

Reconstructing a Pianist – The Enigmatic Eva Wollmann

by Göran Tegnér

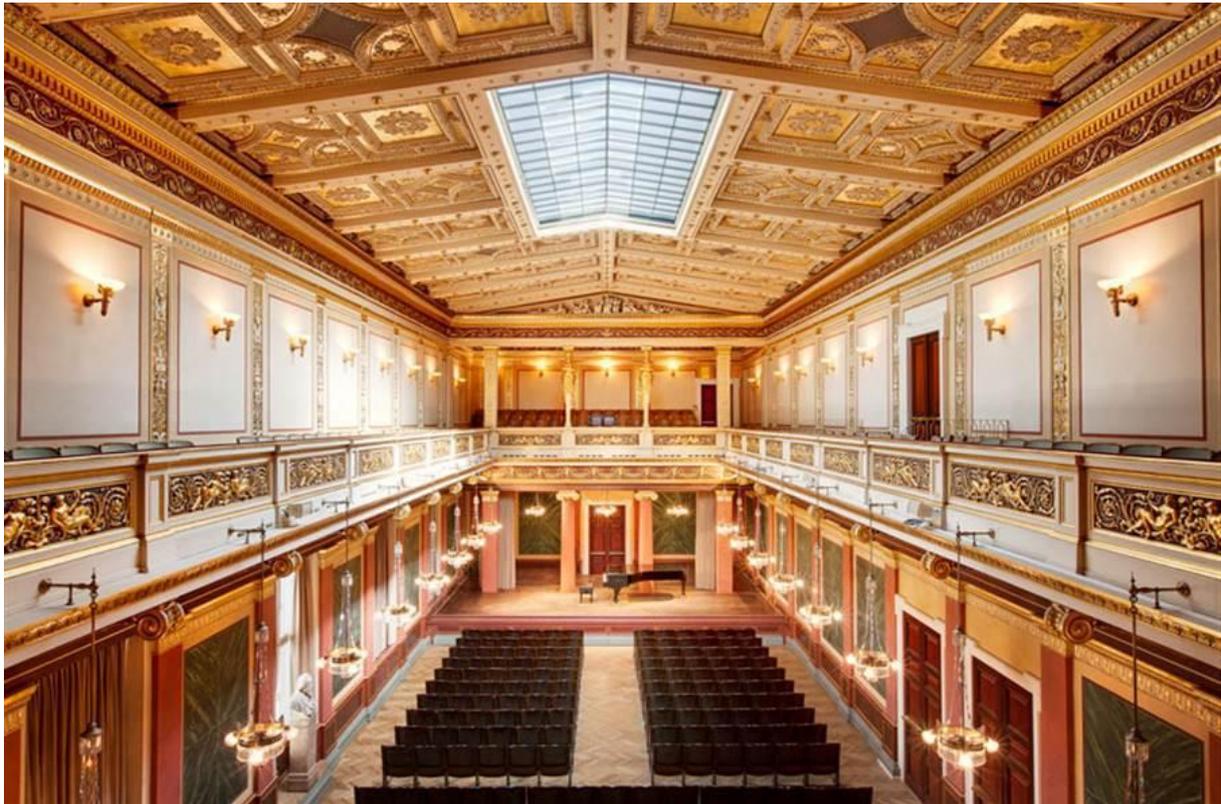
When the record company Westminster started recording in Europe in the first years of the LP, initially just in Vienna, in 1949, one of the pianists they engaged was a Viennese artist named Eva Wollmann. In 1954 and 1955 she recorded three LPs for Westminster. Apart from those, there are three more, recorded in 1956 and 1957, by other companies. The only information about her easily available is to be found in the sleeve notes for the Westminster records, texts presumably written by the sales department of Westminster, probably based on facts furnished by Eva Wollmann, but grossly exaggerating. She was said to be "one of Europe's outstanding pianists", having "toured widely in Europe, playing solo recitals and appearing as soloist with the major symphony orchestras", and having "made innumerable radio broadcasts". I am afraid this was not really the case, as she is so little known today. This article is an experiment in tracing her brief career, chiefly using the Internet and her few now 65-year-old LPs as sources



Eva Wollmann, photo on the jacket of her Westminster recording of Tchaikovsky's The Seasons, 1954.

One track, taken from her recording of Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*, has been included in an anthology of women pianists; in the small biography accompanying the CD, with facts taken from the liner notes already mentioned, she is said to have been born in 1902. This is, as I will show, highly unlikely.

