

Cultural Exceptionalism in Nazi Germany?

The Case of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra¹

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Introduction

In the famous Hollywood movie *The Pianist*, the audience is captivated by the vision of a Nazi officer playing the piano. Juxtaposing Chopin's piano sonata to the horrors of the Holocaust, Roman Polanski demonstrates how contradictorily, if not perversely, the human world can function. While European Jews are being killed in concentration camps in Eastern Europe, a Nazi officer has the time and leisure to play one of the greatest musical achievements in cultural history, ironically, on a piano belonging to a victim of the Holocaust. The scene suggests that aesthetics have no monopoly on morals.² While the Nazi officer could have been a talentless amateur, he instead played the sonata skilfully captivating. The presumption that Nazis were incapable of valuing and producing sophisticated art is, in fact, faulty. In her *Most German of the Arts*, Pamela Potter quotes the musicologist Albrecht Riethmüller's phrase "Music is German isn't it?"³ This quote brings attention to the fact that without Germany, and its eminent composers Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms to name a few, the history of Western music would be missing some of its crown jewels. At the same time, *Most German of the Arts* suggests that throughout modern history, music has played a predominant role in Germany, including the years of the Third Reich.

Historiographically, it is quite puzzling that academics have dedicated great attention to the other arts— theatre, film, architecture, and literature— during the Third Reich, while "the most German of the arts," which undoubtedly occupied a central position in the ideology and propaganda of National Socialism, seems to be greatly underrepresented. Potter argues that this can be explained in part by the uninterrupted success that prominent musical figures enjoyed while working within the musical milieu after 1945, and by their efforts to suppress investigations into their roles within the Nationalist Socialist regime.⁴ Looking at some prominent figures, such as the former conductors of the Berlin Philharmonic, Wilhelm Furtwängler and Herbert von Karajan, it is evident that, in spite of their prominence and involvement in Nazi politics, successful musical careers in Germany and the world could be continued after the war.

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² Michael Kater, *Die missbrauchte Muse* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1997), 15.

³ Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), ix.

⁴ Pamela Potter, "The Nazi Seizure of the Berlin Philharmonic," in *National Socialist Cultural Policy*, Glenn Cuomo, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 23.

The case of the Berlin Philharmonic fits into this larger paradigm of scarcity of scholarly studies on musical institutions in Nazi Germany. One might be surprised to learn that the Berlin Philharmonic has only one book dedicated to its role within the Third Reich, which was published relatively recently in commemoration of its 125th year anniversary in 2007. In contrast, there are a dozen available biographies of the former orchestra's conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. One reason might be that during the war numerous sources held by the orchestra were lost. In Berlin, the office of the Philharmonic was destroyed in November 1943 as a result of the Allied bombing campaigns.⁵ Moreover, the reluctance by some prominent figures, such as Herbert von Karajan, the main conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic until 1989 who had joined the Nazi Party *twice*, has to some degree prevented historical investigations on the orchestra.

On a closer look, however, a few published memoirs of musicians of the Berlin Philharmonic, including the timpanist Avgerinos Gerassimos and the contrabassist Erich Hartmann, who both lived through the tumultuous years of the Third Reich, come to attention. Although insignificant in number, these primary sources can help the historian better understand the situation of the 'ordinary' musicians who have received significantly less scholarly attention. Through rather top-down approaches that focus on the elitist leaders in the musical scene, analyses on the rather unknown musicians in the Third Reich and their memoirs have been largely absent within the existing literature on music in Nazi Germany. In juxtaposition to the more exposed solo artists and celebrities, the lived experiences of musicians who collectively constituted the social institution of symphony orchestras in Germany remained an abstract conundrum that historians have been unable to break through and put into livelier contexts.

This paper is therefore based on the primary source documents written by musicians of the Philharmonic in conjunction with some valuable archival sources that I gathered in the *Bundesarchiv*, or federal archive, in Berlin as well as secondary sources by a number of scholars. Together, they aid in comprehending that music in the Third Reich was not as monolithic and coordinated as history surveys often portray. Although the Philharmonic in Germany's capital welcomed government influence in 1933 and the eventual takeover by the state, metamorphosing into a *Reichsorchester*, I argue that it successfully maintained an exceptional degree of political and artistic independence, ensuring for itself a number of privileges and preferential treatments.⁶ The Philharmonic's reaction to Nazi pressure demonstrates that pragmatic self-interest shaped the orchestra's collaboration with the Nazis rather than ideology.

Erik Levi labels the Berlin Philharmonic under Nazi auspices a 'special case' as the orchestra had been an independent cooperative since 1882, with policy decisions placed in the hands of the musicians themselves.⁷ The Nazis, thus, had at first no legal basis upon which to impose the infamous civil service law in April, 1933—the restoration of the professional civil service. Evidently, the law rationalized the release of all Jewish state employees and individuals deemed not politically tolerable. Since the Berlin Philharmonic, however, was not a state-owned body, unlike most theatres, opera houses and museums, it was in the unique situation of being able to at least temporarily resist Nazi coordination. The Jewish members of the orchestra could continue to work, while Jewish state-employed artists, musicians, conductors, (music) teachers, and curators all over the country were gradually dismissed.

At the time Hitler took over Germany, the orchestra's financial situation was dire. Already in 1929, plans were put in place to change ownership of the Philharmonic to the City of Berlin, the

⁵ Misha Aster, *Das Reichsorchester* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2007), 33-34.

⁶ *Reichsorchester* translated into English means "Reich's Orchestra."

⁷ The musicians each owned shares of the orchestra.

State of Prussia and the federal government. All three were to become shareholders of the cooperative, owning 51% of the shares.⁸ By losing the majority of shares and the right of self-determination, the orchestra exchanged its independence for economic security. The state would thus own the majority of the orchestra's shares and obtain a strong voice in making decisions. Due to the 1929 global economic crisis, however, and the federal government's subsequent reluctance to invest in the orchestra, the plans for changing ownership were put on ice.

