

Mary Dickenson-Auner (1880-1965)

Summary

An Irish violinist, composer and music educator who built her career in Vienna — and who is today largely forgotten. In her lifetime she stood as a soloist on the great podiums of Europe, worked with Bartók and Schönberg and created an extensive body of compositions. As a woman in a musical world dominated by men she had at times to publish under a male pseudonym; as a British citizen she was banned from performing and teaching under National Socialism. Thus gender, nationality and the events of history combined into a threefold silence.

In the first concert of the cycle (25 November 2026, Gläserner Saal) the Auner Quartett performs her **Streichquartett Nr. 4 (String Quartet No. 4)**; the musicologist and long-standing Ö1 broadcaster **Irene Suchy** reads from her memoirs „Mein Musikleben" (My Life in Music). Daniel Auner, related to her through the family, plays on her own violin. Almost all of her string quartets survive only in manuscript and are currently being digitised by Dr Dima Khierbeck; the Auner Quartett plans a CD production of these works for autumn 2026. The transfer of her estate to the exil.arte Center of the mdw, coordinated by its director Gerold Gruber, is currently under way.

A life against resistance

Mary Frances Dorothea Dickenson was born in Dublin in 1880, into a respected, musically and academically gifted family: her grandfather Hercules MacDonnell was a co-founder of the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She had to fight for her first violin lessons at the age of six; for a long time no one credited a girl with serious musical ambition. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London under Émile Sauret and then perfected her technique with Otakar Ševčík in Prague. In 1905 she made her debut under Oskar Nedbal with the Czech Philharmonic and went on to concert for around a decade as a soloist across Europe.

The pseudonym Frank Donnell

She published her early compositions under a male pseudonym — and precisely because they were taken for the work of a man, they found recognition. She describes this openly in her memoirs:

„Damals waren die Vorurteile gegen Kompositionen von Frauen noch viel größer als heutzutage. So versteckte ich mich hinter dem Namen Frank Donnell. Das brachte mir recht gute Kritiken, die ich sonst sicher nicht bekommen hätte. Aber später gab ich das Pseudonym auf, weil es mir feige vorkam, mich hinter den Männern zu verstecken.“ (At that time the prejudices against compositions by women were far greater than today. So I hid behind the name Frank Donnell. That brought me quite good reviews I would surely not have received otherwise. But later I gave up the pseudonym, because it seemed cowardly to me to hide behind the men.)

— Mary Dickenson-Auner, „Mein Musikleben“

Vienna: Bartók, Schönberg and the avant-garde

In 1909 she moved to Vienna; in 1912 she married the scholar Michael Auner. After years in Transylvania and — owing to the war — in the Netherlands, the family returned to Vienna in 1920. Mary joined Arnold Schönberg's „Society for Private Musical Performances". Her most significant interpretive contribution falls in this period: in 1922 she gave, with the pianist Eduard Steuermann, the Austrian premiere of Béla Bartók's Violin Sonata No. 1. To prepare the Salzburg performance, Bartók stayed a week at her house in Neuwaldegg — „a fine, quiet man who liked to sit in the garden to work". Decades later Paul Hindemith, on meeting her again, remembered at once: „Salzburg, 1922, violin!"

The „Hörstunden": music education as a life's work

From 1925, within the Vienna school reform, she developed her own educational concept: the „Hörstunden" (listening lessons), in which children were introduced through short, explained concerts to Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven. On a voluntary basis she expanded the project to some 17 Viennese schools by 1938. Asked by an official what she herself gained from it, she replied simply: „Ich habe die Freude der Kinder." (I have the joy of the children.)

1938: the enforced silence

In March 1938 the life of the British citizen changed fundamentally. She describes the end of her school work soberly:

„Ein mir nicht gut gesinnter Lehrer verklagte mich bei der obersten Behörde, dass ich in die Schule beim Eintritt nicht mit ‚Heil Hitler‘ grüßte. Es wurde mir nahegelegt, mich entweder dem Gebrauch anzupassen oder mich zurückzuziehen. Als Engländerin zog ich das Letztere vor.“ (A teacher ill-disposed towards me denounced me to the highest authority for not greeting the school on entering with „Heil Hitler". I was advised either to conform to the custom or to withdraw. As an Englishwoman I chose the latter.)

