

## The Otto Haas Archive: the music trade in the 20th century

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### Summary:

This CDP project will focus on the business archive of the antiquarian music firm, Otto Haas – providing insight into the trade of antiquarian and manuscript music books and scores from the late 19th century to the 1980s. The archive follows the business through three incarnations, starting with the firm established by Leo Liepmannsohn in Paris and Berlin in the 1860s and 70s, and taken over by the eponymous Otto Haas in 1903. Haas moved the business to London in 1936 and following his death in 1955 the firm passed to Albi Rosenthal, whose daughter is the current proprietor.

The period covered by the archive was one of intense activity in the manuscript and antiquarian music trade. As a result, the voices of many notable collectors of the time are found in it (e.g. Paul Sacher and Alfred Cortot) through correspondence and the operational evidence of buying and selling. There is also significant correspondence and documentation relating to the valuation of archives of major composers of the period, such as Igor Stravinsky, John Cage and Benjamin Britten.

The archive – deposited in tranches at the British Library over several years – will be the central focus of the project. Parts of this, including financial records and annotated catalogues, are listed and searchable, while some sense of an original order is discernible in other parts of the archive. Alongside their research for the doctoral thesis, the PhD student will play a key role in helping the Library to evaluate, sort, and reunite other material currently scattered across the archive, resulting in an appropriate and meaningful arrangement that reflects the activities of the business and makes the archive useable by other researchers.

This aspect of the project will draw on the full range of British Library resources required to undertake archival arrangement and conservation. Expertise in all aspects of curatorial work, from acquisition and appraisal through to organising, cataloguing and preservation will be provided, alongside knowledge of the collection gained from dialogue with the donor. The project will also benefit from contextual information present in the wider British Library collections, be it comparable archives of other dealers (e.g. Maggs or May & May); or – given that some material that passed through Otto Haas has ended up elsewhere in the British Library collections – institutional records.

By making the contents available to explore – through enhanced organisation and catalogue descriptions – this project will open out the collection to a wide a range of future research possibilities for the first time.

### Areas of Study:

Broadly, it is envisaged that the research project would relate to collecting, collectors and the associated trade within the broader context of musical life, examining the extent to which dealers shaped the market for musical sources. This might usefully explore the effects of events in the wider world, both political and economic (e.g. austerity and prosperity). The reputations of Liepmannsohn, Haas and Rosenthal meant that the firm stood at the centre of the trade for over 150 years: as a result, the archive provides a broad perspective on a period of intense collecting activity. The period up to the First World War was particularly fruitful, as we know from the experience of the British Museum (Library).

We would be looking for the HEI partner to work with us to develop the research theme within this broad area, providing the theoretical framework and enabling the project to benefit from their research expertise and academic networks.

Areas of study to which the archive has the potential to make a particularly strong and original contribution, and around which this CDP project might be developed, include:

- **The book trade:**  
The fact that the firm dealt primarily with music, and was so dominant in that sphere, would offer a unique contribution to wider book trade narratives. To what extent is the music trade comparable to the book trade more generally? How did it change at different periods? What do priorities evidenced by objects bought and sold tell us about construction of collections, the interest of individuals and/or the construction of canons? The trade is by its very nature confidential, so to have an insight into this hidden world at the peak of its activity would provide very strong research potential to illuminate a different perspective on music history.
- **The formation of specific collections:**  
Particular individual collections, such as those of Alfred Cortot and Paul Sacher, feature strongly in the archive and a project could focus on the formation of these – or indeed the longer-term collecting of cultural institutions (not least the British Museum/Library itself). This theme could also more broadly consider aspects of the nature of collecting, as well as touching on ethical concerns such as spoliation or breaking up of older collections.
- **Networks and communities:**  
This could consider the movement of objects between collectors, dealers and institutions over time, and the extent to which these connections operated as networks. Given the international scope of this trade, and the movement of people at this time (e.g. in the 1930s), this is likely to form part of a wider social-historical narrative as well.
- **Economic and/or aesthetic theories of valuation:**  
This is a well-established field of research for the visual arts, linked to debates around the commercialisation and ‘commodifying’ cultural artefacts. But it is less well-established for music (at least not the tangible products of it - e.g. scores). In this sense a study of the antiquarian trade could be contextualised within growing scholarly interest in the music industry – albeit as an element not previously considered or documented.

#### **Benefits and training opportunities for the student:**

The PhD student will benefit from privileged access to this largely unlisted and untapped source for research. Getting to know the material ‘from the inside’ will provide rich opportunities to undertake original research and make an important contribution to scholarship.

The CDP will also be a unique opportunity to gain professional archival and curatorial experience, with the student inputting into all stages of the process from initial appraisal to cataloguing and making the archive available to the public in the reading room. While these activities will relate specifically to this particular archive, they will result in transferable skills around presentation of ideas, curation, decision making and information management. Along the way the student will also gain insight into conservation/preservation issues, data protection and ethical concerns. Insight into the wider workings of the Library could be gained through shadowing in other departments.

Over the course of the project, there will be opportunities for the student to contribute to the public engagement and outreach activities of the Library’s Music Collections team, e.g. through events, presentations, social media.

The Haas archive in particular will be of great interest to the music research community and the richness of the material will provide opportunities to capture the public imagination by illuminating some hidden stories of twentieth century musical life, especially in relation to major composers such as Stravinsky and Cage. As well as regular posts for the British Library [Music Blog](#), there could be opportunities to convene public events or academic study days linked to related figures like Stefan Zweig, or broader sociological themes such as celebrating roles played by the Jewish community in cultural life, or the impact of emigration from central Europe in the 1930s.

*Application deadline: 23 November 2018. For more information about the call and how to apply visit [www.bl.uk/research-collaboration](http://www.bl.uk/research-collaboration) or email [Research.Development@bl.uk](mailto:Research.Development@bl.uk).*