

EVGENY HENKIN AND THE THEREMIN

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EVGENY HENKIN: From January 1928, I began to learn to play the theremin. On September 15, 1928, I began to work on this instrument. I gave concerts in many cities in Germany, I was in Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Austria, Luxembourg, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay. In addition, I travelled in France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia.

QUESTION: In what year did you stop working on the theremin?

EVGENY HENKIN: At the end of 1934.

QUESTION: Why did you have to stop working on the theremin?

EVGENY HENKIN: The "Union of German Artists" did not give me permission to continue performances with theremin concerts, as a non-Aryan.

From the Soviet authorities investigation into Henkin on his return to the USSR

Over the last few years I have been researching the history of the Theremin and associated 'aether-wave' instruments in the pre-WWII period in Europe. In previous histories (e.g. Albert Glinsky's (2005) *Theremin: Ether Music and Espionage* and Andrey Smirnov's (2013) *Sound in Z: Experiments in Sound and Electronic Music in Early 20th Century Russia*) little attention has been paid to the European context after Leon Theremin left for the USA in December 1927. This article provides a summary of events in this period in Berlin and elsewhere in Europe, particularly focusing on those directly related to Evgeny Henkin. It is likely that some information is still missing, and that between November 1928 and November 1929 Henkin probably performed in concerts as yet undocumented and not included here. However, what has been discovered so far supports Henkin's claims concerning his work in Germany, in other European contexts and in South America. Beyond November 1929, details of Henkin's activities become sparse, but they do include some important contributions to the understanding of the development of electronic music performance at key historical moments and locations.

When Leon Theremin left Europe in late 1927, a School of Electrical Music was established in Berlin where students received training in performing on Theremin's 'aetherwellen' instrument. Later in the year, a *Theremin Trio* was established whereby students from the school would play at concert events that combined lectures, performances and opportunities for audience participation. The trio, also at times known as the *Original Prof. Theremin Trio*, had a number of members trained in Berlin from 1928 – 1930, and consisted of 2 Theremin performers and an accompanying pianist. It is clear that the aim of these concerts was to provide both entertainment and information, and to commercially promote

the Theremin with the intention of developing a market for the instrument. While Leon Theremin focused his promotional and commercial efforts in the USA in this period, his employees or collaborators based in Berlin acted in a similar way in Europe

1928

Evgeny Henkin, according to his testimony quoted at the beginning of this article, studied the Theremin beginning in early 1928, and began to perform on the instrument from 15th September. This claim has some veracity as between the 15th and 23rd September the first 8 Theremin Trio concerts took place at Copenhagen's Tivoli Concert Hall as part of a radio and tourism exhibition.

In September 1928, concerts simultaneously took place in Germany and Sweden, suggesting at least 2 versions of the Theremin Trio were active at this point. Hyltén-Cavallius (2013) in discussing the Swedish concerts that occurred after the Copenhagen performances states that

One critic admitted that the instrument produced a lovely sound, but that the two gentlemen Tcharikoff and Henkin demonstrating the instrument that evening played with such endless tremolo that it more reminded him of «music from Hawaiian lovesick cats» (Teater- och musiknytt in Svenska Dagbladet 1928).

As such it is clear that we know Henkin performed in Sweden in September/October 1928, and he is also mentioned in other Swedish newspaper coverage of the concerts. The Swedish concerts took place as follows:

- **24th, 27th and 30th September: Auditorium, Stockholm**
- **29th September: Lund (venue unknown)**
- **4th October: Realskolan Auditorium, Malmö**

Following the early concerts in Denmark, Sweden and Germany, other Theremin Trio concerts subsequently took place in 1928. It is likely that Henkin performed alongside Christy Tscharikoff (Thereminist) and Michael Lewin (Pianist) at most of the following concerts, some of which specifically name Henkin in press coverage.

- **1st October – 28th October: Scala Theater, Berlin**
This was a 4-week residency at the Scala variety theatre and it is likely that Henkin was involved in at least some of the concerts
- **15th November: Gleiwitz, Poland**
- **18th November: Breslau (venue unknown)**
This concert definitely featured Henkin, Tscharikoff and Lewin as details are available in a theatre programme from the time.
- **25th November: Landestheater, Altenburg**
This concert featured Henkin, Tscharikoff and Lewin as likewise details are available in a theatre programme from the time.
- **29th November: Capitol Theatre, Jena**

- **5th December: Eintracht Theatre, Karlsruhe**

A review in the *Badischer Beobachter* identified Henkin, Tscharikoff and Lewin as the performers at this event. An anonymous critic remarked:

... on the basis of the pieces performed by the Theremin Trio, whose accompaniment was provided by a piano (Prof. Michael Lewin), one cannot deny that some of the notes are nevertheless highly agreeable and even aesthetically moving, and one must openly admit that these intonations, which are detached from any particular material sound and are therefore indeed "free-floating", present music with a wide variety of new possibilities. ... However, one condition will always have to be met: the players must be very sensitive musicians and must have a very sensitive ear. In this respect, there was always a noticeable difference in favour of Eugen Henkin (sic.), who outperformed his partner Kristidor Tscharikoff (sic.) in both monophonic and two-part performances. The way he played the "Rigoletto" Fantasy, for example, was a musical experience, while some of the other parts remained more like a mechanical reproduction magnified by the loudspeaker. By the end of the event, the initial scepticism had given way to such increasing interest that many listeners eagerly took advantage of the opportunity offered to them to try their hand as an "air tone generator", with the success, of course, that the tones they produced wildly and arbitrarily could not be controlled by the simplest acoustic laws.

