11.1939</i>					
Unterschrift des Wohnungseigentümers: <i>E. Mentzer</i>		Unterschrift des Hausigentümers (Stellvertreter): <i>Karl Weber</i>			

Image: Meldezettel Ferdinand Leopoldi 1941; Source: Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, online at: <https://www.wien.gv.at/actaproweb2/benutzung/image.xhtml?pid=a14cf7330dbd3248250065e82cf062df>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> The JDC archive holds the records of the Transmigration Bureau, including Hermann Leopoldi's attempts to issue a travel card to his brother. The Transmigration Bureau's primary role was thus to accept deposits from friends or family overseas towards the travel costs of Jews emigrating from Europe. [https://jdc-ideaais2.jdc.org/il/notebook\\_ext.asp?item=49724&site=ideaalm&lang=ENG&menu=1](https://jdc-ideaais2.jdc.org/il/notebook_ext.asp?item=49724&site=ideaalm&lang=ENG&menu=1), December 29, 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Traska, Lind, *Hermann Leopoldi*, p. 251.

address at that time was “unknown.” After that, Ferdinand was hidden and protected by his life partner Margarete (von) Kiraly,<sup>32</sup> a non-Jewish Austrian Hungarian musician with whom he had previously artistically collaborated. At the same address in Vienna, where Margarete (von) Kiraly resided, at Körnergasse 2 in Vienna’s second district and where Leopold was most likely hidden, his ex-wife Marta Kohn (née Muchow), also lived.<sup>33</sup> However, his *Friedhofskartei* (cemetery registry) indicated that he had resided in Schmelzgasse 12, 1020 Vienna.

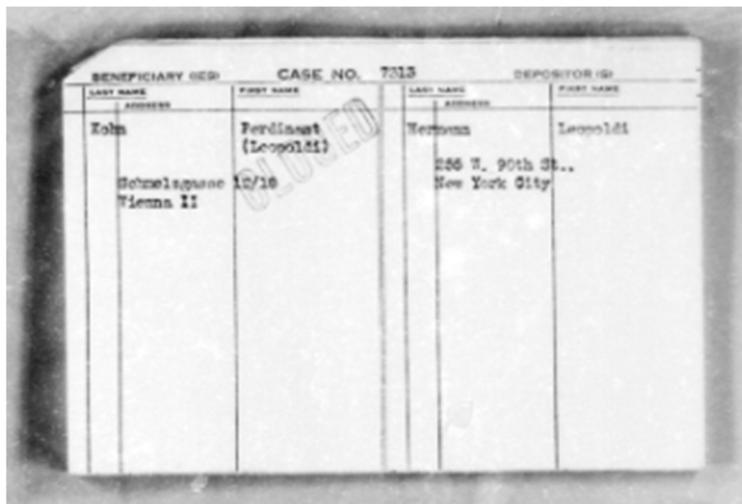


Image: Receipt by the Transmigration Bureau, JDC online archive, online available at: ransmig\_bureau\_cardindexE56\_176203E56\_176203-00799.jpg

In July 1943, Ferdinand Leopoldi’s hiding

Name	Kohn Ferdinand Viktor Jon. <i>Kohn</i>		
Wohnort	II, Schmelzg. 12	Sterbe Ort	II, Malzg. 16
Geb. tag	20. VII. 1886	Todesursache	Gehirnblutung
Todes- tag	20. XII. 1944		
Beerd. tag	21. XII. 1944		
Grabstelle		Begräbniskosten	
	Z. F.	N. F.	FI.
		16	
		9	
		86	
	Beerd. Kl.	Grab Kl.	Vorschr. RM
		3	
	Zahlung RM	Rückstand RM	
Gr.			
R.			
Nr.			

Image: Friedhofskartei Ferdinand Leopoldi, IKG Archive Vienna

place was betrayed and he was subsequently transferred to the Gestapo for interrogation. He remained at Vienna’s Gestapo’s headquarters – Morzinplatz, 1010 Vienna – for several months. Allegedly, the torture he encountered at the Gestapo caused him to suffer a near fatal stroke. Considering his compromised health condition, he was eventually transferred to the Rothschild hospital in Vienna’s second district, which functioned as a transit camp for many before their ultimate murder in an extermination camp.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Geni entry for Margarte Hoenigfeld (von Kiraly) <https://www.geni.com/people/Margarete-Hoenigfeld/600000006345543376>, accessed November 26, 2025.

