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Research in the Grisons

**A musical delight**

The history of the spa and hotel orchestras in the Engadine



Once a month, the Academia Raetica presents research projects that are of social importance for Graubünden and the Alpine region. They provide a foretaste of upcoming conference “Graubünden forscht” (Sept. 21-22, 2022, [www.gr-forscht.ch](http://www.gr-forscht.ch)).

*Special exhibition "Höhenmusik" at Museum Alpin, Pontresina, 6.6.-22.10.22 and 19.12.22-15.4.23. Photo: D. Heinen*

Musicologist and philosopher Mathias Gredig embarked on a “treasure hunt”, so to speak, when in 2020 he seized the idea of researching the - hitherto undocumented - history of the spa and hotel orchestras in the Engadine: “In the past, you could hear them everywhere and they formed an important part of everyday life in spa resorts. Hence, the history of the spa and hotel orchestras is important for understanding the history of tourism, music and culture.” As early as the 19th century, the enchanting scenery of the Engadine and its special climate attracted travelers and spa guests to the high valley for mental and physical recreation. In the 1860s, the spa houses and soon spa associations and other hotels created their own orchestras to provide musical entertainment for their guests. Today, the Camerata Pontresina and the Salonorchester St. Moritz keep this tradition alive with their concerts.

Gredig, who grew up in the Engadine, describes his research project with palpable enthusiasm: “What is unique about the history of the spa and hotel orchestras is their dazzling diversity that transcends disciplines. In winter, the orchestras played next to bobsled and skeleton tracks, on ice skating rinks and at ski jumps. Consequently, the history of the orchestras is also linked to the history of sports. And the (ice) pavilions, halls and concert shells built specifically for the concerts, for example, create a link to architectural history.” Gredig is leading the research project together with musicologist Matthias Schmidt. The Institute for Cultural Research Graubünden, the University of Basel, the Swiss National Science Foundation, the Voluntary Academic Society Basel as well as the Upper Engadine communities and several foundations are financially supporting the project. During the project's duration from 2020 to 2023, the results

will be presented to researchers and a broad audience in various formats, including an exhibition, a conference, book publications, essays and radio broadcasts.

The stimulating and enjoyable special exhibition “Höhenmusik” (high-altitude music) at the Museum Alpin in Pontresina presents the lively history of the spa and hotel orchestras by means of rare objects, video documentations, a listening station, a topographical soundscape model as well as vivid backdrops. The exhibits show, among other things, the origins of the orchestras, performance venues, instrumentations, functions and musical styles of the orchestras, as well as the lives of the musicians and their relationship with guests and locals. On his "treasure hunt" in the archives, Gredig has discovered unique documents and objects that are part of the exhibition. On June 24 and 25, the conference “Salon Orchestras of the Alps” in St. Moritz and Pontresina invites to concerts, lectures and a vernissage of the exhibition “Höhenmusik”.

Mathias Gredig and Daniela Heinen



*Mathias Gredig. Photo provided.*

The Institute for Cultural Research of the Grisons (Institut für Kulturforschung Graubünden) conducts and promotes research in the humanities, social sciences and cultural studies with a general reference to the Alpine region and with special emphasis on the Grisons and neighboring regions. [www.kulturforschung.ch](http://www.kulturforschung.ch)

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