1929

In early 1929, Henkin, Tscharikoff and Lewin embarked on a tour of the Netherlands. The tour was extended during January with further concerts, and as a result this means details in the tour programme from the time are incorrect. It is important to emphasise that attendance at the concerts was often surprisingly low – this was the case in the Netherlands and other German concerts. My attempt to clarify the events of this tour are as follows.

The Theremin Trio in the Netherlands – January 1929

On 4 January 1929, Henkin, Tscharikoff and Lewin gave a demonstration to the Dutch press at the Victoria Hotel in Amsterdam which subsequently garnered wide newspaper coverage. The newspaper *Voorwaarts* reported that

[t]oday a small number of guests gathered in a room of the "Victoria Hotel" to enjoy a foretaste of the demonstration of "ether wave music", that the Theremin Trio, formed on the initiative of the inventor Prof. Theremin, will give on Saturday night in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and on Monday in the Building for Arts and Sciences in Rotterdam. ... We are dealing here with a completely new instrument, which cannot be compared with any existing ones. One can try to make comparisons with a cello or a saxophone or a musical saw, but it remains something completely new.

The tour of the Netherlands then developed as follows.

- **5th January: Concertgebouw Groote Zaal, Amsterdam**

In a *De Kunst* magazine article, the writer N.H.W. in reflecting on the first Amsterdam concert wrote,

Prof. Lewin, who revealed himself in an interview as a very generally developed, highly intelligent artist of a high rank, believes with absolute certainty in the future of the ether-wave music. He believes in it so firmly that he predicted to us that in a year's time he would come with a full ethereal waves orchestra. He is convinced that there will be devices that will play music which will be quite different from one another in timbre, in character. Just as there are now three different timbres resembling the violin, the cello, and the human voice, so, he says, there will be more. Mr. Henkin, who has much skill in playing the instruments, also firmly believes in the future of the aether waves of music.

- **6th January: Schouwburg het Gulden Vlies [2.30 pm], Alkmaar**
- **6th January: Stadsschouwburg [8.00 pm], Haarlem**
The music critic of the *Haarlem Dagblad* wrote

Messrs Henkin and Tscharikoff showed musicality and skill in several shorter songs; the quintet from Rigoletto, played by the former, even showed a considerable skill in fast staccato figures, which are much more difficult to perform than legato sequences, since the playing hand must immediately hit the distances correctly in the first case; the legato allows the player to control how far the movement of the hand should go. An exuberant applause rewarded Mr. Henkin; but the other solo and duo songs were generally nice to hear and were gratefully accepted.

- **7th January: Gebouw voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen [8.00 pm], Rotterdam**
- **8th January: Sociëteit De Harmonie [8.00 pm], Groningen**
In the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* K. wrote

Both the soloists played their instruments excellently; the playing reminds one somewhat of the movement of the cellist's hand, but of course the string is missing; one understands, therefore, that [a movement] too far to the right or left gives a false note and that one needs great certainty before being able to play a very simple solo; and of course Mr Tscharikoff and Mr Henkin had that certainty.

- **9th January: Muis Sacrum [8.00 pm], Arnhem**
- **10th January: Hotel Figi [8.00 pm], Zeist**
- **11th January: Concordia [8.00 pm], Bussum (possibly moved to 13th)**
- **12th January: Concertgebouw [8.00 pm], Venlo**

The *Limburger Koerier* noted that at the Venlo concert,

It was a very interesting evening, from which it could be learned that with the invention of the radio we have not yet reached the end of the possibilities. In the meantime, it is possible to elicit tones on the sensitive aerial and to extract as much as the two of them - the third played the piano - could manage ...

On the 13th January, details of a number of concerts on the same day can be found in the Dutch press, and it is unclear which of these concerts took place.

- **13th January: Rembrandt Theater [no time], Eindhoven - possibly cancelled**
- **13th January: Stadsschouwburg [no time], Maastricht - possibly cancelled**
- **13th January: Stadsschouwburg [2.00 pm], Rotterdam (an extra show)**
- **13th January: Concordia [8.00 pm], Bussum**

The Bussum concert did take place, with a relatively negative review by Hugo Godron in the *De Gooi- en Eemlander* who suggested the auditorium was only a quarter full. He wrote

To our great surprise ... the technicians strolling on stage suddenly turned out to be the performers themselves. It certainly gave us goose bumps. The tone of this trained Mexican dog [the whistling radio sound of an untuned radio] reminded us somewhat of an invention made some years ago that was just as ingenious: the singing saw ...