The existence of the orchestra continued to be in danger, and again in 1933, plans for a government take-over were considered as the only reasonable solution. In the spring of that year, the Ministry of Propaganda indicated interest in taking the orchestra under its auspices. But when Hitler himself guaranteed financial securities to Furtwängler in a private audience in August, it was decided that the federal government itself was to become the sole owner. After weeks of working out the legal formalities, the musicians sold their shares of 600 *Reichsmark* each to the German government, which in turn became the sole shareholder of the orchestra on November 1, 1933.⁹ With the orchestra's relinquishing of self-government, a tradition of artistic independence abruptly ended.

An apocalyptic atmosphere in the sense that the orchestra would turn out to be apprehensive of increasing political pressure and ideological infiltration by the Nazis did, however, not materialize. The orchestra's reorganization was not considered as invasive; instead, it was welcomed by most musicians and considered long overdue.¹⁰ In exchange for becoming a *Reichsorchester*, the Philharmonic was ensured a remarkably high degree of artistic freedom. A perception existed within the orchestra that Furtwängler, with his protective hand, would safely steer the orchestra through this tumultuous time. When Furtwängler reached a compromise with Joseph Goebbels, Minister for Propaganda and Enlightenment, that the Philharmonic would remain untouched as long as the conductor declared himself willing to stay in Berlin. The Philharmonic ostensibly won the lottery over its future as a result.

Nevertheless, the orchestra was soon subject to a structural reorganization. The Reich installed a practically unimportant board of directors, consisting of members of the Interior, Propaganda and Finance Ministries, and a commissioner who acted as an official representative of the Nazi Party. In practice, however, little changed. The Jewish members of the orchestra were, thanks to Furtwängler's intervention,¹¹ still permitted to work, and the conductor himself declared

⁸ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 57.

⁹ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 47.

¹⁰ Potter argues that "the failure to nationalize the Berlin Philharmonics prior to Hitler's rise to power was due to the lack of cooperation from all government branches concerned. Particularly the left, members of the communist party had been against lavishing support on the Philharmonics for some years, initially because they considered the orchestra to carry a high snob factor, and that money could be better used for social services." In addition, "the refusal to cooperate was due in part to the absence of a responsible office in the Reich government, a problem that caused the Philharmonics endless frustration. Unlike the Berlin city government, the Reich had no administrative body for cultural affairs at the time. The Philharmonics usually approached the ministry of the interior and the ministry of finance, shuttling back and forth between the two with requests for financial aid." As none of the Reich ministries (and Prussian ministries) saw themselves entirely responsible, the orchestra received insufficient, piecemeal funds. See Potter, "The Nazi Seizure of the Berlin Philharmonic," 41-45.

¹¹ Furtwängler vehemently supported the case of his Jewish musicians and artists. In a letter to Goebbels, publicized in the *Vossische Zeitung* 11 April, 1933, Furtwängler claimed that the foremost principle of the arts had to be quality. Removing Jewish artists of talent, who could not arbitrarily be replaced, could not be in Germany's interest. Goebbels used this incident to promptly release a response to Furtwängler's critique, arguing that the *real* German artists now had a chance to show their talents. See Joseph Wulf, *Musik im Dritten Reich – Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1983), 86-87.

he would continue working with the Philharmonic. The board of directors worked, if at all, subtly in the background, and for a while, no intervention in the orchestra's artistic affairs was discernable.

Despite the common notion of *Gleichschaltung*—the complete coordination of the German state under Nazi leadership—the authorities stayed clear of artistic issues in the case of the Berlin Philharmonic. If the repertoires from 1934 to 1945 can serve as a reflection of state intervention into artistic matters, it is safe to say that it was limited.¹² As late as 1938, Furtwängler still promoted the Russian composer Stravinsky by recording his composition *Card Game* under the composer's supervision. Stravinsky was known for his modern, atonal music—a thorn in the eyes of most Nazi ideologues. Additionally, the Berlin Philharmonic performed works by Béla Bartók at events that were even sponsored by the Reich's Chamber of Music, even though Bartók's name was linked to Eastern European Jewish circles.¹³ Works by Felix Mendelsohn-Bartholdy, his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in particular, continued to be performed, despite the composer's Jewish background. Music by non-Aryan composers was in fact frequently played, particularly during the first few years of the Third Reich.¹⁴ Later on, works by modern composers such as Stravinsky were restricted, but only in correlation to the political events of the time. As the Soviet Union and France became official enemies of the Reich, symphonic works by composers from such countries were no longer permitted (although even then, exceptions proved to be common). Evidently, Goebbels and his ministry interfered very little, avoiding conflicts with Furtwängler who was, after all, responsible for the orchestra's artistic affairs. As the historian Michael Kater argues, the Nazis were smart enough to slacken the reins over the country's musical sector and allow a certain degree of artistic freedom and tolerance, while simultaneously constructing a monitoring apparatus over Germany's musical landscape.¹⁵

The Mannheim Incident

Furtwängler's apparent unlimited powers were first contested in the city of Mannheim. In April 1933, the Berlin Philharmonic under Furtwängler was scheduled to perform in a southern German city together with the orchestra of the Mannheim *Staatstheater*. Furtwängler had been a concertmaster in Mannheim earlier in his career, so an arrangement was made for him to return to his old domain and conduct a mega-concert consisting of more than 170 musicians from both orchestras. A dispute, however, arose when members of the Mannheim orchestra were appalled by Furtwängler's decision to place some of their best solo artists in the second row (who would thus play the less challenging second part), while the Berlin musicians were granted the privilege of playing the first part.¹⁶

The city of Mannheim was, of course, grateful for Furtwängler's visit along with a joint performance with the world-renowned Berlin Philharmonics. In 1933, however, the situation was different. State-legitimated forms of anti-Semitism increasingly found ways into German social life, and after some of the solo artists of the Mannheim orchestra bitterly complained about the

¹² Potter, "The Nazi Seizure of the Berlin Philharmonic," 53.