<sup>33</sup> Information provided by Ms. Irma Wulz, archive of Vienna’s Jewish community.

<sup>34</sup> The Rothschild hospital was founded in 1873 by Baron Anselm von Rothschild and transferred to the Jewish Community (*Israelitische Kultusgemeinde*). From 1938 onward, the Rothschild Hospital was the only hospital in which Jewish women and men were treated. Patients had to pay for their treatment themselves; the costs for those who had been impoverished were covered by the Jewish Community of Vienna. After the completion of the mass deportations from Vienna in the autumn of 1942, the Rothschild Hospital was closed. A smaller hospital was opened at Malzgasse 16. Between 1943 and 1945, the Rothschild Hospital served the SS as a military hospital. After the war, the building was used to house Jewish displaced persons.

For more information, see: <https://www.memento.wien/address/21364/>, accessed December 29, 2025;

<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/ikw/shoah-in-waehring/juedische-institutionen/rothschildspital>, accessed December 29, 2025;

as well as: Christine Örtl, *Das Rothschildspital und die jüdischen Displaced Persons 1945-1954*, Michael Heindl, Ruth Kobliczek (ed.), “125 Jahre Rothschildspital,” Donnerskirchen: Dagobert, 1998.

He died on December 20, 1944, in the Rothschild hospital in Vienna as a result of his harsh imprisonment by the Gestapo.<sup>35</sup>

The cause of death was simply noted as bleeding of the brain. His ex-wife paid for his burial at Vienna's Central cemetery, gate 4, which was the Jewish section.

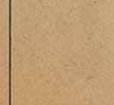
<b>Name: KOHN-LEOPOLDI</b> Vorname: <i>Ferdinand Kohn</i> Stand: <i>geb. u. w. Maria Kohn</i> Geburtstag: <i>20.1.1876</i> Geburtsort: <i>Wien</i> Kreis:		Index Nr. <i>8490</i> Aufgenommen: <i>14.7.42</i> Platten Nr. Verf.-Rkten: <i>T 84 17078</i>
<b>Personalbeschreibung:</b> <small>[Die zutreffenden Angaben sind zu unterstreichen.]</small>		
1. Größe: <i>1 m 66</i> cm <small>(sehr klein, klein, mittel, groß, sehr groß).</small> 2. Gestalt: <i>[nach unten]</i> (schlanke, schwachlich). 3. Schulteranlage: <i>[flach]</i> , waagrecht. 4. Gesicht: (Farbe, Form, Größe). <i>schmal-singsel.</i> 5. Stirn: (sehr hoch, sehr niedrig, zurückweichend, senkrecht, vortretend).	6. Haar: (Farbe: hell-, mittel-, dunkelblond-, braun-, schwarz-, rot-, grau-, <u>graugelblich</u> -, weiß). 7. Bart: (Farbe: hell-, mittel-, dunkelblond-, braun-, schwarz-, rot-, grau-, <u>graugelblich</u> -, weiß). <i>Kahl.</i> 8. Augen: (Iris: <u>blau</u> , <u>grün</u> , gelb, gelbbraun, hell-, dunkel-, braun-, schwarzbraun). 9. Augenbrauen: (wenn vom Kopfhaar abweichend, gefärbt): Form: Größe:	10. Nase: (Nüchtern (eingebogen, gebügelig, <u>ausge- <u>spannt</u></u> , winkliggebogen, weitig), Kieferbecken (Vorsprung, sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr dick, sehr fein, aufgeföhrt, dünn, (nach rechts, links), nach sichtbar oder verdeckte Nasen- (Nasenrücken, Bänder, Kinnrücken). 11. Ohren: (sehr groß, sehr klein, sehr schmal, drei-, vierlöcher, rund, oval, abliegend, sehr <u>ausliegend</u> ). Ohrspeicheldrüsen: (sehr klein, sehr groß, un- gleichförmig, gleichförmig, durchsichtig, durchscheinend). 12. Mund: (sehr klein, sehr groß, <u>dünne</u> Lippen, aufgeworfene Lippen). 13. Zähne: (vollständig, <u>abnehmend</u> , auffallend groß oder klein, stark geputzt, festes Gebiß oben oder unten, Füllungen). 14. Besondere Anmerkungen: <i>Krimm. Malak (Malakoid-          (Mentol) -</i>
Rm: 	Kontrollfinger: 	

