





In December 2008, an international conference brought together a panel of historians and sociologists and over forty visitors - mainly members of Jewish congregations in Germany, to discuss the impact of Jewish migration from the former Soviet Union since the early 1990s on communities in Germany, the USA and Israel. Lively debates were triggered by questions such as how the immigration of Russians and the changing character of Jewish life in Germany, the USA and Israel have affected the Jewish community in Germany, the USA and Israel.

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On 17 February 2009, the Austrian Ambassador, Dr Gabriele Matzner-Holzer, graciously opened her residence for a lecture-concert in aid of the Centre. The performers were Liora Grodnikaite, mezzo soprano, born in Vilnius and former 'Young Artist' at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; and Ido Ariel, an Israeli pianist and conductor currently teaching at the Jerusalem Music Academy and writing a doctoral thesis on Arnold Schoenberg at the Royal College of Music in London.

The programme comprised a broad range of lieder by Schubert, Schumann, Mahler and Schoenberg. Before each group of lieder, Ido Ariel described the context of the works and gave musical illustrations at the piano, demonstrating that whereas Schubert's music closely matches Goethe's poetry, Schumann writes primarily for a solo pianist with words flowing alongside. However, with Mahler and Schoenberg, the relationship between words and music becomes more arbitrary. Although the work of art is still to be experienced as a whole, with music running parallel to the words, the music does not appear to illustrate the meaning of the poetry.

Following the recital, Professor Peter Pulzer, Chairman of the Academic Advisory Board of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, noted the progression from the music of two non-Jewish to two Jewish composers, providing a fine example of the innovation that characterised the Jewish-German symbiosis during the Weimar Republic. This experimentation, associated with liberal democracy, contributed to restoring the image of Germany and Austria in the eyes of neighbours after the Great War.

Some of this music was destroyed during the Nazi book-burnings of 1933, and leading composers were forced to flee abroad. But Weimar Jewish culture continued to thrive in exile in the coffee houses of New York, Los Angeles, Tel Aviv, Sydney, Buenos Aires and London. This diffusion of culture is a central topic for teaching and research at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies. And we are most grateful to the Austrian Ambassador and to the Austrian Cultural Forum for their generosity in hosting and co-ordinating this event.