After the Bussum concert on 13th January, a different Theremin Trio line-up probably completed some of the dates on the tour of the Netherlands with concerts at

- **14th January: Concertgebouw [8.00 pm], Nijmegen**
- **15th January: Casino [8.00 pm], Hilversum**
- **16th January: Concertgebouw [8.00 pm], 's Hertogenbosch**
Press reports suggest this was cancelled at the last minute
- **17th January: Amsterdam – extra show moved to Theater Carre, 18th January**

Things become further complicated as on 18th January 2 concerts appear to have taken place simultaneously with different line-ups of the Theremin Trio.

- **18th January: Gebouw voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen [8.00 pm], Den Haag**
The *Haagsche Courant* was highly critical of the performance, stating

As for the musical results, we cannot hide the fact we were bitterly disappointed. Perhaps it is right, perhaps it is wrong: but we have committed ourselves to take Professor Theremin seriously. Well, then the full truth: it was a demonstration, perhaps it has its place in a variety show, where the necessary attention is paid to "novelties", but Theremin's invention has nothing to do with art.

- **18th and 19th January - Amsterdam [Theater Carre [8.00 pm]]**

The following planned concerts appear to have been cancelled:

- **19th January: Tivoli [8.00 pm], Utrecht**
- **20th January: Schouwburg [2.30 pm], Deventer**
- **20th January: Odeon [8.00 pm], Zwolle**

A Return to Germany

Towards the end of the tour of the Netherlands, Henkin, Tscharikoff and a new pianist, Korif, were already performing back in Germany.

- **17th January: Kurhaus (convention and social centre), Wiesbaden.**
- **18th January: Burgwalltheater, Dortmund.**
A critic from the *Iserlohner Kreisblatt* seemed amused and entertained by the event, but was critical of the claims made for the Theremin instrument, writing that

When the rather bombastic announcement said that “the orchestra had experienced its hour of birth without instruments”, this statement by an imaginative critic seemed to us at least to be greatly exaggerated.

- **20th January: Stadttheater, Krefeld**
- **21st January: Parkhaus, Bochum**
- **22nd January: Hans-Sachs-Haus, Gelsenkirchen**
- **23rd January: Saal des Städtischen Konzerthauses, Aachen**
- **24th January: Parkhaus, Bochum**
- **25th January: Beethovenhalle, Bonn**
- **28th January: City Concert Hall, Nachen**

Following the Nachen concert there appeared to be a 2 week break from performances, though it is possible that further details have yet to be found covering this period. However, there was a Theremin Trio concert in Switzerland on

- **13th February: Kino Capitol, Zurich**

Back in Germany the Theremin Trio began a series of appearances in Bielefeld

- **14th and 15th February and 18th - 21st February: Gloria Palast, Bielefeld**
A review in the *Westfälische Zeitung* gave a positive appraisal of the initial appearance, outlining how

Two young gentlemen—the “airwave musicians”, Eugen Henkin and Kristoff Scharikoff, step up to the apparatus. One gives a short lecture in fluent, albeit Russian-accented German. Then the “concert” begins ... The most fascinating thing about [the sound of the Theremin] ... is undoubtedly the incredible dynamic changeability and thus the possibility of applying nuances of the most subtle delicacy, to enliven the performance in a way that can hardly be compared with other instruments. ...

The *Westfälische Neueste Nachrichten* was just as effusive, stating

... what Messrs Eugen Henkin and Kristow Tscharikow produce, sometimes on one, sometimes on two apparatuses, with piano accompaniment, is truly amazing. A

magic of heavenly sounds in great richness of modulation flows from ghostly regions, from the most delicate pianissimo to the colorful sound that fills the hall.

- **11th March: Stadttheater, Hagen**
- **14th March: Emelka Theater, Düsseldorf**
- **15th March: Stadttheater, Hamborn**

The *Hamborner Volks-Zeitung* reported that

The 12 program numbers, including the "Volga Lied", the Barcarole from the Tales of Hoffmann, a fragment from "Rigoletto", which was particularly impressive and received the greatest applause, demonstrated the fabulous versatility and the beauty of the aether-wave sound. Of course, the player must be exceptionally musical.

- **16th March: Stadthalle, Münster**
- **17th March: Stadttheater, Osnabrück**
- **18th March: 2 concerts – Saalbau, Essen and Stadttheater, Oberhausen**
- **20th March 1929: Stadthalle, Solingen**

The *Bergische Zeitung* reported that though Henkin and Tscharikoff's performances were impressive, there was little prospect that the Theremin would have an impact on music making as a whole:

Messrs. Henkin (who also spoke a few explanatory words) and Tscharikoff performed a series of pieces with piano accompaniment on two apparatuses, partly solo, partly in pairs. Undoubtedly they can boast of having no serious competitors in their field, for they demonstrated fabulous dexterity in handling the apparatus. It was music throughout ... And the value of the invention for musical practice? We don't think it's of any use. The whole thing is a witty gimmick, not musical, but a technical matter ...