Image: Gestapo card, courtesy of the Documentation Center, online at: <https://www.doew.at/result> [search term: Ferdinand Kohn-Leopoldi]

## Excuse I: Music in Concentration Camps

Music and singing were integral parts of camp life in almost all Nazi-concentration camps. In fact, singing was in fact not merely tolerated by the SS but ordered. Almost every camp inmate was thus inescapably confronted in one way or another with music during his or her camp imprisonment, including with camp orchestras providing crude musical entertainment during selections, marching to work, and, at its darkest, marching to death by gas. Accordingly, deliberately ordered singing and other musical practices were employed in concentration camps as instruments of discipline,

<sup>35</sup> Namentliche Erfassung der österreichischen Holocaustopfer: Biographische Angaben zu rund 64.000 Opfern der Shoah, <https://www.doew.at>, entry: Ferdinand Leopold Kohn; <https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-10952-234354-/ferdinand-kohn-in-austria-vienna-jewish-vital-records>, accessed October 20, 2025; DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 22, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-22-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

humiliation, and psychological control, meaning that “singing on command was part of daily life in German Nazi Camps.”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to live music, music was also played over loudspeakers. Music was moreover employed to entertain SS officials “after hours,” as were other entertainment stints, such as theater performances,<sup>37</sup> sport competitions.<sup>38</sup> and dances.<sup>39</sup>

In 1938 in Dachau, Hermann Leopoldi’s first place of incarceration, the *Dachaulied* was composed by inmates Jura Soyfer and Herbert Zipper.<sup>40</sup> The *Dachaulied*, as well as the Buchenwald song, which was composed by Hermann Leopoldi and Fritz Löhner-Beda, were an integral part of early musical coercion in concentration camps.<sup>41</sup>

## Excuse II: The Looting of Musical Instruments

From the *Anschluss* on March 13, 1938, onward, the Nazi regime implemented a systematic program of expropriating Jewish-owned cultural property, including musical instruments, musical manuscripts and scores, as well as related musical objects, as part of its broader cultural plunder machinery operating across the Reich and occupied Europe. Cultural expropriation was conducted by several Nazi agencies, including the Gestapo, the SS and the NSDAP.

In addition to the looting of musical instruments, as was the case with Hermann Leopoldi, the *Anschluss* and the adoption of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws in Austria on May 20, 1938, also brought the loss of key musical positions such as at the renowned Viennese Philharmonic. In some cases, the firing took place earlier, preceding the Nuremberg Laws by several months, as occurred with the firing of Jewish musicians of Vienna’s State Opera. This was the case, for example, with the opera’s concertmaster and soloist Arnold Rosé, in addition to other musicians.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Juliane Brauer, “How Can Music Be Torturous?: Music in Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camps,” *Music & Politics*, 10.1 (Winter 2016), online at: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0010.103>

<sup>37</sup> My Jewish Learning, *Theatre in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/theatre-in-the-nazi-concentration-camps>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Sport and sportspeople in Auschwitz, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/education/e-learning/podcast/sport-and-sportstpeople-/>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Guido Fackler, “Music in Concentration Camps 1933–1945”, *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*, 124 (2017): 60-83., online at: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/5732?lang=en&utm>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Music and the Holocaust, *Dachaulied*, <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/music-early-camps/dachau/dachaulied/>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Guido Fackler, “Music in Concentration Camps 1933–1945”, *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*, 124 (2017): 60-83., online at: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/5732?lang=en&utm>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>42</sup> Bernadette Mayrhofer, *Expulsion and Murder of Vienna Philharmonic Musicians after 1938*, The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra Confronting the Past, Vienna: Vienna Philharmonic, 2014, p. 51, citing Letter from Kerber/Vienna State Opera administration to the BthV, March 18, 1938, AdR, SThV 886/1938, online at: <http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/orchestra/history/national-sozialism>, accessed December 29, 2025. See also: Carla Shapreau, *The Vienna Archives: Musical Expropriations During the Nazi Era and 21st-Century Ramifications*, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Report, 2014, online at: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt0q71b0p2/qt0q71b0p2.pdf>, accessed December 29, 2025.