¹³ Potter, "The Nazi Seizure of the Berlin Philharmonic," 53. When Bartok found out that he was not featured in the "Degenerate Music Exhibition" in 1938, he promptly demanded that he too be on the list of undesirables.

¹⁴ Kater, *Die missbrauchte Muse*, 167.

¹⁵ Kater, *Die missbrauchte Muse*, 29.

¹⁶ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 99.

symbolic degradation imposed by Furtwängler by placing them in the second row, the issue quickly turned into a political one. While Mannheim, known as a stronghold for Nazi supporters, featured numerous Nazi members in the orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic was blessed with having some of the most renowned solo artists of the time, many of whom were Jewish: concertmaster Simon Goldberg and the solo cellists Nicolai Graudan and Joseph Schuster. Consequently opposition arose when Furtwängler declined the request of August Sander, president of the Mannheim orchestra, to allow the hosts to pre-arrange the seating of both orchestras' musicians. An artist of Furtwängler's stature had to decline; conscious of his powers, he could not leave such a task to someone else. Besides, Furtwängler well discerned the political element of the request, and had he left the task of arranging musicians' seats to the organizers in Mannheim, none of his international Jewish star musicians would have been seated visibly in the first row.¹⁷

In the interim, a protest arose in Mannheim. Some of the local musicians hyperbolized that German-Aryan artists of talent were demoted, while dozens of Jewish musicians received preferential treatment. In addition, the people of Mannheim had not overlooked a letter previously published in a Berlin daily and addressed to Goebbels, in which Furtwängler argued for an end to political intervention in Germany's musical sector. Furtwängler's alleged support for talented Jewish artists was known. All this stood in juxtaposition to a new National Socialist zeitgeist meant to galvanize Germans into joining the bandwagon of Nazism and participate in the emasculation of German Jews. Furtwängler, however, remained uncompromising and threatened to cancel the concert should his standing be questioned and his privileges as artistic director be curtailed.¹⁸

During the final rehearsal on the day before the concert, when Sander once again approached the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic to leave the seating to the hosts, Furtwängler renewed his refusal. Unsurprisingly the mood prior to the *concerto grossi* was not elated, and although the performance--dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of Richard Wagner's death--was a success, the Mannheim incident underlined how palpably arts in Germany had become intertwined with politics. Shortly after the concert, the president of the Mannheim orchestra paid another visit to Furtwängler, renewing allegations regarding the conductor's lack of national pride and integrity. Furtwängler, outraged about these accusations in his home town, refused to attend the post-concert party, a symbolic gesture of protest.¹⁹

The Mannheim incident did not end with the party Mannheim had organized for its guests from Berlin. On April 29, an article in the right-wing *Mannheimer Hakenkreuzbanner* magazine lauded the concert, but explicitly criticized that:

[A]ll string musicians in the first row were without exception Jews. Who dares to present such impertinence in a city like Mannheim? We will find ways to eradicate such contaminants [*Fremdkörper*] in this state-subsidized orchestra. We will in the future not tolerate again that a few dozen Jews will play before us. Herr Furtwängler should bear this in mind.²⁰

Furtwängler's response followed promptly. Irritated, the conductor complained that the issue of Jewish musicians within the Berlin Philharmonic was, at best, a matter for the federal

¹⁷ Herbert Haffner, *Furtwängler* (Berlin: Parthas Verlag, 2006): 155.

¹⁸ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 99.

¹⁹ Haffner, *Furtwängler*, 155.

²⁰ Haffner, *Furtwängler*, 156.

government and not a local *NSDAP* branch. Furtwängler also declared that he would lay down his honorary membership in the Mannheim orchestra and would never again visit the city. In any case, the article drew an incorrect picture of the Berlin Philharmonics as it held no more than six Jewish members.²¹

Although there was only a small percentage of Jewish musicians in the orchestra, the incident in Mannheim demonstrated that Jewish citizens in Germany, regardless of their talent or position, were increasingly subjected to severe discrimination. The incident represented a minor political struggle between a regional manifestation of Nazism on the one side, with the Philharmonics and Furtwängler standing for cultural freedom on the other. The maestro could claim victory in this case; yet even Furtwängler, who was initially able to protect all of his musicians, must have discerned that a different time was in the making. For the time being, however, the Berlin Philharmonic resembled a unique, temporary oasis for its Jewish musicians who seemed, despite increasing social discrimination, untouchable.

The Hindemith Affair

Notwithstanding Furtwängler's agreement with Goebbels that allowed the six Jewish musicians to stay in the orchestra during 1933, it would be naïve to assume that the people concerned felt comfortable in their situation. In fact, by the end of the 1935/36 season, all Jewish members had left the orchestra. Yet not one was forced to resign. While Jewish artists in state-owned institutions were released relatively rapidly after Hitler's rise to power, the Jewish members of the Berlin Philharmonic who had enjoyed Goebbels' toleration chose voluntarily to resign. At the end of the 1933/34 season, concertmaster Simon Goldberg and solo cellist Joseph Schuster decided to emigrate and start new careers abroad.²² No empirical evidence suggests that both Schuster and Goldberg were implicitly urged or directly coerced to quit. Instead, thanks to their extraordinary fame, they faced no challenges in finding new engagements abroad. Goldberg in particular managed to continue his astonishing career in the United States, where he became a naturalized citizen in 1951.²³

The Jewish cellist Nicolai Graudan stayed in the orchestra for another season. His contract with the Berlin Philharmonic was even renewed in 1934, despite his Jewish status and the fact that he was not a German citizen. However, Graudan's new contract did not include a wage increase, which would have put him on equal footing with his German colleagues. Instead, the new contract included an increase in the common services that were expected from him. Such depreciative treatment was unacceptable for an artist of Graudan's stature, who had performed throughout Europe as a solo-cellist for years. When Graudan found a new position in England in 1935, the cellist asked for the immediate termination of his contract, a request that the responsible ministry instantly granted.²⁴ Gilbert Back, the fourth Jewish member, performed as a violinist in the orchestra since 1925. Historical data on Back suggests that initially he did not intend to leave the orchestra. Instead of terminating his contract, the Nazis bought Back out of his contract, and for

²¹ Haffner, *Furtwängler*, 156.