— Mary Dickenson-Auner, „Mein Musikleben“

As a foreign national she was forbidden to perform in public; she was no longer even allowed to give private lessons. At a stroke she lost every sphere of activity.

A body of work out of the silence

What began as loss she turned into the most creative period of her life. At almost sixty, deprived of every public role, she began to compose in earnest — the long-suppressed notes broke forth, as she herself wrote, „wie eine Flutwelle" (like a tidal wave). Over some two decades an extensive body of work arose: symphonies, operas, oratorios, songs and chamber music. Instead of the „old triad music" she systematically used four-, five- and six-note chords, wrote emphatically polyphonically and returned again and again to the Irish folk tunes of her childhood — a combination she herself called „Celtic Impressionism". She died in Vienna in 1965.

The theme throughout the whole cycle

The rediscovery of suppressed and forgotten voices runs through all four evenings. In the first concert (25 November 2026) Dickenson-Auner's String Quartet No. 4 stands beside Schubert, Brahms and Zemlinsky. In the second (17 February 2027) Webern's slow movement and Berg's „Lyric Suite" meet the Emperor Waltz. The third (17 March 2027) with Thomas Hampson gathers, under the title „a bouquet of songs", works by Zemlinsky, Mary Dickenson-Auner and others often driven into exile. The fourth (22 May 2027) closes with Fritz Kreisler's „A Confession to Vienna". Mary Dickenson-Auner is thus not merely one item on one evening, but the dramaturgical centre of the entire cycle.

Jenseits vom tanzenden Wien

Tickets available now from the Wiener Musikverein.

I 25 November 2026, 8.00 pm · Gläserner Saal

Irene Suchy reads from „Mein Musikleben" (My Life in Music) by Mary Dickenson-Auner

Franz Schubert	Quartettsatz c-Moll D 703 (Quartet Movement in C minor)
Mary Dickenson-Auner	Streichquartett Nr. 4 (String Quartet No. 4)
Johannes Brahms	Ungarische Tänze Nr. 5 & 6 (Hungarian Dances Nos. 5 & 6)
Alexander Zemlinsky	Streichquartett Nr. 1 A-Dur op. 4 (String Quartet No. 1 in A major)

Tickets & details: <https://musikverein.at/konzert/?id=0013414b>

II 17 February 2027, 8.00 pm · Gläserner Saal

Wolfgang Böck reads reflections on Arthur Schnitzler's „Leutnant Gustl", formulated by Manfred Stimmmler

Anton von Webern	Langsamer Satz (Slow Movement)
Johann Strauss	Kaiserwalzer op. 437 (Emperor Waltz, arr. Auner Quartett)
Alexander Zemlinsky	Streichquartett e-Moll (String Quartet in E minor, 1893)
Alban Berg	Lyrische Suite (Lyric Suite) for string quartet

Tickets & details: <https://musikverein.at/konzert/?id=00134148>

III 17 March 2027, 7.30 pm · Brahms-Saal

Thomas Hampson, baritone

Hugo Wolf	Italienische Serenade (Italian Serenade)
Arnold Schönberg	Streichquartett op. posth. D-Dur (String Quartet in D major)
Alexander Zemlinsky et al.	Bouquet von Liedern (a bouquet of songs) for baritone and string quartet, arr. Dima Khierbeck

Tickets & details: <https://musikverein.at/konzert/?id=00134145>

IV 22 May 2027, 8.00 pm · Gläserner Saal

Christoph Wagner-Trenkwitz on Fritz Kreisler's Vienna

Johann Strauss	Frühlingsstimmen-Walzer op. 410 (Voices of Spring Waltz, arr. Daniel Auner)
Egon Wellesz	Streichquartett Nr. 5 (String Quartet No. 5)
Alexander Zemlinsky	Zwei Sätze für Streichquartett (Two Movements for String Quartet)
Fritz Kreisler	Streichquartett a-Moll „Bekenntnis zu Wien" (String Quartet in A minor, „A Confession to Vienna")