Although Arnold Rosé could save his musical instrument, other Jewish-owned musical instruments were looted indiscriminately, beginning almost immediately after the Anschluss. The transport of Alphonse Rothschild's vast collections of cultural treasures lasted weeks and included a significant musical instrument collection of nearly eighty instruments, such as a 1710 Antonio Stradivari cello, a 1776 Joannes Baptista Guaragnini violin, and a viola allegedly by Carlo Bergonzi.<sup>43</sup> Another prominent musical collection looted was that of Oskar Bondy, to name just one other famous example.<sup>44</sup>

The April 26, 1938, ordinance to register Jewish property—the *Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden*<sup>45</sup>—enforced the already ongoing expropriations of instruments and musical scores. The ordinance required persons defined as Jews to register assets exceeding 5,000 Reichsmark, including foreign assets. Moreover, there were many economic and administrative hurdles for those seeking to emigrate, including the Reich flight tax, (*Reichsfluchtsteuer*),<sup>46</sup> the Jewish property tax (*Judenvermögensabgabe*),<sup>47</sup> a punitive tax of 25% on Jewish assets, as well as the blocking of Jewish accounts.<sup>48</sup> Even the export of property, including musical instruments deemed of certain value, were often prohibited by the Federal Monuments Office (*Zentralsstelle für Denkmalschutz*) under a so-called export legislation (*Ausfuhrverbotsgesetz*).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the decree from November 18, 1938, on the “Confiscation of Property of Enemies of the People and the State of Austria” provided a semi—basis for further confiscations. This was followed by the Ordinance Regarding the Utilization of Jewish Assets (*Verordnung über den Einsatz des jüdischen Vermögens*),<sup>50</sup> enacted on December 3, 1938, that compelled Jewish emigres to surrender their property.

Faced with these choiceless choices, some opted to leave their musical instruments with Aryan friends and neighbors. Ferdinand Leopoldi, for example, left his Armati violine with his partner, Ms.

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<sup>43</sup> Sophie Lillie, *Was einmal war: Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wiens*, Vienna: Czernin Verlag: 2003, pp. 1003-1006.

<sup>44</sup> Lexikon der Provenienzforschung, *Oskar Bondy*, <https://www.lexikon-provenienzforschung.org/en/bondy-oskar>, accessed December 29, 2025; Overall, Austria's art database lists 15 musical instruments, <https://www.kunstdatenbank.at/search-for-objects/category/73>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>45</sup> NS-Quellen- Materialien zum Nationalsozialismus, *Vermögensentzug, Rückstellung und Entschädigung in Österreich, Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden*, [http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz\\_anzeigen\\_detail.php?gesetz\\_id=29310&action=B\\_Read](http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz_anzeigen_detail.php?gesetz_id=29310&action=B_Read), accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>46</sup> NS-Quellen- Materialien zum Nationalsozialismus, *Vermögensentzug, Rückstellung und Entschädigung in Österreich, Verordnung zur Durchführung der Reichsfluchtsteuer im Land Österreich (14 April 1938)*, [http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz\\_anzeigen\\_detail.php?gesetz\\_id=30110&action=B\\_Read](http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz_anzeigen_detail.php?gesetz_id=30110&action=B_Read), accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>47</sup> NS-Quellen- Materialien zum Nationalsozialismus, *Vermögensentzug, Rückstellung und Entschädigung in Österreich, Verordnung über eine Sübneleistung der Juden deutscher Staatsangehörigkeit*, [http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz\\_anzeigen\\_detail.php?gesetz\\_id=22710&action=B\\_Read](http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz_anzeigen_detail.php?gesetz_id=22710&action=B_Read), accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Carla Shapreau, *The Vienna Archives: Musical Expropriations During the Nazi Era and 21st-Century Ramifications*, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Report, 2014, online at: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt0q71b0p2/qt0q71b0p2.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.demokratiezentrum.org/ressourcen/lexikon/ausfuhrverbotsgesetz/>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>50</sup> NS-Quellen- Materialien zum Nationalsozialismus, *Vermögensentzug, Rückstellung und Entschädigung in Österreich, Verordnung über den Einsatz des jüdischen Vermögens*, [http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz\\_anzeigen\\_detail.php?gesetz\\_id=20910&action=B\\_Read](http://ns-quellen.at/gesetz_anzeigen_detail.php?gesetz_id=20910&action=B_Read), accessed December 29, 2025.

