

Orchestras and Concerts in Germany

As with drama and opera, the richness of the concert scene in Germany is rooted in structures that have developed historically, characterised by several centres with regional musical traditions. Even smallish cities like Meiningen or Coburg have theatres and orchestras; in major cities, such as Munich, Berlin or Hamburg, the audience can choose a concert from those offered by several world-class orchestras. With some 130 symphony orchestras and numerous chamber ensembles, Germany – relative to its population – has one of the greatest density of orchestras of any country. The bulk of this variety is the 85 orchestras working in opera houses and theatres, each with 40-130 orchestral places. Almost without exception they also give concerts, and – especially in smaller cities – provide most of the concerts on offer. In addition, there are 32 orchestras who only give concerts and are not attached to an opera house or theatre.

The first written evidence of German orchestral culture originates from Kassel. It tells us that in 1502 Wilhelm II, Landgraf of Hesse, accepted a certain Henschel Deythinger into the ensemble: *Kasseler Hofmusik* (Kassel court music). Whereas hitherto musical pieces had been cast and played in an ad hoc, variable manner – according to acoustic, spatial and personal circumstances. Now the trumpeter Deythinger, with eight other brass-players, under an overall leader – formed the *Kasseler Hofkapelle*. The first independent instrumental ensemble – an orchestra – was born. Ensembles with a worldwide reputation today, like, for example, the *Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden*, the orchestra of the *Münchener Staatsoper*, the *Bayerisches Staatsorchester*, have their roots in the 16th century. Under the direction of the Renaissance composer Orlando di Lasso, who was employed at the Munich court in 1563, the Hofkapelle (court band) there (which still had a vocal bias) was well-known all over Europe. In 1770 it was renamed the *Churfürstliches Orchester*, and eight years later amalgamated with the *Mannheimer Hofkapelle*, when the pfälzische Kurfürst (Pfalz Elector) Theodor (1724-1799) moved his residence from Mannheim to Munich.

At that time Karl Theodor's court was pretty unimportant politically. Musically, however, the establishment of the Hofkapelle soon made him into the focal point of early classicism. On behalf of the music-loving Elector the violinist Johann Stamitz systematically formed an ensemble from the best instrumentalists in Europe. With its virtuosity and cultured sound, it quickly enticed musicians and composers from all over the world, and became a focal point for the development of artists like Mozart and Haydn. Together with his assistant Christian Cannabich, Stamitz made sure musical education was unified and – by precise examples of bowing technique, articulation and dynamics – decisively influenced the profession of Konzertmeister (concert-master). In order to guarantee this first European leading orchestra qualified successors, he created wide-ranging opportunities for musical education by establishing a Tonkunstschule (School of Music) and stipends for residencies with famous teachers of composition. The musicians were urged to take part in as many rehearsals, academy concerts, and opera performances as possible – a practice-oriented education such as few music colleges still offer. Then, around 100 years later, at the *Münchener Hofoper* (Munich court opera) the amalgamated orchestra made history by giving the world premières of works by Richard Wagner. In 1865 »Tristan and Isolde« was performed at the Hofoper, followed three years later by »The Mastersingers of Nuremberg«, then »The Rhinegold« in 1869 and »The Valkyrie« in 1870.

The Orchestra as a Germ cell of local Musical Life

Thus, the rich German orchestral scene and many orchestras' deep local or regional roots – even in relatively small cities – is due to traditions reaching back into the history of court performance and encouragement of the arts. Since in Germany – unlike in France, Spain, or England – no strong central National State could assert itself after the Thirty Years War, the country remained fragmented into numerous small princedoms. There were many courts – and many of these had orchestras. Then, in the 19th century, the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie took charge of these orchestras – and today the Kommunen and Länder have taken over this legacy of former princes.

An orchestra's relationship with its responsible authorities and audience is quite different from that of ensembles travelling through and giving guest-performances. These ensembles always play the same touring programme, which – obviously – can be tailored only roughly to a location's specific needs. Resident orchestras, on the other hand, can respond in a very varied way to their particular context. Above all, they can develop continuity in planning their repertoire – hardly possible with guest-performances. Many chief musical directors in numerous cities use this opportunity with great artistic imagination. Conductors like Ingo Metzmacher in Hamburg, Peter Kuhn in Bielefeld, or Marcus R. Bosch in Aachen have introduced a thematic concert-planning in their cities, making their concert-audience familiar with little-known areas of musical history, or leading their audience systematically towards contemporary works. The presence of both the orchestra and its chief conductor at a given location enables them to embed overall concepts into related events; nowadays, introductory matinées, explanatory concerts, literary-musical themed evenings, and thematically linked chamber music concerts – are all part of what many orchestras in Germany offer.