Tickets & details: <https://musikverein.at/konzert/?id=0013414a>

Full information on the cycle is also available at www.aunerquartett.at/kammermusikzyklus

Jenseits vom tanzenden Wien

The title translates roughly as „Beyond the Vienna of the Waltz". Vienna dances. Since the 19th century, the waltz of Johann Strauss has shaped the image of the city — popular, influential and so overwhelming that „serious" composers often struggled to find a place beside it. Yet beyond this dancing Vienna, generations of composers pursued their own paths. This cycle tells their story.

The title carries three meanings that follow one another in time — like the three steps of a waltz, from which the whole movement first emerges. They lead from the music of the 19th century through the rupture of National Socialism into our own present.

First step • the 19th century: the striving music beside the waltz

From Schubert to Schönberg, serious, striving art music sought its place in the shadow of the ubiquitous dance culture. The classical heritage — Schubert, Brahms — and the modernism of the Second Viennese School always stood beside a Vienna that above all wished to dance.

Second step • the Nazi era: the far side of the Atlantic

While Nazi propaganda instrumentalised the seemingly harmless music of Strauss — even falsifying the composer's genealogy to that end — almost all of the composers performed here were driven out, ostracised or forced into inner emigration: Zemlinsky, Schönberg and Kreisler to the USA, Wellesz to England, Dickenson-Auner banned from performing in her own Vienna.

Third step • the present: the afterlife itself

„Beyond" finally means the continued resonance: how the waltz of Johann Strauss inspired the serious composers and lives on in their work — not as an opposite, but as a creative echo. That this displaced music sounds again in the Musikverein today is its late homecoming.

A voice from the Alexander Zemlinsky Fund

„Was für ein kühnes, spannendes Projekt, in dem das bekannte Auner Quartett Neues erkunden und einen großen Bogen jenseits bekannter Wiener Klischees spannen will. Und mittendrin Alexander Zemlinsky als zentrale Figur des Zyklus und der Wiener Moderne. [...] Die Wiederentdeckung einer zu Unrecht in Vergessenheit geratenen Komponistin und bedeutenden Persönlichkeit des Wiener Musiklebens, Mary Dickenson-Auner. Und das im Musikverein. Dem Ort, der sich von Anfang an Entdeckungen und Wiederentdeckungen wichtiger Werke zur Aufgabe gemacht hat." (What a bold, exciting project, in which the renowned Auner Quartett sets out to explore new ground and to trace a wide arc beyond the familiar Viennese clichés. And at its centre Alexander Zemlinsky as the central figure of the cycle and of Viennese modernism. [...] The rediscovery of a composer and important figure of Viennese musical life unjustly fallen into oblivion: Mary Dickenson-Auner. And all this in the Musikverein — the place that has made it its task from the very beginning to discover and rediscover important works.)

— Peter Marboe, chairman of the Alexander Zemlinsky Fund at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien

Two axes: Zemlinsky and Dickenson-Auner

Two figures hold the programme together. **Alexander Zemlinsky** (1871–1942) forms the musical axis — a work of his sounds in each of the four concerts. Fostered as a pupil and friend of Brahms, teacher and brother-in-law of Arnold Schönberg, dedicatee of Alban Berg's „Lyric Suite", he connects every generation of this programme; his path from fin-de-siècle Vienna into American exile, where he died forgotten in 1942, embodies the fate of an entire musical culture. **Mary Dickenson-Auner** (1880–1965), violinist, composer and namesake of the quartet,

forms its dramaturgical centre — the knot at which the whole web of this Viennese music history is drawn together.

Auner Quartett

It had to be a genuinely „Viennese quartet" once again, one that engages with the music of this city from the early 20th century with the necessary quality and enthusiasm ...