- **21st March: Kammerspiele im Saalbau, Mönchengladbach**

The *Westdeutsche Landeszeitung* suggested that

Undoubtedly the invention of these apparatuses, in which tones of any pitch and depth can be produced by electromagnetic waves, is an extraordinary thing ... In introductory words, Herr Henkin explained the various options with practical examples. The echo effect was particularly astounding. Through a loudspeaker-like apparatus, the sounds could be heard from the opposite gallery ... Henkin showed more skill in ... making the coloratura from Rigoletto, for example, stand out clearly and distinctly. His hearing also proved to be the more sensitive.

- **22nd March: Schauspielhaus, Remscheid**
- **28th March: Phoebus Palast, Nürnberg**
- **29th, 30th and 31st March, Renaissance Theater, Berlin**

These were highly significant performances – an experiment with a larger ensemble including a number of musicians from the Berlin Theremin school who had, or would in the future, appear as part of the Theremin Trio.

A critic in the *Berliner Volkszeitung* wrote positively about the event, stating that

The sound problem as such is of course of most interest to these instruments. The character depends on the loudspeaker used for reproduction, but also on the skill of the player, whose slightly vibrating hand is able to give life to the sound and more or less exactly find the distance within the electrical oscillating circuit. Then the dynamic liveliness of the sound and the increased flexibility of the tone sequence, up to staccato, are surprising. Messrs. Tscharikoff and Henkin control the "space", that is, the hand movements over the apparatus, with astonishing accuracy.

A writer in the *Hamburger Anzeiger* described the performance, its importance as a stepping-stone to future developments and the virtuosity of Evgeny Henkin's playing:

In this concert, which was a station on the way to the electric orchestra, the already known apparatuses were used ... the best player, Henkin, proved that he had already mastered his instrument extremely well and, being musical by nature and gifted with a good ear, he knows how to finely nuance the sound through vibration; his solo study elicited the strongest applause from the listeners and made the concert a great success towards the end.

Further concerts then took place with Henkin involved in most of them

- **30th and 31st March and 2nd and 3rd April: Phoebus Palast, Nuremberg**
- **1st April: Maffei Theatre, Turin**
It is unclear who performed at this event and there may well have been further Italian concerts as yet undiscovered.
- **10th April: Rialto Café, Dresden**
- **16th April: Schauspielhaus, Kiel (Kieler)**
- **16th - 18th April: Gloria-Palast, Mannheim**
- **19th - 21st April: Capitol Cinema, Mannheim**
N.B. this did not involve Henkin as he is named in a *Hamburger Neueste Zeitung* review on the same dates.
- **19th - 21st April: Kammerspiele Theater, Hamburg**
The *Hamburger Neueste Zeitung* identifies Henkin and Tscharikoff as the performers with 'Mr. Henkin first giving an interesting lecture in broken German on the construction and operation of this apparatus.'
- **1st - 15th May: Colosseumtheater, Karlsruhe** as part of a variety show
- **21st and 22nd May: Pole Nord, Luxembourg**
The *Escher Tageblatt* identifies Henkin and Tscharikoff as the performers.
- **2nd June: Freiburg im Breisgau, Stadttheater**
- **9th June and 11th June: Theatergemeinde, Bregenz, Austria**
A *Vorarlberger Landes-Zeitung* review reported

Then followed the programme ... sometimes played by Mr. Henkin or Mr. Tscharikoff, sometimes by both together, it was an experience, a miracle ... The tones were so delicate, so sure, sometimes you thought you heard a cello sound, sometimes a "voice". After the intermission, Schubert's "Little Ständchen", a wonderfully rendered

romance by Rubinstein from Tscharikoff, was even more enchanting. The high point of the evening ... were the duets of Tchaikovsky, Offenbach and Verdi pieces. For Henkin, the rich vibration of the Verdi piece was a particularly beautiful performance.

From June onwards, there is evidence that a number of Theremin Trio concerts took place in **Bonn, Bad Godesberg, Bad Salzuflen, Bad Oeynhausen, Breslau, Düsseldorf and Erfurt**. However, Henkin was not involved and appears to have taken a break from performances with the Theremin Trio. The trail picks up again for Henkin with the following German concerts where he appeared:

- **8th September: Reform Kino, Hamburg**
- **8th - 10th October: Residenz Theater, Paderborn**
- **11th October: Schauburg Theater, Iserlohn**
- **5th and 6th November 1929: Alhambra Theater, Hilden**

An advert in the *Hildener Rundschau* identifies Henkin and Tscharikoff as the 'Aetherwellenmusik' performers.

Soon after these performances, other Theremin Trio concerts took place with a new line-up outside Germany, but it was at this point that Henkin appears to have ended his association with the Theremin Trio.