²² Ironically, Furtwängler replaced Goldberg with a new concertmaster, Hugo Kolberg, who was married to a Jew. The Nazis in Berlin were aware of this, and thus, another wave of protests was aimed at Furtwängler. See Fred Prieborg, *Trial of Strength – Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Third Reich* (London: Quartet Books, 1991), 190.

²³ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 101.

²⁴ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 102-103.

16,000 *Reichsmark*, the violinist agreed to leave the orchestra.²⁵ For the upcoming 1935/36 season, the Berlin Philharmonic no longer included Jewish musicians within its rows.

In addition to the four Jewish members who left the orchestra, there were two half-Jewish (*versippte*) musicians. According to historian Misha Aster, both musicians, Hans Bottermund and Bruno Stenzel, could continue their work in the orchestra without interruption throughout the Third Reich. Although Goebbels noted in his diary on August 2, 1937 that two half-Jews remained in the orchestra, the minister also foresaw that a subsequent forceful layoff would be challenged by Furtwängler.²⁶ It seems that Goebbels did not prioritize this issue and thus avoided another argument with Furtwängler.²⁷ Although other musicians in Germany had to prove their Aryan ancestry to the Reich's Chamber of Music, once again the ministry appeared to make an exception for the Berlin Philharmonic; an exception that relegated Nazi ideology to a matter of secondary importance as both Bottermund and Stenzel should have been excluded legally.²⁸ Instead, they were silently tolerated throughout the entirety of the Third Reich.

The Berlin Philharmonic remained, despite its enthusiastic support of the orchestra's takeover by the government, anti-ideological in a sense that it actively tried to protect all of its members and did not necessarily accommodate Nazi demands. Goebbels' toleration, however, had its limitations. As long as the Philharmonic remained cooperative for the most part, the minister was willing to negotiate some concessions. In late 1934, however, the Berlin Philharmonic scheduled to debut the opera *Matthias the Painter* by the German composer Paul Hindemith. In March, Hindemith's homonymous symphony had its premiere at the Berlin Philharmonic, which was greatly celebrated by the audience. Yet, in the summer, the Chamber of Music forbade the performance of the opera for the upcoming season due to the opera's alleged controversial libretto. The theme of the opera centred on how artists deal with political authorities during times of oppression. Unsurprisingly, the government perceived the opera as an indirect form of criticism, although Hindemith had never been a political commentator and his music, despite being somewhat modern in character, was not classified as degenerately atonal. The composer's problem, however, was that Hitler personally disliked him. The approval for the opera, from either Hitler or one of his ministers, therefore never came.

After the official disapproval, the focus immediately shifted to Furtwängler who was supposed to conduct the opera at the State Opera in Berlin. The conductor had cultivated a friendship with Hindemith for years and had performed the composer's works numerous times. As Hindemith's opera was dismissed and increasingly criticized in the Nazi press, Furtwängler felt he had to take a stand for his friend. In a letter to a major newspaper--printed on the front page on November 25, 1934--the conductor defended the composer. Furtwängler criticized the inhumane treatment in the media and exclaimed that Hindemith had always proved to be a loyal German. Furthermore, he once again questioned the legality of government intervention into artistic matters.²⁹

²⁵ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 104.

²⁶ Goebbels expected that Furtwängler would use all his available powers to prevent a forced layoff of both musicians. Goebbels' Diaries, August 2, 1937 in Misha Aster *Das Reichsorchester*.

²⁷ In a letter to Goebbels, Furtwängler outlines that both Stenzel and Bottermund were indispensable and could qualitatively not be replaced. Furthermore, Furtwängler explains that both musicians had not been apprenticed by Jewish teachers or maintained relations to Jewish circles. Therefore, he argued the special permit both musicians were previously granted by Goebbels previously should be extended, and the musicians should be allowed to join the Chamber of Music. BArch, R55 23919.

²⁸ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 104.

²⁹ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 108.

Furtwängler's questioning of Nazi authority on artistic matters showed that to some degree, freedom of opinion in Nazi-Germany was still possible. His letter rapidly turned into a media sensation, particularly after he received widespread support from the public. Over the following days, the conductor was welcomed with standing ovations at the Philharmonic, and the foreign press even asked for permission to reprint Furtwängler's letter.³⁰ While Goebbels and his ministry at first remained silent, it soon became necessary for the Nazi elite to act if a loss of face was to be avoided. After a meeting with Hitler and Goebbels, Göring (who was Furtwängler's official superior in the state of Prussia) informed Furtwängler on December 4, 1934 that his resignation was expected within the next few days; otherwise he would be formally dismissed from his positions as conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic and vice president of the Chamber of Music as well as his engagement with the *Staatsoper*. Having no real alternative, Furtwängler declared his resignation the following day. The Hindemith Affair cost the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic his job.