Margarete (von) Kiraly, for safekeeping.<sup>51</sup> According to Ronald Leopoldi, Ms. Kiraly cared for him and hid him during the Nazi era. After his death in 1944, she organized and paid for his funeral.<sup>52</sup>

By August 1940, the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA) ruled that property left behind by emigrating Jews, including property held at shipping companies and as part of lift vans, was to be offered for sale. Consequently, objects, including musical instruments, packed for shipment out of Austria and held by transporters and forwarding agents, were seized with the involvement of the Vugesta (*Verwaltungsstelle jüdischen Umzugsgutes der Gestapo*; Office for the Disposal of the Property of Jewish Emigrants), established in September 7, 1940.<sup>53</sup>

The looting of musical instruments did not, however, only take place in Austria, but was commonplace all over Nazi-occupied Europe. The *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR), created in July 1940 under Alfred Rosenberg, functioned as a Nazi Party special task force (“Einsatzstab”) charged with appropriating cultural property from perceived enemies, including Jews, Communists and Freemasons. The ERR operated across most occupied territories, with the *Sonderstab Musik* as one of its specialist sub-units focusing on the seizure, cataloguing and transfer of musical property — instruments, sheet-music, archives, recordings— from Jewish households and institutions in occupied Western Europe. It is estimated that the ERR plundered approximately 70,000 Jewish households in the Netherlands, Belgium and France alone, which included the looting of instruments, musical scores, and, for example, records.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, pages 12, 18, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-12-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>; <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560319/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-18-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed October 20, 2025. See also: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt0q71b0p2/qt0q71b0p2.pdf>, accessed October 20, 2025.

<sup>52</sup> Email exchange with Ronald Leopoldi and the author on November 24, 2025.

<sup>53</sup> Kunstdatenbank, *Die Vugesta*. “Die Verwaltungsstelle für jüdisches Umzugsgut der Gestapo,” <https://www.kunstdatenbank.at/die-vugesta-die-verwaltungsstelle-fuer-juedisches-umzugsgut-der-gestapo>, accessed November 24, 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Proveana-Datenbank Provenienzforschung, *Sonderstab Musik des Einsatzstabes Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, <https://www.proveana.de/de/link/act00002926>, accessed November 24, 2025; Musique et spoliations - recherche de provenance des instruments et documents musicaux, <https://www.musique-et-spoliations.com/>, accessed November 24, 2025



The attorney continued by expressing Hermann Leopoldi's claim to the Amati violin as the "*sole living next of kin*." By May 29, 1946, Gustave Jahr urged the American officials to respond to his earlier letter, as he had not received an answer at that point.<sup>57</sup>