— Günter Pichler, Alban Berg Quartet, on the Auner Quartett

Named after the Viennese violinist and composer Mary Dickenson-Auner, to whom the first violinist is related, and founded in 2013, the Auner Quartett has established itself as one of the most distinguished ensembles of its generation on the international chamber-music scene. It has won several national and international competitions, including the renowned Eugène Ysaÿe Competition in Liège in 2018. As the first Austrian ensemble it subsequently featured on the cover of the Performing Arts Yearbook of Europe, with the citation „Auner Quartett – The award-winning string quartet: a perfect musical match".

In the 2020/21 season the Auner Quartett was appointed cultural ambassador of Austria by an expert commission of the Foreign Ministry (as part of the „New Austrian Sound of Music" programme), and has since performed regularly in cultural forums and embassies around the globe. Drawing on Vienna's historic salon culture, in 2016 the four musicians founded their own chamber-music cycle, which will take place in the halls of the Wiener Musikverein from the 2026/27 season. In this cycle, entitled „Jenseits vom tanzenden Wien", in which guests such as Thomas Hampson and Wolfgang Böck also appear, first violinist Daniel Auner leads through the programme with personal introductions. The title alludes to the Vienna beyond the dance music of the Strauss family — to those „serious" composers around Mary Dickenson-Auner who struggled for a place in the city's musical life, were persecuted under the Nazi regime and often driven into exile, and whose work Vienna only gradually reclaimed after 1945. A further focus, alongside the music of Mary Dickenson-Auner and composers of her circle — such as Arnold Schönberg and Alban Berg — lies on new music, often commissioned by the quartet. The project „Cirque d'eau", eight compositions on Austrian lakes, is currently being completed with the Austrian composer Johanna Doderer and recorded at various natural sites across Austria.

The Auner Quartett received its musical training in Vienna, studying at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna with Johannes Meissl (Artis Quartett), among others, and as a selected ensemble of the European Chamber Music Academy (ECMA). The musicians gained further artistic impulses in masterclasses with Hatto Beyerle and Günter Pichler (Alban Berg Quartet), Petr Prause (Talich Quartet), Alasdair Tait (Belcea Quartet), Patrick Jüdt and members of the St. Lawrence String Quartet (USA).

Concert tours have taken the four musicians to renowned festivals and concert series worldwide — from Berlin to Brazil, from Kuwait via Kyiv to Colombia. As committed music communicators, the quartet actively seeks contact with the younger generation, appearing regularly in schools within the „Rhapsody in School" initiative founded by Lars Vogt. Through benefit concerts — for the Ukraine relief of „Apotheker ohne Grenzen Österreich", „Austrian Doctors" or the Diakonie refugee aid — as well as workshops for youth orchestras abroad, the ensemble takes on social responsibility; such projects, partly in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, have led the musicians to Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Belize and South Africa.

The CD of clarinet quintets by Mozart, Reger and Leitner (Gramola 2018, with Simon Reitmeier) received excellent reviews, and the portrait album of the Austrian composer Johanna Doderer (Capriccio 2019) documented the quartet's versatility. In 2021 „Versinkende Sonne" (Gramola) appeared, with string quartets by Alexander von Zemlinsky, Egon Wellesz, Anton Webern and Fritz Kreisler; commissioned by the Austrian National Bank, the recording was named „Ö1 CD of the Year 2022". A new CD, „Jenseits vom tanzenden Wien", will be released in 2026, featuring string quartets by Schönberg, Kreisler, Korngold and Strauss. To date the Auner Quartett has released ten CDs.

The Auner Quartett has been supported since its founding by the Viennese string manufacturer Thomastik-Infeld and, since 2025, by the Habsburg clothing manufactory. The musicians play precious historic instruments: Daniel Auner performs on a violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, a permanent loan from the collection of the Austrian National Bank.