The Hindemith incident demonstrated, like the Mannheim case, the continued preference of the Berlin Philharmonic to remain apolitical or outside politics, even though the orchestra was formally now a *Reichsorchester*. Having performed works by Hindemith for years—sometimes even under the composer's supervision—the musicians of the orchestra never questioned the sincerity or quality of one of Germany's most talented contemporary composers. Supporting their conductor during this power struggle in late 1934, members of the Philharmonic were shocked when they learned of Furtwängler's sudden departure. After all, he had safely guided the orchestra since the Nazi takeover, protected its suddenly unwanted Jewish musicians as long as possible, and successfully resisted Nazi influence and intervention into the orchestra's affairs in Mannheim and several other instances.³¹ The Berlin Philharmonic had been an orchestra in the Reich without being a true *Reichsorchester*. Apart from the fact that the orchestra had been legally owned by the Reich, there were only a few tangible signs that pointed to the handwriting of the orchestra's new patriarch.

Once Furtwängler resigned from his positions, Goebbels used this chance for a tabula rasa, changing the overall structure of the orchestra. Following Furtwängler's dismissal, von Schmidtseck, the orchestra's manager (*Kommissar*) was also released from his position. Goebbels probably saw Schmidtseck as Furtwängler's right hand rather than an official representative of the Nazi Party who was supposed to cultivate a National Socialist spirit within the orchestra. Instead, the Philharmonic was assigned another Nazi functionary, Hermann Stange, who became the orchestra's new conductor and manager in unison.

Stange, who had worked in Bulgaria prior to his arrival in Berlin, was of minor musical talent and his appointment to one of the highest posts within Germany's musical sector can only be explained by Stange's excellent connections to high-ranking Nazi functionaries such as Joseph Goebbels and Hans Hinkel, *Reichskommissar* for cultural matters in the Propaganda Ministry. According to Aster, however, Stange received very little support within the orchestra, which saw

³⁰ Wulf, *Musik im Dritten Reich – Eine Dokumentation*, 175-76.

³¹ Another example of how the orchestra actively resisted Nazi pressure occurred in April 1933 when the major of Berlin, Wilhelm Hafemann, single-handedly demanded a list of all Jewish members of the orchestra. Lorenz Höber promised cooperation, but in reality did not compose the promised list. Höber was aware of the fact that the orchestra was not a public institution and was subsequently not legally obliged to respond to Hafemann. When, ten days later, Hafemann threatened Höber that he would find other ways to the musicians' contracts if Höber would not meet his obligations, he Höber responded that it would take time to compose the list. Since the orchestra was 'unfortunately' on tour at that time, Höber had good reason to again postpone the process; he told Hafemann that the issue could be dealt with only when the orchestra returned in a few weeks. See Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 96.

him as a political opportunist.³² Berlin's press was also not particularly impressed by the new, autocratic conductor; critiques against his persona became increasingly common. In addition, Furtwängler, who only reluctantly declared his resignation, worked silently in the background against Stange, whom he called an "uncontrollable dreamer."³³ And at last, Hitler himself recognized that Berlin and the German Reich could not spare an artist of Furtwängler's magnitude. All these factors together resulted in the conductor's return after only a few months. On April 1, 1935, Stange's contract was dissolved and his short career with the Philharmonic ended.

The Hindemith Affair and its immediate repercussions underline that, on the one hand, Furtwängler and his Philharmonic had to acknowledge some limitations set by the Nazi apparatus. Criticizing the government in the press constituted one limitation. On the other hand, Goebbels and even Hitler recognized that there was a price to pay to utilize and present Germany's artistic quality at home and abroad. Installing a Nazi functionary, who admittedly cultivated excellent lines of contact to high-ranking Nazis, proved to be a cataclysmic misjudgement. The Propaganda Ministry seriously miscalculated its use of the Berlin Philharmonic as a toy. It was not sufficient to create some ideological formula and replace Furtwängler with an unknown, yet loyal Nazi sympathizer.³⁴ The incident also illustrates that the Nazi leadership could not ignore popular discontent. When Furtwängler resigned, more than 30% of the regular visitors cancelled their season's tickets as a sign of protest; in several universities in Germany, music students collected signatures calling for Furtwängler's immediate return.³⁵ The experiment with Stange, therefore, demonstrates the constraints that Nazi bureaucracy and intrigue could experience. As the incarnation of National Socialist nepotism, Stange could not prosper within the environment of the Berlin Philharmonic. Its tradition of producing world-class music was not to be interrupted by a dictatorial regime intending to metamorphose the orchestra into a political instrument. With the return of Furtwängler, Goebbels and his ministry understood that in terms of ideological infiltration, they could only have a limited impact on the orchestra.³⁶ Instead, the minister discerned that he could better use the orchestra for propaganda purposes abroad that would concentrate on advertising Germany's artistic greatness.

The Reichsorchester

Although the Berlin Philharmonic did not attain a reputation for being a clique of Nazi sympathizers, for the rest of Europe the orchestra epitomized an official propaganda instrument of Hitler's Germany. The foreign press knew that the famous orchestra had been taken over by the Nazis in 1933 and, if not, it was a well-established truism by the end of the decade that the freedom of arts in Germany had been severely curtailed. Thus, it was no surprise that a German orchestra

³² After his Stange's appointment, the Propaganda Ministry found out that Stange he had been a member of the Social Democratic Party. Earlier on, Stange had denied any political participation or membership prior to Hitler's takeover. Subsequently, Stange's reputation within the orchestra suffered severely and doubts about his political integrity within the Nazi leadership developed. See Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 76.

³³ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 75.

³⁴ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 77.

³⁵ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 14.