Facts we don't have any reason to doubt are that she was born in Vienna, and from the age of seven studied with her mother, who was a pianist and teacher herself. Later on she was a pupil of Hedwig Kanner-Rosenthal (wife of pianist Moritz Rosenthal), who left Vienna for New York in 1938. She continued her studies at the Conservatory of the City of Vienna; in March 1946 she took part in a "Schülervortragsabend" – a student concert, held by the conservatory in the Brahms-Saal in the Musikverein, one of the most important music institutions of Vienna. Eva Wollmann played Chopin's second piano sonata. One of her fellow students playing in this concert was Paul Badura-Skoda; of him we know that he commenced his studies at the conservatory in 1945. He was born in 1927, so it seems logical that Eva Wollmann was of approximately the same age.



The Brahms-Saal of the Musikverein in Vienna, where many concerts by Vienna music students took place. Homepage of the Musikverein.

The "Vortragsabend" was followed by a second "Schüler-Schlusskonzert" in June. Both Eva Wollmann and Badura-Skoda took part, Eva Wollmann playing Chopin's G-minor Ballade. This concert probably marked the end of the Spring term, but not the end of their studies at the conservatory.

In December 1946 she stood in for an indisposed pianist, playing a Mozart concerto; the *Österreichische Zeitung* (1946.12.28) reported that it was the first time she had performed with an orchestra, that her technique was good and that she has "a pronounced feeling for the classical Mozart style".

The next time she turns up in the sources is in a "Schüler-Schlusskonzert", held in the Schubert-Saal in the Konzerthaus in June 1947. Badura-Skoda played in this concert too – the only musician among the students to have a major career. This time it is impossible to say who played what. Probably Wollmann studied at the conservatory from autumn 1945, finishing by in the spring term 1947. We do not know which teachers she had at the conservatory.

She continued her studies at the Academy of Music in Vienna, probably starting in the autumn of 1947. The sleeve notes are not to be taken too literally as regards her studies. According to the annual report of the Academy, she studied piano with Richard Hauser from 1947/48 to 1949/50 and chamber music with Otto Schulhof, who also was one of Paul Badura-Skoda's teachers.

In April 1948 she performed, with many other students, in a "Vortragsabend" – a performance evening in which instrumentalists and singers studying at the Academy performed chamber music, lieder, and piano music. Eva Wollmann may have played the B-flat minor variations by Szymanowski (1903), the most "modern" piece on the programme.

In June 1948 she took part in what was a very important music competition, the Austrian Music Competition of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, where she shared the second place with Felicitas Karrer, playing the Mozart D-minor concerto. The previous year's prizewinner had been Paul Badura-Skoda.

In June 1949, students of Professor Richard Hauser's class appeared in a "Klavierabend", a "Piano Evening". Eva Wollmann performed (Chopin's B flat minor sonata again) together with nine other pianists. Hauser was first a teacher at the Conservatorium of the city of Vienna – maybe Eva Wollman had already studied under him there – and from 1947 at the Academy of Music. In the 1920s he had studied with both Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern. Maybe he passed on to Eva Wollmann an interest in contemporary music. He taught at the Academy until his death in 1970; Mitsuko Uchida was one of his students.

Another "Klavierabend" with Hauser's class took place in June 1950. Eva Wollmann played Chopin's Polonaise-Fantaisie op. 61. But several years before that, in February 1948, while still a student, she was one of the soloists in a concert in the Brahms-Saal of the Musikverein, with the Wiener Kammerorchester under Vinzenz Hladky, playing the piano part in a "Concertino for viola, clarinet, and piano" by the Austrian composer Alfred Uhl. The work had been written in 1937 and the other soloists were Albertina Feist, viola, and Friedrich Wildgans, clarinet. The latter was also a composer.

In the sleeve notes mentioned, Eva Wollmann is said to have had a predilection for contemporary music.

Even before finishing her studies at the Academy, she performed in a number of concerts. In one of them, in February 1948, she played in a concert given in the Great Hall of the Musikverein, accompanied by the Wiener Symphoniker under Rudolf Moralt. Together with Fritz Egger, totally forgotten now but then firmly established in the musical life of Vienna, she performed Mozart's concert for two pianos, KV 365. Egger also played both Chopin's F minor piano concerto and Gershwin's Concerto in F, its Austrian premiere.