In this way orchestras also contribute greatly to the educational resources for young people and grown-ups in their particular cities. In Chemnitz, for example, at some 30 schools, members of the *Robert-Schumann-Philharmonie* have adapted so-called Klassenpatenschaften (»become class-godparents«); the Philharmonie players accompany classes till their final exams, and familiarise pupils with their daily work in various ways – with theatre and concert performances, and with classical music in general. This project is related to complex aspects of the orchestra's other work, all with the aim of introducing young people to musical and orchestral culture. There are similar projects in numerous other cities, allowing orchestras to build up valuable germ-cells for local musical life. Many orchestral musicians also have teaching contracts at music colleges, and teach at conservatories and young people's music schools. Quite frequently, of their own accord, they also develop permanent chamber-music ensembles, covering a wide range from parlour-music through ancient music to experimental form and »free« musical theatre projects. Other orchestral musicians manage semiprofessional symphony and chamber orchestras, which, along with local choirs, stage the kind of oratorio-concerts that are characteristic of the choir scene in Germany.

The Situation of the Orchestras

Over the past 15 years many things have changed in the orchestral scene in Germany. In the wake of the social changes brought about by German Reunification – after interim Federal funding had finished – orchestras were amalgamated, made more compact, or totally disbanded (the law states that individual Federal regions are responsible for their own cultural funding – in the exceptional situation of Reunification the Federal authorities also provided promotional programmes for the first few years). In the west there were also a number of amalgamations or closures. On the other hand, during the last thirty years there have also been some new foundations, which are either funded, or at least, promoted, by the public purse. These are mainly in the area of New Music. The *Junge Deutsche Philharmonie* (Young German Philharmonic) gathers highly gifted music college students together and works with internationally distinguished conductors, such as Lorin Maazel or Markus Stenz. It administers itself without a chief conductor, and plans its programme collectively. The *Junge Deutsche Philharmonie* gave rise to the *Ensemble Modern*, which, like the *Musikfabrik Nordrhein-Westfalen*, expands its chamber-music staff with additional musicians according to its programme. In the field of ancient music, private ensembles like *Musica Antiqua Köln* work almost exclusively with a more or less permanent pool of musicians, who are engaged – as appropriate – for individual projects.

In Germany playing in an orchestra is a very sought-after profession. Each year around 1,400 students on instrumental or orchestral music courses sit their exams. Over the past few years, however, only some 170 places a year have been available. Every place advertised – even with a medium-sized orchestra – often has 200 and more applicants, including many instrumentalists from abroad. Recently several orchestras, offering their own academy and practical posts, have tried to familiarise students – even while studying – with orchestra-related playing, and important orchestral literature. Since instrumental studies are biased

towards a soloist career at the start, this mixture of academic and practical work gives students vital experience and professional help with realistic career-planning.

Radio Broadcasting

A vital pillar of the concert scene are the 13 orchestras financed by public authority charges for radio. With commissions for new compositions and their own concert-series they contribute substantially to music's further development; their radio broadcasts also make new works and those little-known outside the usual Baroque to Romantic repertoire accessible to a wide audience. Concert-series such as the *Witten Days for new Chamber Music* and *Musik der Zeit* (Contemporary Music) – both *Westdeutscher Rundfunk: WDR* –, the *Musica Viva* of *Bayerischer Rundfunk: BR*, and *das neue Werk* from *Norddeutscher Rundfunk: NDR* in Hamburg all enjoy international renown. Since being founded in 1946, the symphony orchestra of the *Südwestrundfunk: SWR* has premièred about 350 compositions; and as co-organiser of the *Donaueschinger Musiktage* (Danube Music Days) it has helped establish key composers like Pierre Boulez, Hans Werner Henze, and Cristobal Halffter. But also festivals which attract a broad audience, such as the *Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival*, could not exist as they are without the partnership of radio authorities. As well as the opera houses which support their own choirs, the radio authorities maintain the few publicly financed professional choirs in Germany. In the immediate postwar period almost every radio authority also boasted its own »big band«. Today only four remain, of which principally those in the *NDR* and *WDR* go on widening the spectrum of large jazz-groups by commissioning new works; therefore ranking with leading international ensembles. Recently, however, the tense economic situation has led radio authorities to question the future of their orchestras, which mainly provide light music; and even institutions like the *Donaueschinger Musiktage* are now under threat.