³⁶ The financial report of 1938/39 mentions that with the return of Wilhelm Furtwängler to the Berlin Philharmonic, the orchestra's finances perpetually improved. All subscription concerts with Furtwängler were sold out and even had to be repeated. Furtwängler's engagement with the Philharmonic was a "popular and financial success." BArch R55 197 Microfiche 10.

visiting foreign countries was not always welcomed by its hosts. When the Berlin Philharmonic travelled through numerous European cities, public reception was often reserved, particularly after Hitler started sowing chaos and misery all over Europe. Even as early as 1933, some protesters disturbed a concert of the Berlin Philharmonic in Paris, distributing fliers that called for an intensified boycott against Germany where, according to the flier, the Nazis imprisoned innocent people and treated them inhumanely. In 1935, another group of protesters warned explicitly against the dangers of German fascism in London. Similar protests occurred in Antwerp and Brussels, where the local police had to ensure Furtwängler's personal safety.³⁷ While these protests certainly succeeded in gaining publicity, they were, however, minor in scale. Until 1939 protests against Germany were usually limited to a small minority of people, usually intellectuals. Such protests against the Berlin Philharmonic were admittedly annoying disturbances for the orchestra and sometimes the hosting parties, but the success and positive critiques of the orchestra's guest concerts were generally not affected. Only with the start of the war did widespread resentment against the orchestra intensify in some countries. Particularly in Vichy France and Switzerland the orchestra faced popular protests prior to, during and after their concerts. During a tour in 1940, concerts in Belgrade and Zagreb even had to be cancelled due to the unsafe conditions for German citizens.³⁸

The increase in protests with the beginning of the war suggests that the Berlin Philharmonic increasingly lost its status as neutral entertainment, at least in the eyes of the audience. According to Esteban Buch, the performance of the German classics--works by Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms--remained unproblematic, both at home and abroad, because the German composers eschewed association with Nazism. These composers, despite being German, were listened to by Nazis and non-Nazis alike, and were not hated or rejected by either. The German classical tradition epitomized a mosaic of artistic geniuses, who world audiences widely adored but were not considered as icons of Nazi propaganda.³⁹ Performing abroad and playing Beethoven's symphonies, therefore, was not perceived by most foreigners as exhibiting Nazi propaganda, but as performing brilliant art. The German classical tradition had long been an integral and important part of Western culture, and contemporary political events in Europe could not undermine Germany's cultural accomplishments of the past. Yet, foreign audiences realized that the Berlin Philharmonic (and other German orchestras) playing German classics effectively helped the Nazis to erect a cultural propaganda apparatus that intended to cast the German Reich in a more positive light. The Philharmonic, therefore, increasingly became the subject of criticism, not because it played so much German music, but because it was considered an ambassador of Hitler's new Germany.

Although the musicians themselves might have been apolitical or indifferent towards their employer, the ministry knew that sending one of Germany's best orchestras abroad would have a propaganda effect. Drawing the European continent into a cultural battlefield, the Nazis were eager to demonstrate Germany's racial superiority in music and the arts. Manuela Schwartz explains that the Nazis, who intended to mediate and improve the Reich's reputation abroad by demonstrating Germany's cultural supremacy, turned German orchestras into political instruments. The Berlin Philharmonic thus represented a collective ambassador of the German Reich with only few actual directives to follow: to concentrate on playing the brilliant music which it was known for.

³⁷ Haffner, *Furtwängler*, 182.

³⁸ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 312-13.

³⁹ Esteban Buch, "Beethoven und das Dritte Reich," in *Das Dritte Reich und die Musik* (Berlin: Stiftung Schloss Neuhardenberg, 2006), 43.

The political motives that the Propaganda Ministry pursued were, however, not necessarily shared by the musicians of the orchestra, who were grateful to momentarily escape the harsh realities of the home front. While the orchestra was considered a *Reichsorchester* internationally, the players of the Berlin Philharmonic perceived their international appearances as quite apolitical. Erich Hartmann recalls that while on tour, the concerts of the Berlin Philharmonic were always a sensation. He remembers that “We only did our jobs. We had great pleasure to play music and entertain the people. None of us thought about politics.”⁴⁰ Hans Bastiaan, concertmaster in the orchestra, explains that only today does he understand that performing in countries such as Portugal and Spain was meant to cultivate the Reich’s friendly relations with these fascist countries.⁴¹ Bastiaan claims that “we were harmless, apolitical musicians.”⁴² Existing recollections and interviews of the orchestra musicians from that time suggest that members of the Berlin Philharmonic were not necessarily politically-motivated agents who with or without coercion from the authorities advertised the ideological concepts of National Socialism throughout the European continent. Instead, the musicians were career-oriented artists; playing for one of Europe’s best orchestras and performing abroad was a dream for many artists. Klaus Weiler, biographer of Gerhard Taschner, who became first concertmaster of the Philharmonic at only 19 years of age, argues that (young) artists found little interest in politics back then and rather focused on their work, trying to improve and excel in their careers. It is understandable that artists like Taschner thankfully accepted positions to play in an orchestra, regardless of whether they were funded or owned by the Nazi government.⁴³ After all, artists, as is the case today, depended on opportunities and philanthropic patrons and only the most talented and famous artists—a small minority—had a choice of selecting the type and location of their employment. Additionally, only Furtwängler—who was evidently not an advocate of Nazism but who, as demonstrated, occasionally dared to question the authorities—and a few other talented conductors were permitted to tour with the Philharmonic.⁴⁴ Without a politically inspired conductor at the top, it is hard to imagine how the Philharmonic was a political agent that intended to export the spirit of National Socialism. While in collective unity the orchestra appeared to symbolize Nazism, in reality the orchestra strictly focused on performing excellent music, at home and abroad.

For the musicians themselves, the ideological objective of the Nazis was not of primary importance. In fact, the low percentage of Nazi Party members in the orchestra (7.2%) supports an image opposing that of an ideologically-inspired orchestra, in stark contrast to other musical ensembles, such as the Vienna Philharmonic which saw more than 40% of its members attracted to the party.⁴⁵ On one hand, the orchestra was grateful to have sponsorship to tour Europe and consolidate its reputation of being a world-class orchestra, even in times of war. On the other hand, the possibility of leaving the Reich, particularly during the last years of the war, was a privilege that ordinary Germans were not granted. Touring through European cities, the Philharmonic resembled a bizarre cohort of tourists. Members of the Philharmonic understandably appreciated

⁴⁰ Interview of Erich Hartmann in *The Reichsorchester – The Berlin Philharmonics and the Third Reich*. A film by Enrique Sanchez Lansch. DVD, 2007.