But she was bound to add one of the Chopin concertos to her repertoire, since she was to take part in the first Chopin competition in Warsaw after the war, taking place in 1949, 100 years after Chopin's death. The other Austrian participants were Badura-Skoda, Fritz Egger, Walter Kamper, and Inge Mayerhofer Langner; none of them ended among the top six. There is very little documentation of this first Warsaw competition. All competitors took part in an all-Chopin concert in Vienna in September, with the Tonkünstlerorchester under Felix Prohaska accompanying both of Chopin's concertos. Eva Wollman's contribution was the Polonaise-Fantaisie op. 61, while Badura-Skoda offered the F-minor concerto. A few years later he was to record both concertos for the Westminster label.

According to the annual report of the Academy, Eva Wollmann finished her studies there after the spring term 1950. The sleeve notes give the information that she continued her studies after the Academy with the Austrian Pianist Bruno Seidlhofer, the Italian pianist and conductor Carlo Zecchi of the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome, and with Eduard Steuermann of the Juilliard School in New York.

Bruno Seidlhofer taught at the Academy from 1938 until 1980; he was appointed professor in 1943. Among his pupils were Paul Badura-Skoda, Martha Argerich, Nelson Freire, and Rudolf Buchbinder, to name just a few. Carlo Zecchi not only taught at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, but also at the Mozarteum in Salzburg; Wollman may have studied with him there. Zecchi's domain was the classics. Steuermann, who was born in Sambor in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had studied with both Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern and was an ardent promotor of contemporary music. Among his many students we find Alfred Brendel, Lili Kraus, Victor Ullmann, and Moura Lympany. Eva Wollmann was not among Steuermann's students at the Juilliard School, so she must have been a private student. Maybe she did not study with him in New York, but attended one of his masterclasses in Salzburg,

where he taught from 1952 to 1962. Eva Wollmann's studies with him seem to confirm her interest in contemporary music. She was probably a private student with these three teachers.



Bruno Seidlhofer (from bach-cantatas.com), Eduard Steuermann (from discogs.com) and Carlo Zecchi (from bach-cantatas.com).

In 1951 there are only two concerts known to me, both concerning "Preis der Kritik", the Critics' Prize. In the first we have three sopranos and two pianists, Eva Wollmann and Kitty Tschirren, performing Lieder and piano pieces. Eva Wollmann performed a Bach Prelude and Fugue in F sharp minor and the Theme and Variations op. 3 by Szymanowski. Perhaps a third pianist accompanied the singers, or the two pianists shared this task.

The second concert of the "Preis der Kritik" was subtitled "Entscheidung", Decision; the artists were the pianists Eva Wollmann, Walter Klien, and a baritone, accompanied by Erik Werba, as well as a string quartet from Linz Conservatory. Eva Wollmann played Chopin's B flat minor sonata. I have not found the results of the competition.

Her interest in contemporary music is evident in 1952: some time in spring she performed music by the South African composer Stefans Grové, as noted by the South African daily *Die Burger* of May 22.

More important is her participation as one of the pianists playing at the 1952 festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, ISCM, which that year took place in Salzburg. Other pianists taking part were the Hungarian Géza Anda and the Norwegian Kjell Baekkelund (who most likely performed a piano concerto by the Norwegian composer Klaus Egge).

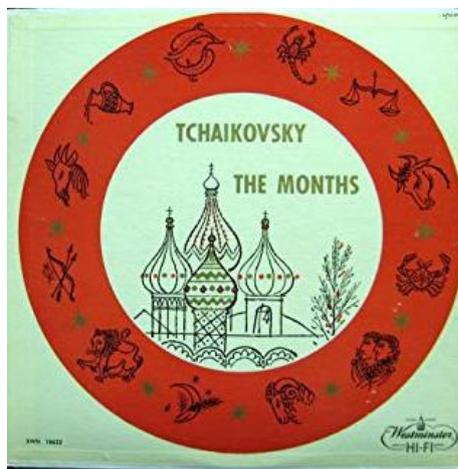
Wollmann seems to have played in at least two works, "Theme and variations for piano and orchestra", written in 1951 by the Japanese composer Yortisune Matsudaira, and a colossal work by her compatriot Friedrich Wildgans. The work by Wildgans was "Eucharistical Hymns, folkloric cantata for soloists, chorus, 3 pianos, wind and percussion". The other pianists were Max Kundeigräber and Günther Radhuber. The work was performed again in Vienna in 1954 (Eva Wollmann did not take part this time) and caused a scandal.