1930

South America

It appears that after leaving the Theremin Trio in November 1929, Evgeny Henkin became a freelance solo Theremin performer. It is unclear how and when he began performing as little information has been found so far. However, Henkin's claims to have performed in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil are backed up by evidence found in the Brazilian press in July 1930. In writing about the performances in Brazil, the *Correio Da Manha* stated that

Henkin is the electric musician. It is a phenomenon that can only be understood by seeing and hearing it. On stage, putting his hand near an exquisite radio type instrument, he performs any music that the public asks for. And that's not all, because anyone who wants to can go on stage and play the music that comes to mind on the instrument.

O Paiz indicated that Henkin had earlier performed in Argentina before travelling to Brazil.

The artists Henkin and Vianor should arrive via Demerara next Monday from Buenos Aires. They are two true celebrities of their kind, having both travelled to Europe and the United States, under widespread applause, and gone on to Buenos Aires, under a special contract that extends to us

- **14th - 20th July: Odeon, Rio De Janeiro**
- **22nd - 29th July: Odeon, São Paulo**

A *Gazeta*, in reporting on Henkin's upcoming arrival and performances, stated that

Next Tuesday, in the Red Room of the Odeon ... two interesting novelties for São Paulo will open ... One is Henkin, the electric musician, who plays with his instrument any song asked of him by the audience.

Interestingly the name 'Theremin' does not appear anywhere in the press coverage or advertising associated with these and other Brazilian appearances - Henkin is simply described as '*O Músico Elétrico*' [the Electric Musician].

It is likely that following Henkin's Brazilian appearances he travelled on to Uruguay, but at present no further details are available of his concerts there or for his earlier concerts in Argentina.

1932

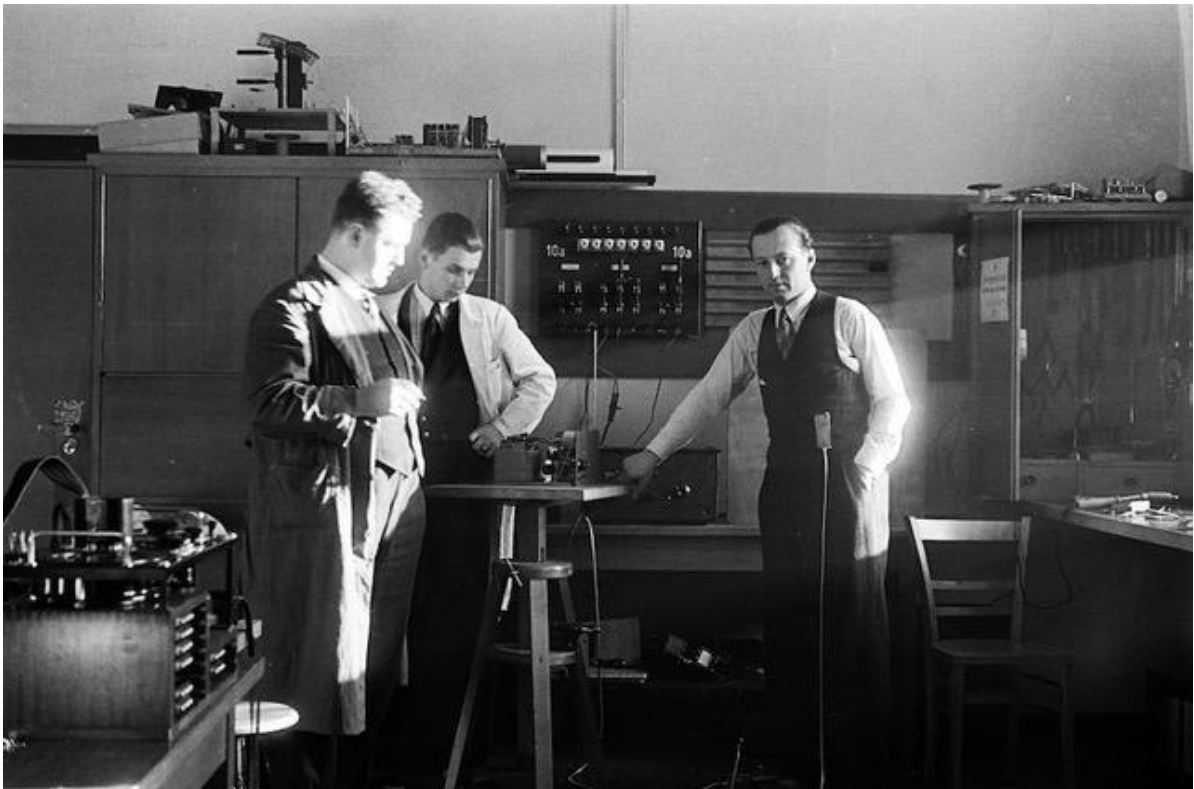
The HHI and the Konzert auf Elektrischen Instrumenten (19th October 1932)

Apart from Henkin's electric/electronic music performances in South America in summer 1932, it has not been possible to find many details of his performances between late 1930 and late 1934 when Henkin identified that he stopped performing due to Nazi cultural policies in Germany. However, some tantalising information gained from wider research and contained in some images in the Henkin archive help tell some of the story.