⁴¹ Interview of Erich Hartmann in *The Reichsorchester – The Berlin Philharmonics and the Third Reich*. A film by Enrique Sanchez Lansch. DVD, 2007.

⁴² Herbrt Haffner, *Die Berliner Philharmoniker – Eine Biografie*. (Mainz: Schott Verlag),: 121.

⁴³ Klaus Weiler, *Gerhard Taschner – Das Vergessene Genie* (Augsburg: Wissner Verlag, 2004), 24.

⁴⁴ Other conductors with whom the Berlin Philharmonic went on tour were Clemens Krauss, Erich Jochum, Karl Boehm and Robert Heger. None of them were members of the Nazi Party.

⁴⁵ Hellsberg, Clemens Hellsberg, . *Demokratie der Könige -. Die Geschichte der Wiener Philharmoniker*, (Vienna: Kremayr Verlag, 1992), 464.

any chance to leave chaos, war and increasing poverty behind. Yet, material self-interest motivated the musicians to agree to scheduled guest concerts abroad rather than the chance to visit ancient temples or museums of modern art. In Southern Europe in particular, the members of the Berlin Philharmonic eagerly made use of local markets and luxuries. Buying coffee, chocolate, butter and other goods, the artists felt they were in a temporary heaven far away from Berlin, which was increasingly subject to Allied air raids. Thinking of their families and friends, and of their survival at home, constantly motivated the musicians' behaviour. Supplying themselves with goods unavailable or restricted at home, members of the Philharmonic explicitly used their privileged situation to visit the parts of Europe that still enjoyed peace and offered a welcome economic oasis compared to home, where food supplies were rationed. The daughter of Carl Hofer, first violinist in 1943, remembers that the supplies her father brought home enabled the family's survival. By bartering with coffee beans in Berlin, essential food supplies like milk and butter could be bought on the black market. Hans Bastiaan also recollects that the coffee they could buy in Southern Europe was worth diamonds in Berlin.⁴⁶ Hartmann recalls that sardines, chocolate, ham and particularly textiles were in great demand at home, and to alleviate each family's struggle, each musician took as many goods as possible.⁴⁷

As the war dragged on, the Berlin Philharmonic increasingly adapted to the war at home. The orchestra, however, was again in an exceptionally privileged situation.⁴⁸ Although the musicians voluntarily agreed to night-patrol (*Luftschutzdienst*) around the concert hall, the patrolling musicians and the local fire department failed to prevent the home of the Philharmonic from destruction during a February 1944 raid by the British Air Force. Only some of the inventory in the building could be saved, but the *Philharmonie* could no longer be used. Fortunately, most of the instruments and other equipment had already been stored in a remote Bavarian location to avoid destruction by the war.⁴⁹ Evidently the orchestra enjoyed the privilege of receiving preferential treatment and protection by government authorities, who helped transfer most of the valuable equipment to a more secure location. In addition, the attack on the buildings of the orchestra illustrates that outside of voluntary night-patrolling, the members of the orchestra were, unlike the great majority of German citizens, not involved or obliged to participate directly in the war. Whereas young and middle-aged German males, including artists from other orchestras and cultural institutions, were sooner or later drafted and sent to war, Goebbels himself granted special exemptions to all musicians of the Berlin Philharmonic, excluding them from military service.⁵⁰ This generous gesture is remarkable, considering that during the last days of the Third Reich,

⁴⁶ *The Reichsorchester – The Berlin Philharmonic and the Third Reich*. A film by Enrique Sanchez Lansch. DVD, 2007. Hartmann also recollects that the goods they brought were so envied after a guest concert in Paris in 1944 that all the food stuffs that were temporarily stored in Berlin were stolen, while the expensive instruments of the orchestra were left untouched. See Erich Hartmann, *Die Philharmoniker in der Stunde Null. Erinnerungen an die Zeit der Philharmonie vor 50 Jahren*, (Berlin: Feja Verlag, 1996), 24.

⁴⁷ Hartmann, *Die Philharmoniker in der Stunde Null. Erinnerungen an die Zeit der Philharmonie vor 50 Jahren*, 19-21.

⁴⁸ The musicians were also privileged in regards to housing during the war. When Erich Hartmann's residence was bombed out in 1944, the Nazi Party found some adequate housing for the contrabassist. Even during peacetime, the orchestra did not hesitate to consult political authorities to ask for housing. When the orchestra engaged the hornist Handke in June 1939, the orchestral administration requested some accommodation for the musician at the Propaganda Ministry. See Hartmann, *Die Philharmoniker in der Stunde Null - Erinnerungen an die Zeit der Philharmonie vor 50 Jahren*, 9 & BArch R 55 197 Microfiche 1.

⁴⁹ Gerassimos Avgerinos, *Das Berliner Philharmonische Orchester als eigenständige Organisation., 70 Jahre Schicksal einer GmbH, 1882-1952*, (Berlin: Privately Published, 1972), 70.

⁵⁰ Haffner, *Die Berliner Philharmoniker*, 116.

teenage boys were sent to fight for their *Vaterland*, yet the Berlin Philharmonic, with its reservoir of excellent musicians, was deemed indispensable.⁵¹ Their death in the war, it appears, would have been too costly; instead, while it was clear by the end of 1944, if not sooner, that the war would be lost, members of the Berlin Philharmonic were actively protected by government authorities. The Berlin Philharmonic and its musicians were too valuable to be sacrificed – an incredible privilege.