In the liner notes mentioned above she is said to have made "innumerable radio broadcasts". I have found only one trace of these; together with several other musicians she played chamber music on the BBC Third Programme of September 16th 1952. The music is not specified, but the other musicians, the Parrenin Quartet, the flautist Hubert Barwahser and the harpist Phia Berghout, had all, as had Eva Wollmann, taken part in the ISCM festival in Salzburg a few months earlier, so maybe it was a recording from the festival that was broadcast. This also suggests that she performed other works besides those mentioned.

There are just a few concerts to note in the following years. In April 1953 she was engaged by the Academic Orchestra Association to perform the piano part of Beethoven's Triple concerto. The other soloists were Walter Schneiderhan, leader of the Wiener Symphoniker and elder brother of the violinist Wolfgang Schneiderhan, and the cellist Nikolaus Hübner. The conductor was Leopold Emmer.

In May 1953 she was the soloist in another of Beethoven's concertos, the third in C minor, with the Wiener Symphoniker under Hans Swarowsky. A few weeks later she played a contemporary piano concerto by Kurt Schmidek, prize winner in the Wiener Symphoniker's composition competition; the Wiener Symphoniker played under F. Charles Adler.

For 1954 we can note that Eva Wollmann was chosen to record for the American record company Westminster, which had started recording in Vienna in 1949. The works were recorded in the Mozart-Saal of the Konzerthaus in Vienna, as were most solo and chamber music recordings of that company. For Westminster she just made three recordings, in 1954 and 1955, followed by a few recordings with other companies. One of them is the recording in 1957 of a contemporary work, the Italian composer Antonio Lora's piano concerto; she was accompanied by "The Vienna Orchestra" under the Anglo-German director F. Charles Adler.



Jackets for two of Eva Wollmann's Westminster recordings, Tchaikovsky's The Seasons (1954) and Shostakovich and Prokofief cello sonatas with Antonio Janigro (1955).

The Österreichische Musikzeitschrift, in its yearly survey of 1955, noted that "the begabte Wiener Nachwuchs-Pianistin Eva Wollmann" (gifted Vienna pianist of the coming generation) had played in Linz. I think we can assume that Eva Wollmann performed widely around Austria, in recitals and with orchestra, concerts that not yet have reached the Internet.

We can note some more concerts: in March 1956 she was the soloist in the Great Hall of the Musikverein in Shostakovich's first piano concerto, directed by Gustav Koslik, and a few weeks later she played Mozart's piano concerto KV 488 under Carlo Zecchi. The last known concerts are when she played, three times in March 1957, Ravel's concerto for the left hand, accompanied by the Wiener Symphoniker under Hans Swarowsky.

After the recording of the Lora concerto and these performances of the Ravel concerto, nothing is known about her. If the assumption that she was born a few years before 1930 is correct, she was around thirty years of age when her career suddenly stopped. Did she stop because of illness, or was there some other reason? My efforts to find out what happened have so far been without success.

She seemed quite established in the musical life of Austria after – and even before – the completion of her studies. If recording as a soloist is to be seen as a measure of success, none of the pianist colleagues of her years of study were more successful in that respect, with the exception, of course, of Paul Badura-Skoda, Jörg Demus, and Friedrich Gulda. Possibly reviews of her performances could shed some light on how she was regarded by the critics, but nothing is available on the Internet.

However, in 1970 the Dutch composer Marius Flothuis dedicated his "Fünf Epigramme und ein Capriccio" for piano op. 72 to Eva Wollmann, and the Dutch musicologist Joyce Kiliaan has notes from a conversation with Flothuis in 1995, where he mentions that Wollmann was then alive, but in an advanced stage of Parkinson's Disease. Enquiries with contacts in Vienna have established that no person named Eva Wollmann was buried in a Viennese cemetery between 1954 and 2019, implying that she left the city at some stage. This, if anything, adds to the riddle, and brings us no closer to knowing why her promising career ceased abruptly in 1957, or what (and where) she did subsequently. Perhaps some reader can supply the missing information. As of now, Eva Wollmann's fate remains an enigma.