The following images seem to document a visit (or visits) to the newly built Heinrich Hertz Institute (1930) in Berlin – the first image is an exterior shot that clearly identifies the HHI building and engineers and researchers from the Institute.



In the second photograph Evgeny Henkin (on the right) is pictured with two members of the HHI laboratory that was at this time further developing a small Theremin-style device that ultimately it hoped to market for home music making in Germany. This device was intended to be amplified through a radio, and unlike the instrument Leon Theremin had developed that was controlled with two antennae, this instrument had a hand held tonal on/off switch (here attached to Henkin's waistcoat) and foot pedals to control volume (N.B. this was an early design by Leon Theremin that was later superseded in his own work by the two antennae model). It is unclear what Henkin's role was in these developments, but as a widely recognised skilled performer on the Aetherwellen instrument, he was probably brought in during the testing stages of the new HHI device.



Although there is currently no other information available about Henkin's work with the HHI, on **19th October 1932** he took part in a German radio broadcast that was the first radio concert of an orchestra consisting exclusively of electric instruments. At this concert electronic instruments developed at the HHI and the Rundfunkversuchsstelle at the Berlin Staatlich-akademische Hochschule für Musik were presented. After 1930 both Berlin institutions were encouraged by the Ministry of Culture to co-operate and work closely together in developing and presenting electronic musical instruments to a wider public at radio industry shows and elsewhere. (Donhauser 2007: 46)

The hour-long concert featured two Theremin style instruments (played by Henkin and Martin Taubmann) as well as a Trautonium, a Hellertion and a Neo-Bechstein keyboard instrument. Alongside Henkin and Taubmann, Dr Gustav Leithauser of the HHI, Oscar Sala, Bruno Hellberger and Waldemar Padwa appeared on the bill.



A view of the 'Funk-Stunde' Berlin radio 'Konzert auf Elektrischen Instrumenten' (19th October 1932)
[original source unknown – available at
http://hartwig.bplaced.net/text/alte_artikel/1932_Trautonium_ua/1932_e_m.htm]

The Finnish newspaper *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* wrote of the broadcast event that was available to listeners across Europe:

About four or five years ago, the world's newspapers carried the news that an engineer ... Theremin, had invented an electrical device that could play any kind of music. This news attracted a fair amount of attention, but recently there has not been much more publicity about this device.

However, the device was not abandoned after the invention. On the contrary, it has been quietly improved and further developed. This device and other types of electronic music devices based on its basic idea were on show to the public at this autumn's German radio exhibitions. However, the first broadcast demonstration of the equipment took place only yesterday, when the Berlin Funkstunde (public radio station) held an electric instrument concert from 21:00 to 22:00 Finnish time. This very interesting programme was broadcast by the following radio stations: Berlin, Breslau, Königsberg, Leipzig, München, Hamburg and Vienna.

... The audience was treated to music performed on the following devices; Trautonium, Theremin, Hellertion, Neo-Bechstein piano, etc. The music provided by the various devices was good, in many cases even more pleasant than that provided by a conventional instrument of the same type. The low and high notes came out brighter and fuller on several instruments than on flutes and cellos. The military march at the end of the programme, which was supposed to mirror the performance of a full orchestra, sounded magnificent. Those radio listeners who were listening to these foreign stations at the time and understood what the broadcast was about must have been satisfied with their reception of the evening's foreign radio programme, hence the uniqueness of the event.

After this performance, though a further broadcast took place in January 1933, Henkin does not seem to have been involved in further activities at the HHI. In fact with the Nazi party taking power in Germany in 1933, the HHI's electronic musical instrument activities seem to have eventually diminished, with the Nazi regime most interested in supporting the development of the Trautonium. Notably, however, Dr Gustav Leithauser who championed the development of the Theremin-style instrument at the HHI was by 1933 tasked to head up the development of the German 'People's Radio' through which the Nazis widely broadcast their propaganda - and eventually by 1936 Leithauser was removed from his duties at the HHI due to Jewish family connections.

Die "Musenschaukel" Cabaret – Clou Konzerthaus (11th February 1934)

Between Evgeny Henkin's October 1932 appearance on German radio and late 1934 where he indicated that he ended his career as a 'Theremin' performer there is little information about how he sustained his career in this period. There is some evidence that he continued to perform across Europe. For example, photographs in the Henkin Archive taken in Bautzen, eastern Germany outside the Café Lehmann (a Konditorei (Pâtisserie)) feature a poster for an evening performance by Evgeny Henkin in the background on the café window.