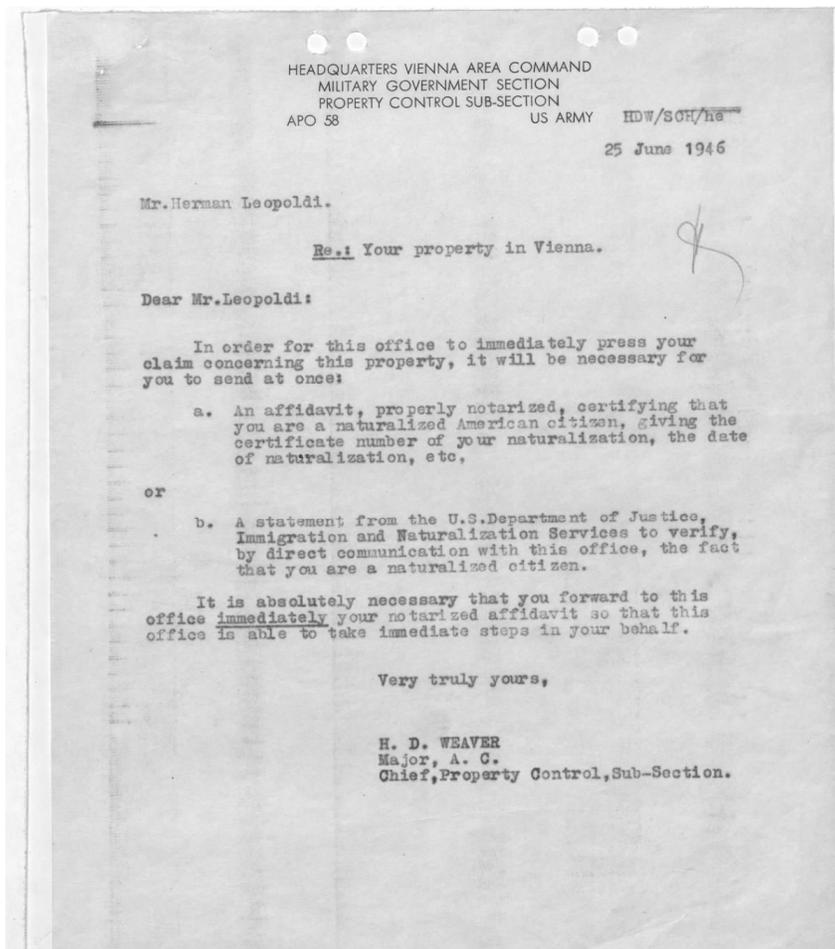


Image: DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 8, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-8-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

A response followed about a month later, on June 25, 1946, noting that the American officials would like to contact Hermann Leopoldi directly in order to establish that he was indeed a naturalized citizen.<sup>58</sup> Hermann Leopoldi followed suit and submitted proof of his American citizenship in July 1946.<sup>59</sup>

Hermann Leopoldi's claim for his brother's Amati, which was the central focus of his claim, faced numerous obstacles, foremost among them the assertion by Austrian officials that the violin was not, as stated, a precious Amati violin, but rather a worthless imitation. To counter such statements, in a letter sent to the American officials, Mr. Jahr, Leopoldi's attorney, noted that "*I would like to add that my client has just heard from his sister, Mr. [sic] Martha Muchow Leopoldi, Vienna II, Koerner-gasse II/30, and she informs my client that the Amati violin in question was purchased by the deceased Ferdinand Kohn (stage name Ferdinand Leopoldi) for a*

<sup>57</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 5, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-5-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>58</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 8, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-8-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>59</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 15, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-15-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

*substantial sum, and that he assured his former wife, Mrs. Muchow Leopoldi, that after the war he would sell the violin in the United States for a substantial amount.”*<sup>60</sup>

On September 9, 1946, the U.S. official tasked with handling the case, F. W. Hodge, requested Ms. Kiraly to appear in his office for questioning. Whether this meeting took place is impossible to reconstruct, as, at the time of the request, Ms. Kiraly was incapacitated due to health reasons and therefore did not comply with the invitation. At the same time, the American official addressed Hermann Leopoldi’s legal representative to inform him that according to a Mr. Wilfing, the violin in question was not an Amati, but rather an imitation, but that regardless of value, he intends to “satisfy the claims of Mr. Leopoldi and take the violin under the control of this office.”<sup>61</sup> The assertion that the violin was not a precious Amati was underscored by an official appraisal by Karl Richard Kaltenbrunner,<sup>62</sup> who, at the time, was the head of a Vienna-based violin-making studio that could carry out its business undisturbed between 1938 and 1945.<sup>63</sup> Despite the American official’s assertion to restitute the violin no matter its value, it is assumed that this never took place.