Sources

Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Warsaw, email;
Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna, <https://www.musikverein.at/suche#!/search-term/Eva%20Wollmann> and archives;
ISCM, <https://iscm.org/activities/wmds/iscm-wmd-1952-salzburg>;
Joyce Kilian, Amsterdam, email
Juilliard School, New York, email
Leo Smit Foundation, Amsterdam, <https://leosmitfoundation.org/leo-smit-stichting>
Naxos anthology of "Women at the piano", vol 5, Naxos Historical 8.111219
Österreichische Musikzeitschrift 1948
Österreichisches Musiklexikon online,
https://www.musiklexikon.ac.at/ml/musik_H/Hauser_Richard.xml
Österreichische Zeitung 1946-12-28;
Westminster recordings; WL 5298, WL 5290, XVN 18791, liner notes
Wiener Symphoniker homepage; <https://www.wienersymphoniker.at/de/suche>
Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst, Vienna, email;

Eva Wollman's recordings

J.S. Bach; Italian Concerto BWV 971, Aria variata in the Italian Manner BWV 989, Overture in the French style BWV 831 (Westminster WL 5298, 1954)

P. I. Tchaikovsky: The Seasons op. 37 a (Westminster WL 5290, 1954)

C. Franck: Variations symphoniques for piano and orchestra, with Hans Swarowsky and Vienna Festival Orchestra (According to Forgotten Records recorded February 1955, orchestra said to be Wiener Symphoniker, original edition Music Treasures of the World)

D. Shostakovich & S. Prokofieff: Sonatas for Cello and Piano, with Antonio Janigro (Westminster XVN 18791; CD Forgotten Records FR 979)

W.A. Mozart: Quintet for Piano, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn, and Bassoon, KV 452, with The Wind Instruments ensemble of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra (Philips A 00341 L, 1956)

A. Lora: Concerto for piano and orchestra, with F. Charles Adler and the Vienna Orchestra (Composers' Recordings Inc. CRI 223, 1957, 2010 issued als CD as CRI 113).

© Göran Tegnér 2020

Biography

Göran Tegnér was born in Stockholm in 1940. After studies in art history and archaeology at Stockholm University, he was a curator at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm for 35 years; his principal field was medieval art. As musical activities, he studied singing in the 1960s and was from 1986 to 1992 a member of the group *Schola gregoriana holmiae*, led by Viveca Servatius. From 2001 to 2011, he sang in the *Lidingö Chamber Choir*. Since retirement in 2005, he has been able to devote himself to his chief interest beside medieval art, the music and musical culture of the early 19th century, his focus being Sweden. Wishing to deepen his knowledge of the musical life of Stockholm in 1800–1850, he discovered traces of an Italian opera company visiting Stockholm in 1848–1849. Their leading tenor, Francesco Ciaffei (1815–1894), stayed on in Sweden until 1851 and left behind letters, accounts and, documents about his concerts etc. which Tegnér is currently studying, extending his research to Ciaffei's early career in Italy and his career, mainly in Poland, as singer, singing teacher, and impresario.

The results in the field of musicology so far are contributions to the on-line bulletin of The Music and Theatre Library of Sweden, *Dokumenterat*:

- "Ciaffei – en italiensk operasångare i svenska arkiv", 2011 (<https://musikverket.se/musikochteaterbiblioteket/arkiv/dokumenterat/#question-Dokumenteratnr432011>)
- "Stockholms konsertliv 1848 och Francesco Ciaffei", 2015 (<https://musikverket.se/musikochteaterbiblioteket/arkiv/dokumenterat/#question-Dokumenterat472015>)
- "Jean Kullin – en svensk romantiker" 2018 (<https://musikverket.se/musikochteaterbiblioteket/arkiv/dokumenterat/#question-Dokumenterat502018>), also in a longer version as "Jean Kullin, en svensk Liszt, eller Fru Musicas styvbarn", on the blog vivaopera (<https://www.vivaopera.se/category/skribenter/goran-tegner/>)

On that blog also "Paul Badura-Skoda, en biodiskografi" and "Den romantiska tonsättargenerationen och Sverige". Finally "The first Swedish performance of a Verdi opera and the Italian Opera Company in Stockholm, 1848–1849", in Anne Kauppala, Ulla-Britta Broman-Kananen, and Jens Hesselager (eds.), *Tracing operatic performances in the long nineteenth century, practices, performers, peripheries*. Helsinki 2018.

Göran Tegnér is married and lives in Stockholm and the south of France.