

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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MARIE GEIST

German/American cellist, pianist and teacher

Marie Geist was born in 1859, probably in Würzburg (Germany). Little is known of her early life. From 1875 to 1877, Marie Geist studied cello with Emil Boerngen (1845-1893) and piano with Georg von Petersenn (1849-1930) at the Royal Music School in Würzburg. According to the annual report, in the 1876/77 academic year she no longer received piano lessons, but did attend the more 'minor' subjects of harmony, choral singing and literary history. At the same time, a Kathinka Geist was also studying the cello with her (in the following annual report 1877/78 named as Katharina Geist), so very probably identical to her sister Katie Geist. As a soloist she appeared several times in conservatory concerts;

*** 1875 with the Andante from Goltermann's Violoncello Concerto in B minor, Op. 51*

*** 1876 with Mendelssohn's Andante and Presto for piano WoO 19.*

*** In 1877 she appeared to perform the complete Johan Svendsen Cello Concerto in D major, Op.7.*

From 1877 to 1880, Marie Geist continued her cello training at the Royal Music School in Munich with the then famous cellist-composer Josef Werner (1837–1922) and, from the academic year 1878/79, adding her piano studies with Carl Baermann junior (1839–1913). At music evenings and student obligations she frequently performed and it has been registered:

*** January 1878 - first movement of the Beethoven Piano Trio in G major Op.1/2*

*** March 1878 – the Abendgesang of C. Matys for cello, harp and organ*

*** February 1880 - Joseph Haydn Piano Trio in E major by*

*** 6th July 1878 - Carl Schroeder's Adagio for solo cello, harp and orchestra*

*** 15th July 1879 - Carl Schuberth's Romance Op.9 for cello solo*

*** 15th July 1880 - she performed Goltermann's Cello Concerto in D minor, Op.30, at a concert to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the House of Wittelsbach.*

The following is said about a public concert in Munich in 1879:

“Yesterday evening, an exclusive women’s concert, organized by four young artists who had recently belonged to the local music school, took me to the small hall of the Odeon. Fraulein Mathilde Brehm played the violin, Fraulein Geist played the cello, which was not particularly feminine, Fraulein v. Lottner Piano [...]. Of the eleven individual pieces performed, I consider the trio by Jos. Haydn in G with the gypsy rondo, which the ladies produced very precisely and expressively, even though I do not want to hide the fact that the cello was not audible enough compared to the other two instruments”

However, towards the end of her studies in Munich some of her family had already emigrated to the USA by that time. So, in 1880, Marie Geist also moved to St. Paul (Minnesota), where her brothers Joseph M. Geist (?–1897) and Emil Geist (1850/51–1926) were living. Her sister, Katie Geist who developed her career as an organ player followed later. This life-changing event seemed to open up a realm of opportunities for her.

In early November 1880 she gave concerts in the popular Popular Concerts in no less than the London's Steinway Hall; at the end of the same month she appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York, alongside well-known musicians such as the pianist Teresa Carreño and the harpist Josephine Chatterton-Bohrer. In the spring of 1882, she visited her relatives in St. Paul, and in June of that year she made her debut at the Athenaeum there, playing one of the Goltermann concertos. This was followed by a lively concert schedule, above in Minnesota, Milwaukee and New York.

Appearances with the Lenora Austin Party are documented between Oct. 1882 and Jan. 1883. The group, consisting of the at times famous performance artist Lenora Austin, the soprano Etta Hawkins and Marie Geist, performed in large parts of Minnesota e.g. in Mankato, St. Peter, Faribault, Northfield, Duluth, St. Cloud, Fergus Falls, St. Paul, Grand Forks, Winnipeg, Fargo and Austin. At these literary and musical evenings, Marie Geist mostly played the cello and piano as a soloist, though sometimes also accompanying the singing performances.