However, more notable and historically significant is a photograph of a Cabaret poster featuring Henkin's name, taken outside the Clou Konzerthaus, Berlin in February 1934. The text on the photograph is as follows:

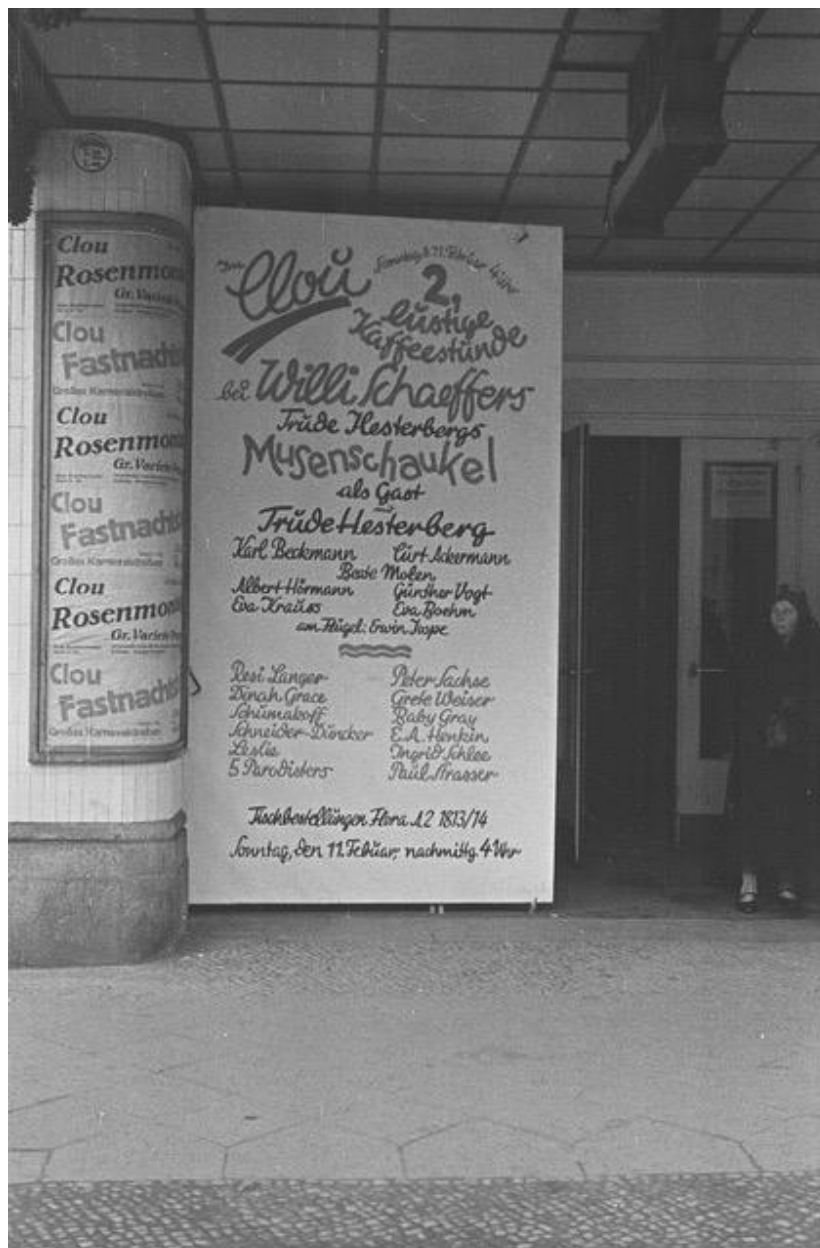
At the Clou 11 February, 4 o'clock from Willi Schaeffers.

Trude Hesterberg's Musenschaukel.

As guests Trude Hesterberg [and] Karl Beckmann / Kurt Ackermann / Bea(te) Molen / Albert Hormann / Gunther Vogt / Eva Krauss / Eva Boehm / on the piano: Erwin Toope

Resi Langer / Peter Sachse / Dinah Grace / Greta Weiser / Schumakoff / Baby Gray / Schneider - Duncker / E. A. Henkin / Leslie / Ingrid Schlee / 5 Parodisters / Paul Strasser

Table Ordering, Flora A2 1813/14



This photograph provides evidence of Evgeny Henkin's involvement with Trude Hesterberg's satirical-literary cabaret *Musenschaukel* on 11th February 1934. According to historical sources, Trude Hesterberg established the cabaret in November 1933 at the Pavillon Mascotte. The usual story found in a number of writings on Berlin cabarets in the pre-WWII period is that the *Musenschaukel* [The Muses Swing] cabaret was closed in January 1934 following criticism from a Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*. One source suggested it was banned by Goebbels propaganda ministry.

However, this photograph questions this accepted history. In Klaus Budzinski and Reinhard Hippen's (2016) *Metzler Kabarett Lexikon* (Metzler Cabaret Dictionary), there is mention that in January 1934 a new cabaret programme followed directly on from the *Musenschaukel* – this was a cabaret revue called *Windstärke 10* by Hanns Fritz Beckmann, Frank Günther and Günter Neumann. Budzinski and Hippen suggest this cabaret closed (presumably at the Pavillon Mascotte) at the end of January, and named all the main performers listed in Evgeny Henkin's photograph.