Moreover, existing archival records indicate that a witness statement was obtained attesting to the fact that the violin was indeed gifted to Ferdinand’s partner, while acknowledging at the same time that the donation occurred while Ferdinand Leopoldi was a Gestapo prisoner being treated for presumed torture in the Rothschild hospital.

With that information, the American officials closed the case, arguing that this was no longer pursuable. The violin was never returned to either Hermann Leopoldi nor to his brother’s surviving ex-wife.<sup>64</sup> No consideration was given to the fact that the violin had meaning beyond its estimated value and that the “gifting” of the violin took place at a place and a time of extreme coercion.

Aside from the violin, Hermann Leopoldi also claimed the loss of his instrument, namely, his *Bösendorfer* piano, but to no avail. Both instruments never surfaced again.

Leopoldi returned to Vienna in the summer of 1947 together with his new partner, Helly Möslein, after receiving an invitation from Austria’s Culture Minister, Dr. Felix Hurdes, and Vienna’s

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<sup>60</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 13, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-13-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>61</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, pages 17-18, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-17-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>; <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-18-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

<sup>62</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 25, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560334/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-25-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed January 13, 2026.

<sup>63</sup> Bestand Obrecht Kaltenbrunner, <https://data.tmw.at/thesaurus/60443>, accessed January 13, 2026.

<sup>64</sup> DN1929-US, USACA - Property Control Branch, 1945-1950: Cases and Reports Pertaining to Property Administered by the Vienna Area Command (VAC), Category: PC/V/II/100 Herman Leopoldi, page 28, online at: <https://www.fold3.com/image/306560307/pcvii100-herman-leopoldi-page-28-us-usaca-property-control-branch-1945-1950>, accessed December 29, 2025.

*Kulturstadtrat*, Viktor Matejka.<sup>65</sup> He rapidly re-established himself on stage, radio, and records. According to his son, Ronald Leopoldi, Hermann chose to stay in a hotel for the first two years after returning to Austria, not trusting the country that he might not have to leave again. He noted in an email-exchange that “*Er hatte immer Angst das ihm die Nazis wieder alles wegnehmen. Man hat ihm gefeiert und tat so als ob er von einer Urlaubsreise zurückkehrte.* [He was always afraid that the Nazis would take everything away from him again. People celebrated him and acted as if he were returning from a vacation.”].<sup>66</sup> By 1949, the family moved to Diesterweggasse 8, in Vienna’s 14<sup>th</sup> district.<sup>67</sup>



Hermann Leopoldi’s return was widely celebrated in public life. In 1958, he was again honored by the Austrian state.

A year later, in 1959, he died in Vienna.<sup>68</sup>

*Image:* Hermann Leopoldi [left] with Vienna’s Mayor, Theodor Körner, 7 October 1950. Source: *Wiener Stadt-und Landesarchiv*, Fotos\_PID\_FC1\_58427\_01, accessed December 29, 2025.

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***“O Buchenwald, wir jammern nicht und klagen,  
und was auch unser Schicksal sei,  
wir wollen trotzdem ja zum Leben sagen,  
denn einmal kommt der Tag: dann sind wir frei!”<sup>69</sup>***

<sup>65</sup> Österreichisches Kabarettarchiv, *Hermann Leopoldi*, <https://www.kabarettarchiv.at/Biografie-Hermann-Leopoldi>, accessed October 24, 2025.

<sup>66</sup> Email exchange Ronald Leopoldi with the author in October 2025.

<sup>67</sup> [https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/Hermann\\_Leopoldi](https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/Hermann_Leopoldi), accessed January 13, 2026.

<sup>68</sup> Hermann Leopoldi, *Biographie*, [https://hermannleopoldi.at/?page\\_id=137](https://hermannleopoldi.at/?page_id=137), accessed October 20, 2025.

<sup>69</sup> “Oh, Buchenwald, we neither lament, nor complain,  
and whatever our future may hold:  
we still want to say “yes” to life,  
because one day the time will come -  
then we will be free!”

Last sentence from the Buchenwald Marsch, December 1938. The full text and an audio recording is available at: <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/central-europe/buchenwald/buchenwaldlied/>, accessed October 27, 2025.