In 1883 she was a cellist with the Janotta Concert Company, which gave several chamber music concerts in St. Paul. Between 1885 and 1887 she formed a trio with Titcomb and the violinist Paul Stoeving and organized a series of chamber music recitals. A few times, as in the winter of 1885, Stoeving and Geist were supplemented by additional strings (here John Holdt and Henry Johns), so that string quartets (Mendelssohn, Haydn) could also be on the program.

The focus of her concert activities was of course on the violoncello, but a few appearances as a pianist are also known:

- ** 23rd April, 1883 - *Capriccio Brillante Op.22* by Mendelssohn
- ** July 1883 - *Weber's Invitation to the Dance Op.65*
- ** August 1886 - she accompanied the zither and horn player "Prof. A. S. Habile of the Vienna Conservatoire" and with the violinist Mühlenbruch from St. Paul (reported in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* 8 Aug. 1886)

In 1885, Marie Geist married her concert manager, the jeweller and amateur musician John B. Erd (1864–1914). Their daughter Senta Erd trained as a soprano with Bianca Bianchi in Munich from 1916 and later worked with great success on the stages in Stuttgart, Basel and Zurich. Another daughter, the violinist Marie Erd, died in 1912 at the age of 23.

Marie Geist was teaching music at Mrs. J. S. Bailey's "Academy and Conservatory - Home boarding and Day School", and in 1882 had also advertised as a private teacher for piano, violoncello and ensemble lessons. The following year she bravely founded her own conservatory on the 127th floor West Third Street in St. Paul. The subjects offered were: piano, organ, violoncello, violin, zither and harmony. The teachers were: Marie Geist-Erd and her sister Katie Geist ('Assistant Teacher', *St. Paul Sunday Globe* 20 Apr. 1884), Emma Lawrence (zither) and Laura W. Hall (theory). Public concerts took place in the rooms of the conservatory, which were probably primarily aimed at schoolchildren and parents, but which the press also did take notice of.

From now on there was a large period in which little is known of her, due to marriage, children and music school life. She performed several times with the violinist Carl Riedelsberger in chamber music in August 1899. The attached photo of her is taken from around 1900.

In 1897 Duluth (Minnesota) became the new residence of the Erd family. From 1899 to 1905 Marie Geist-Erd established a chamber music series on a subscription basis: under the name Beethovian Club (later also Beethoven Trio), she presented with the violinist Fred G. Bradbury and the pianist and composer Gerard Topping in over 15 concerts "*representative works by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, six trios by Beethoven, Reissiger, Schubert, Marschner, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Goetz, Weber, Wagner, Gade, Bungeb, Widor, Smetana, Schnett, Grieg, Brahms and Arensky*" (Duluth News Tribune 23rd April 1905). In May 1903, Marie Geist was elected to the program committee of the Minnesota Music Teachers Association. Appearances in other ensembles are documented up until 1913.

In 1915/16 Marie Geist-Erd accompanied her daughter Senta Erd to New York and from there to Munich. Here their trace is lost and her death year is not even known. So, what remains of her today?

Luckily, the Minnesota Historical Society Library in St. Paul owns "Press clippings and concert programs of Marie Geist, cellist and pianist, 1875-1905" and a manuscript of a biography of Marie Geist written by her daughter Senta Erd. Some additional articles and photographs are archived in the Paul and Jean Christian Collection at the University of South Dakota's National Music Museum.

One of the reviews highly praised her interpretations: from a concert in the Opera House St. Paul on December 14, 1882, the 'St. Paul Daily Globe' musical critic wrote the following day about cellist Marie Geist:

"The 'cello solos by Miss Geist were the works of an artiste of first-class ability, trained in one of the very best schools of Europe. Her tones upon that noble instrument were full, round and clear. The 'Fantasie' by Hænsel is a selection that is full of difficulties, abounding in double stops and rapid, dangerous staccato passages which were executed with precision and a certain definiteness, that stamped the performer an artiste. In the 'Mazurka,' by Popper she gave her hearers an opportunity to listen to the delicious harmonies that constitute such a charm on the 'cello"

A worthy and energetic cellist that all German and US musicians should remember!



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