Daniel Auner violin · **Cristian Ruscior** violin · **Georg Wimmer** viola · **Konstantin Zelenin** violoncello

In the tradition of a first „Auner Quartet“

That a string quartet bears the name of Mary Dickenson-Auner has a historical precedent. In her memoirs „Mein Musikleben“ the composer describes a family ensemble of her own, with which she performed her educational „Hörstunden“ (listening lessons): it consisted of her daughter Moira, a violist friend and her son Michael on the cello, while she herself played second violin. Despite her British citizenship she was initially permitted to take part, and the ensemble travelled through every district of Vienna. This first, family „Auner Quartet“ came to an end when — because she refused to greet the schools with „Heil Hitler“ — she was barred from continuing. Today's Auner Quartett carries this tradition forward: it bears her name and brings to life the very music that was taken from her.

Readings, song, moderation

Each of the four concerts combines the chamber music with a contribution by a prominent guest. The guests are available for enquiries and interviews depending on the date.

Irene Suchy · reading (25 November 2026)

Irene Suchy, a native of Vienna, Dr. phil. Mag. artium, studied musicology and German philology, music education and instrumental cello pedagogy in Vienna and Tokyo. For 35 years she was a music editor at Ö1; she is a lecturer at international universities, an exhibition curator, presenter, dramaturge, librettist and author. She has published on recent music history, on victims of Nazi persecution and the history of musical exile, and on feminist musicology, and holds the Golden Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria as well as the Karl Renner Prize. As a tireless advocate of forgotten and ostracised music, she opens the cycle with Mary Dickenson-Auner's own memoirs.

Wolfgang Böck · reading (17 February 2027)

Born in Linz in 1953, the actor and director Wolfgang Böck achieved cult status as the television inspector „Trautmann" in „Kaisermühlen-Blues". After training as an actor in Graz, engagements followed in Bregenz, Linz, Zurich, at the Renaissance-Theater Berlin, the Volkstheater Wien and the Theater in der Josefstadt. Since 2004 he has been director of the Schlossspiele Kobersdorf; he has received numerous awards, including the Kainz Medal and a ROMY. His reading from Schnitzler's „Leutnant Gustl", formulated by Manfred Stimmmler, mirrors the inner Vienna of the turn of the century.

Thomas Hampson · baritone (17 March 2027)

Long recognised as one of the most innovative musicians of our time, the American baritone Thomas Hampson has received countless international honours for his art. His operatic repertoire comprises more than 80 roles, his discography more than 170 albums. He is an Austrian Kammersänger, an honorary member of London's Royal Academy of Music and a recipient of the Hugo Wolf Medal; in 2003 he founded the Hampsong Foundation. As a particular advocate of the Viennese art song, he brings Zemlinsky and his contemporaries to life.

Christoph Wagner-Trenkwitz · moderation (22 May 2027)

Christoph Wagner-Trenkwitz was born in Vienna and studied musicology, political science and Romance studies. He was chief dramaturge of the Vienna State Opera and, for many years, of the Vienna Volksoper. Since 2001 he has been known to a broad public as commentator of the Vienna Opera Ball on ORF and as a presenter of opera and music broadcasts on Ö1. Since 2020 he has been director of the Operette Langenlois and, since 2022, dramaturge at the Gärtnerplatz State Theatre in Munich; in the summer of 2025 he took part as dramaturge in the new production of „Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg" at the Bayreuth Festival. He leads through the Vienna of Fritz Kreisler and brings the cycle to a close.

Information contacts, press contact

For further information, for the verification of details and for possible interviews, the following persons are available:

- **Daniel Auner, MA** – first violinist of the Auner Quartett
- **Dr Andreas Auner** – grandson of the composer
- **ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr Gerold Gruber** – director of the exil.arte Center of the mdw
- **Josipa Sipek** – exil.arte Center of the mdw, on the estate
- **Erin Hennessey** – Royal Academy of Music, doctoral researcher on Mary Dickenson-Auner's chamber music (in English)
- **Irene Suchy** – musicologist, reading in the first concert
- **Wolfgang Böck** – actor, reading in the second concert
- **Thomas Hampson** – baritone, soloist in the third concert
- **Christoph Wagner-Trenkwitz** – moderator of the fourth concert

Direct contacts can be requested, if desired, from the Kammermusikforum Wien at presse@danielauner.com.

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