

Mary Dickenson-Auner's Violin

Summary

Throughout the cycle Daniel Auner plays on the violin from the estate of Mary Dickenson-Auner, the so-called Fisselthaler instrument. Outwardly it is a German factory violin with a material value of less than a hundred euros — yet its sound matches that of far more valuable instruments, and to this day no one can explain why. The violin maker Hermann Löschberger, who restored it, found no visible interventions. The name goes back to Karl Fisselthaler, whom the composer describes in her memoirs as a mysterious „sound refiner"; externally he cannot be verified.

The fourth concert (22 May 2027, Gläserner Saal) focuses on **Fritz Kreisler** and his String Quartet „A Confession to Vienna"; the dramaturge and presenter **Christoph Wagner-Trenkwitz** speaks about the Vienna that Kreisler left behind.

A sound no one can explain

Outwardly the instrument is unremarkable: a German factory violin, one of thousands, with a material value of less than a hundred euros. Yet its sound stands in sharp contradiction to this — it matches that of far more valuable instruments. The violin was restored by the maker Hermann Löschberger; at Thomastik-Infeld, strings were selected especially for it. Löschberger found no visible interventions during the restoration — no grooves in the wood, no glass dust, unremarkable plate thicknesses. Where the sound comes from cannot be explained with today's understanding.

Karl Fisselthaler, the sound refiner

The name of the instrument goes back to Karl Fisselthaler, whom Mary Dickenson-Auner met after her return to Vienna and describes as a „peculiar and interesting person". Her very first characterisation is telling:

„Man konnte ihn nicht einen Geigenbauer nennen, denn er baute die Geige nicht selbst, sondern ließ sie nach seinen Angaben bauen oder kaufte ganz billige Geigen, die er dann zum Klingen brachte — und zwar war sein Bestreben, dass sie ebenso gut klingen sollten wie die beste Stradivari-Geige." (One could not call him a violin maker, for he did not build the violin himself, but had it built to his specifications or bought very cheap violins, which he then made sing — his aim being that they should sound just as good as the finest Stradivari.)

— Mary Dickenson-Auner, „Mein Musikleben"

What he did to the violins he kept strictly secret; the method was lost with his death. Of the violin she finally kept she writes:

„... bis er mir einmal eine so schöne, wohlklingende Geige brachte, die ich behalten durfte und auf der ich dann immer öffentlich spielte. Ich behauptete, dass sie von selbst spielte, so leicht sprach sie an, und so leicht spielte sie sich." (... until one day he brought me such a beautiful, resonant violin, which I was allowed to keep and on which I then always played in public. I claimed that it played by itself, so easily did it respond, and so easily did it play.)

— Mary Dickenson-Auner, „Mein Musikleben"

Externally Fisselthaler cannot be verified: his name appears neither in the relevant violin-making directories nor in the research on the composer. His work survives solely through her memoirs.

A shopping bag from Spar

One anecdote belongs to the history of the instrument: at the first performance of Mary Dickenson-Auner's **Streichquartett Nr. 3 (String Quartet No. 3)**, Daniel Auner's uncle, Andreas Auner, brought the violin to the concert in a shopping bag of the Spar supermarket chain — at the time it was completely broken. For the family this was a great disappointment: the composer had always considered the instrument fantastic, while the violin makers assigned it only a modest value. It was the restoration by Hermann Löschberger that made the violin playable again — and once more revealed that sound which bears no relation to its material worth.

Fritz Kreisler and „A Confession to Vienna"

The fourth concert is devoted to Fritz Kreisler. His String Quartet in A minor, written in New York exile in 1919, bears the subtitle „A Confession to Vienna" — a late-Romantic masterpiece in which the exile raises a sounding monument to the city of his youth. In his apartment in the USA his Austrian certificate of citizenship hung framed on the wall; in the First World War he had volunteered. Daniel Auner has recorded numerous works by Kreisler and was involved in organising the most recent Fritz Kreisler Competition in Vienna.

One instrument throughout the whole cycle

The Fisselthaler violin is not confined to a single evening: Daniel Auner plays it throughout the entire cycle — from the composer's String Quartet No. 4 in the first concert, through the works of Zemlinsky, Webern and Berg, to Kreisler's „A Confession to Vienna" in the finale. The instrument thus binds the four evenings together and creates a direct, sounding connection between the composer and today's ensemble.

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 Stimmler

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, plays the instrument
- **Hermann Löschberger** – violin maker, restored the instrument
- **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
- **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.

Press contact

Kammermusikforum Wien

Daniel Auner, MA

presse@danielauner.com

+43 677 63513039

Web: www.aunerquartett.at/kammermusikzyklus