Private Suppliers and Festivals

While the symphonic area is mainly covered by publicly funded orchestras, a large variety of private concert-agencies offers principally chamber music, solo evenings and Lieder recitals – as guest performances. In major cities these agencies organise their own concert-series, inviting orchestras from other regions and abroad. They are also extremely important for smaller cities which do not have their own orchestras. In such places the arts bodies responsible – as well as private arts and concert promoters – organise their own concert series, concert agencies providing the artists.

A growing number of freelance artists also seek their income here. Parallel to these concerts on offer, on the increase for decades, a widely varied spectrum of several hundred festivals has developed; this is still growing and can obviously attract new spectators. Festivals such as the *Bonner Beethovenfest*, the *Kurt-Weill-Fest* in Dessau, and the *Richard- Strauss-Tage* in Garmisch-Partenkirchen focus on a composer based locally, and – like the *Richard-Wagner-Festspiele* in Bayreuth – some have worldwide significance. Different strategies are followed by the *MDR-Musiksommer* and the *Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival*, whereby a whole Federal Land enjoys a month-long comprehensive programme – spread over an entire area – of orchestral concerts, chamber music, readings and courses; or the *Ruhrtriennale* (cf p. 90), founded a few years ago in Nordrhein- Westfalen, which – in partnership with international co-productions and local orchestras – performs in listed buildings of the industrial age as well as theatres and opera houses.

Future Perspectives

The immediate priority in Germany after the war was to rebuild theatres and opera houses. »Fidelio« by candlelight in the unheated ruins of an opera house – a beaten and humiliated nation derived confidence and hope for the task of reconstruction from music. If nowadays even orchestras rich in tradition and excellent artistically increasingly have to fight to survive, this can only partly be blamed on an economic situation still in flux and on insufficient tax revenues. In our modern media society orchestras (as well as theatres) face stiff competition for public favour. Furthermore, concentrated listening to sounds without pictures – which a symphony concert demands of its listeners – is diametrically opposed to the speed and multimedia density of our modern IT society. Against this background contemporary music – in particular

– finds itself in a difficult position. »Until the start of the war a new musical composition followed a natural progression from music festival to subscription concert. ...Nowadays contemporary music has all but vanished from normal concerts«, commented the composer Gunter Bialas (1907-1995), in an interview back in 1985.

Even so, in the wake of postmodern relaxation about the relationship of contemporary works to tradition, music has recently been composed that is relatively accessible to an intuitive listener. Compositions by, for example, Giya Kantcheli, Arvo Pärt, or Philip Glass, by proven masters such as Hans Werner Henze, Manfred Trojahn, or Peter Ruzicka – and also by young artists like Moritz Eggert, Detlev Glanert, or Christian Jost – are now welcomed by a wider audience. These composers may also be in a better position to attract more young listeners into concerts – a task many orchestras in Germany – especially in the recent past – have set themselves with special commitment. There is certainly good reason for this, as investigations into audiencestructure show. An audience-questionnaire given to 4,800 concert-subscribers of the *Münchner Philharmoniker*, for example, revealed the average age as high as 58. Recently concert series for children and families have become the norm for practically all orchestras; and the development of intensive children's and young people's work – very common in the USA and Great Britain – appears to be gaining ground in Germany, too.

This development corresponds to a general trend in the German orchestral scene: in earlier decades regular concert-going was taken for granted as part of the lifestyle of the educated middle classes who made up most of the audience. However, insofar as this tradition has become less binding, orchestras must devise new strategies to win over and commit the public. This is happening in many ways. Thus, for example, several German orchestras have successfully adopted the American and Scandinavian model of the composer in residence. This offers orchestras the chance to familiarise their audience with a given composer over a longer period – for the audience he or she becomes interesting as a personality beyond their compositions. And the instrumentalists themselves can work out the music's specific idiom in a continual dialogue with its composer. Equally, the strategy already mentioned of planning a whole season under one heading and arranging events to introduce concert programmes connected by musical history, help give the public more intensive access to symphonic music. Moreover, the recent trend to build – or, at least, plan – impressive concert-halls in major cities (such as Dortmund, Essen or Bochum) – providing permanent bases for the municipal orchestras, and also offering outside orchestras a location for guest-concerts – enables orchestras to offer their audiences attractive buildings for a variety of different activities.

All in all, then, Germany's present concert scene is in a state of change, during the course of which many new forms of concert and dialogue with audiences have been – and presumably will continue to be – created. Against the background of increasingly varied leisure activities and slowly disappearing traditions of the educated middle-class, orchestras must face the challenge of seeking new forms of partnership with their listeners. They are tackling this challenge with imagination and commitment.

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