This story seems incomplete as the *Musenschaukel* cabaret appeared at least one more time on **11th February at the Clou Konzerthaus in Berlin** as is demonstrated by the information contained in this photograph. And this is where things get very interesting as this one-off cabaret performance has important historical resonances.

The Clou Konzerthaus was a venue that regularly staged events for the Nazi party. One online source¹ notes that from as 'early as 1927 mass events of the National Socialists took place at the Clou. Parts of the propaganda apparatus were located in the main building and the annex buildings with the publishing and printing house.' Fedor de Vries provides more details, outlining how on 1 May 1927 Adolf Hitler made his first appearance in Berlin at the Clou, at the Nazis first mass event in the city. Additionally he writes that '*The Nazi propaganda papers "Völkischer Beobachter", "Schwarzes Korps" and "Der Angriff" were also printed here.*' Furthermore, de Vries indicates that '*The Gestapo used the building for torture and interrogations.*'² Images of the Clou Konzerthaus available in the Getty³ and Alamy⁴ photographic archives demonstrate that not only did political and business meetings take place there, but also children's Christmas parties staged by the Nazis, as well as other German nationalist events. From 28 February 1943, a large number of Jewish forced labourers were registered by the SS at the Clou building before being sent to concentration camps and to their deaths. (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: 114)

This raises many questions about how the *Musenschaukel* cabaret, that was said to be frowned on by the Nazis (and supposedly had already ended), found its way to the 'Nazi' Clou Konzerthaus less than two weeks after it was supposedly banned! The question of Nazi approval or disapproval of the event is complicated by information available at the *Cabaret Berlin* website. Here it is suggested that Trude Hesterberg joined the Nazi Party and The Fighting League for German Culture [Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur] in January 1933. Hesterberg later explained this decision by stating

As a woman and an artist I naturally have been influenced by all tendencies of the times, but I never became a politician. I have always instinctively considered my art as a megaphone of the popular opinions of the day. Out of this sense of artistic duty, I became a member of the Nazi party and the Fighting League.

As the *Cabaret Berlin* site suggests this possibly pragmatic decision was viewed as opportunism by the Nazi authorities, and she was placed under a great deal of scrutiny (though eventually she continued to perform throughout the Nazi period at the Kabarett der Komiker (Kadeko) in Berlin). The original *Musenschaudel* cabaret was an attempt to racially sanitise and Germanise cabaret entertainment, aiming to provide '*a popular cabaret which contains nothing foreign ... only numbers that are anchored in our nature and whose music is derived from folk songs.*'

Peter Jelavich (1991: 181) noted that the original programme notes for the *Musenschaudel* stated '*Far be it for us to want to illuminate politics from our small stage ... We pursue just one goal, to reward hard-working people with a few cheerful hours.*' This claim should be understood, as Jelavich suggests, against the backdrop of all cabarets that criticised the Nazi regime being eventually closed by 1935, with many cabaret performers who stayed in Germany or who were arrested in occupied Europe being murdered by the Nazis in concentration camps. Hesterberg was clearly attempting to distance herself from the more politically and socially critical forms of cabaret in Berlin in the 1930s in an act of self-preservation. However it seems the original *Musenschaudel* cabarets, and the final performance at the Clou Konzerthaus, were a commercial disaster – and as the *Cabaret Berlin* site indicates, this accounted for the cabaret's closure - it was not banned.

Evgeny Henkin's photograph of the Clou Konzerthaus therefore places him at the centre of cultural and political conflict in the early years of the Third Reich, performing on a stage and in a building used by the Nazis for party events and activities, and as a Russian from a Jewish family it is hard to imagine how he psychologically navigated his way through this event - never mind through Berlin as a whole in this period - before being forced to end his Theremin performances in late 1934.

An important final point to make is that The Reich Chamber of Culture (Reichskulturkammer or RKK) was established on 22 September 1933 in Germany as a professional organisation for those working in all areas of German creative and cultural life. This was an attempt by Joseph Goebbels to control German cultural activities and promote Aryan art consistent with Nazi ideals as part of the wider process known as *Gleichschaltung* – the totalitarian Nazification of German life. Artists or cultural workers had to apply for membership of the relevant industry subdivision (film, theatre, music, fine arts etc.) and present a certificate proving their Aryan credentials to be able to continue working. If an application was rejected, an occupational ban ensued. The Nazi regime therefore began to deprive targeted population groups - those defined as "full", "half" or "quarter Jews" and other "foreign races" - of their civil rights and their ability to freely make a living. Evgeny Henkin from

September 1933 was therefore performing in Germany under the threat of such a ban for almost a year. It appears that finally, in late 1934, Henkin was effectively banned from performing on the Theremin in Germany.

Notes

1. Galerie 123 - <https://www.galerie123.com/en/original-vintage-poster/41408/clou-berliner-konzerthaus/>
2. Traces of War - <https://www.tracesofwar.com/sights/3002/Clou-Concert-Hall.htm>
3. <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/photos/berlin-konzerthaus-clou>
4. <https://www.alamy.com/berlin-konzerthaus-clou-image218353976.html>

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