

## Call for HEI Partners/Academic Supervisors



### Research Theme:

# The Music Collection of Paul Hirsch (1881-1951): The Collecting Practices of a Jewish Emigré to England in the WWII Period

British Library Co-Supervisors:

Dr Loukia Drosopoulou, Curator, Music

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### Context & Summary

This project will explore the history of the Paul Hirsch Music Collection, now held at the British Library. Hirsch was a German Jewish industrialist, amateur musician and music collector. In the years before WWII he amassed one of the finest private music collections in the world (ca. 20,000 items, comprising predominantly printed music and books on music, but also some music manuscripts). Hirsch fled Germany in 1936 with his collection, settling in England. He initially placed his collection on loan at Cambridge University Library, but in 1946 sold it to the British Museum. Alongside this, the British Library also holds Hirsch's personal papers, comprising invoices for his purchases and correspondence with about 700 individuals, including scholars, librarians and musicians.

The project's main purpose is to investigate the history, including aspects of the provenance history, of the Paul Hirsch Music Collection. Given the period in which he was collecting, there is a possibility that spoliated items might have entered Hirsch's collection. Researching Hirsch's collecting practices – including from whom he obtained items, when he collected the bulk of them, and the geographical spread of his collecting – is therefore a key aim of the project. Another aim is to investigate how Hirsch operated as a collector within a broad network of European music collectors, musicians, academics and librarians active during the first half of the 20th century.

Key project outcomes will be a detailed understanding of the history of the Paul Hirsch Music Collection and the collecting practices of Hirsch, and an understanding of whether spoliated materials are likely to exist within the collection. Information on the provenance of individual collection items will be added to the Library's strategic catalogues, enabling other researchers to benefit from this contextual information on how items were acquired by Hirsch and, where feasible, on the longer ownership history of selected items.

## Research Areas

The Paul Hirsch Music Collection represents a unique assemblage of music materials collected at a pivotal time in Europe's history. Although individual collection items are frequently consulted by researchers, this will be the first major study of the collection as a whole. The survival of Hirsch's accompanying papers provides an outstanding opportunity for a student to undertake original research on the collection and its history.

Relevant AHRC disciplines include Music, History, Library and Information Studies, and Cultural and Museum Studies. Study areas may include music, migration, Jewish émigré studies, book history and the history of collecting, library and museum ethics relating to collections created in the WWII period.

The key themes of the research will be:

- **Hirsch's collecting practices** – What do Hirsch's collection and papers tell us about his collecting practices? To what extent did these change over time? Where and from whom did Hirsch purchase material? How did his emigration affect his collecting?
- **Risks of spoliated items having entered the collection** – To what extent does the collection present a risk in terms of spoliation? To what extent can one identify, from available records, whether any spoliated items might have entered the collection?
- **Provenance of selected items** – What can be gleaned about either the 'full life history' or layers of provenance of selected items in Hirsch's collection? How does this feed back into our understanding of Hirsch's collecting practices? What does this reveal about the movement of cultural objects across Europe? What stories about former owners can be revealed?

The student may in addition wish to consider one or more of the following research angles:

- **Hirsch's networks of contacts** – What do Hirsch's papers reveal about 20th-century cultural correspondence networks? Did Hirsch's network influence his collecting? To what extent did his wife Olga Hirsch's network intertwine with his?
- **The role of Hirsch's music librarian, Kathi Meyer (another émigré)** – What can be gleaned about Meyer's work and the production of Hirsch's library catalogue?
- **Hirsch's musical experiences** – What can we learn of Hirsch's musical interests and experiences as an amateur musician?
- **Musical activities of Jewish people in Germany in the years before WWII, and of émigrés to Britain during the WWII period** – What can items in the Hirsch collection and papers tell us about private and public concerts and other musical activities of Jewish people during this period?
- **What can the study of Hirsch's collection and collecting practices tell us about ideas of ownership and knowledge-building?** – Were these influenced by the experiences and challenges of emigration?
- **A 'big data' digital humanities approach to looking at transmission of material across borders** – Hirsch was collecting music editions published right across the world, of composers of various

nationalities, so there is potential for taking this approach to looking at transmission of material across borders, and in the analysis of Hirsch's social networks.

The student is expected to draw on several methodologies for the investigation of these research questions, in particular book history, music bibliography, and archival research. Other methodologies that could be used include network analysis (including the use of digital humanities visualisation software).

The project themes will be developed together with the HEI and the student taking into account their interests and areas of expertise.

### **Benefits & Training Opportunities for the CDP Student**

The student will have the opportunity to undertake research within a national library and will be hosted by the Music Collections team, a small curatorial team responsible for heritage materials and contemporary collections.

The student will benefit from training opportunities specific to the CDP on provenance and spoliation research, provided by the Library supervisor and other Library staff, as well as external courses. In addition, they will have access to the Library's extensive internal training offer, and consideration will also be given to any support needed while dealing with potentially sensitive issues. They will also have the opportunity to travel as part of the CDP in order to undertake relevant research in institutions outside the Library.

The student will learn how to prepare provenance information for inclusion in the Library's strategic catalogues, and will also have the opportunity to take part in team activities, such as show-and-tells, public events, and social media activities, gaining experience of sharing often complex information about collection items with a public audience. Their work would also contribute to Library programmes on diversity and inclusion.

The project will provide an opportunity for the student to engage constructively with sensitive issues relating to cultural property, in particular relating to WWII-era spoliation and the sale and movement of cultural property during the Nazi period. They will also have a chance to learn about and engage with the ethical duties of cultural institutions such as the BL regarding cultural property and collection provenance.

### **Application Deadline**

*Friday 29 November 2024, 12pm*

### **Application Guidance**

Further information and details of how to apply can be found in the 'Information for HEI Applicants' document made available as part of this call.

### **Contact for Queries**

British Library Research Development Office – Postgraduate inbox: [pgr@bl.uk](mailto:pgr@bl.uk)

and

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