When the raids on Berlin increased in frequency and magnitude, the Propaganda Ministry decided to move the entire orchestra to a different, more remote location for its protection. In the summer of 1944, the city of Baden-Baden, near the Black Forest, temporarily accommodated the Berlin Philharmonic, where the orchestra was distant from the horrors that took place in Berlin at the time.⁵² It is unprecedented that a cultural institution like the Berlin Philharmonic obtained such exceptional treatment. While the *Volkssturm*, a national militia consisting of young boys and elderly men, prepared for Germany's last fight, the Philharmonic entertained the locals in the spa town of Baden-Baden. In September 1944, however, the orchestra returned to Berlin. Besides the musicians' wish to return to their families and friends, the Propaganda Ministry understood how vital the orchestra could be for the people of Berlin. Sensing that the Philharmonic could boost local morale, Goebbels ordered the orchestra back to Berlin, and until the very last days of the war, the Philharmonic concerts continued to be popular. Music, it seemed, served as a remedy for the daily destruction and horror with which the people of Berlin had to live. Alan Steinweis argues that privileged orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic benefited, financially and in terms of deferment statuses, from the value the German people and Nazi regime placed on culture and entertainment as a reprieve from the anxieties and daily hardships of war.⁵³ Concerts were rescheduled, therefore, to earlier hours to avoid being interrupted by the nightly bombing campaigns and to provide the citizens of Berlin sufficient time for travel; after all, the infrastructure in Berlin had completely broken down by early 1945.

As the war entered its final phase, the Reich terminated all but a tiny handful of indispensable deferments (*UK-Stellungen*) that privileged musicians in Germany received to spare them from military service. Most of the previously protected artists were transferred over to the arms industry.⁵⁴ The Berlin Philharmonic, in contrast, remained one of last remnants of artistic activity in the Reich. In fact, the last concert of the Philharmonic took place on April 16, 1945, only days before the arrival of the Red Army. But even for the Philharmonic, there was a limit to the privileged treatment that they could accept. When during the very last days of the Reich, Albert Speer, Minister for Armament and Production, single-handedly protected the orchestra and offered to fly the members of the Philharmonic out before the Soviets would enter Berlin, the musicians

⁵¹ The musicians still had to register at their nearest military office (*Wehrmeldeamt*) and undergo some basic training. Yet, even for such military *Übungen*, the orchestra did not shy away from occasionally asking for special permission to exclude its musicians from such training. Furtwängler himself required a deferment at the Propaganda Ministry for the hornist Martin Ziller, who was, according to the conductor, indispensable, even for the short period required for basic training. BArch, RR 55 197 Microfiche 1. Additionally, the orchestra even inquired about exempting some of its foreign members from military service abroad. For instance, the management of the orchestra requested at the Propaganda Ministry to exempting the solo cellist de Machula, who was a Hungarian citizen, from military service in his home country. He also was considered indispensable. BArch RR 55 21258-4.

⁵² Haffner, *Die Berliner Philharmoniker*, 129.

⁵³ Furthermore, according to Steinweis, German citizens turned to cultural entertainment not just for psychological reasons, but also because of a lack of consumer alternatives. See Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology and Economics in Nazi Germany. The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater and Visual Arts (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 2000)*,: 172.

⁵⁴ Steinweis, *Art, Ideology and Economics in Nazi Germany. The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater and Visual Arts*, 170.

overtly refused and preferred to stay with their families. Only one artist, Gerhard Taschner, the young concertmaster, accepted Speer's offer and left Berlin with his family, guided by a military officer on April 11, 1945.⁵⁵

After February 23, 1945 the orchestra was officially attached to the *Volkssturm*, a civilian army intended to halt the Red Army. In the end, Goebbels himself refused Speer's attempt to defer the members of the Philharmonic from participating in the Battle of Berlin. The Propaganda Minister apparently changed his mind, arguing that the orchestra only reached its greatness due to his initiative and the financial support of his ministry. Thus, "the ones that come after us have no right for it [the Berlin Philharmonic]. It can go down with us."⁵⁶ To counteract Goebbels' apocalyptic revelation, Speer, who had previously promised Furtwängler that he would take care of the orchestra, secretly ordered the burning of the musicians' files that the Berlin military offices held.⁵⁷ Speer's intervention and disregard for Goebbels' orders rescued the Berlin Philharmonic from participating in senseless street-fight during the last days of the Third Reich. To symbolically inaugurate the end of Nazi Germany, the Philharmonic played Richard Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration" (*Tod und Verklärung*) during its last concert. After that, the musicians were on their own.

On May 26, 1945 the Berlin Philharmonic began performing again, this time for the U.S. military stationed in Berlin. Playing for a new patron, the orchestra underwent a seemingly ad hoc transformation from a *Reichsorchester* to one now patronized by the United States. The past quarrels with the Nazis, including the issue of the laid-off Jewish musicians, the power struggle in Mannheim or the Hindemith Affair, were all forgotten; the privileges and the special treatment, however, continued. While a number of musicians were not permitted to remain within the orchestra, due to their membership in the Nazi Party, most were left untouched and received preferential treatment from their new patrons, particularly in terms of additional food supplies.⁵⁸

In retrospect, therefore, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra represents a double-edged sword in the Third Reich. While trying to stay away from politics, clearly the Philharmonic, as a cultural institution operated by the National Socialist government, inevitably had to deal with its political patron and thus politics itself. Trying to be apolitical and stand aside from the political decision-makers, however, the orchestra pursued its self-interests and egoistically accepted material benefits and preferential treatment from the Nazi government without considering itself a puppet that could be manoeuvred at will. Representing the orchestra, Furtwängler in particular stood for a separation of politics and arts and his vehement interferences with official Nazi policy, ones that opposed the predetermined exclusion of Jewish artists from the cultural scene in Germany, indicate that the coordination of the cultural landscape in the Third Reich was not always as smooth, monolithic and linear as the Nazis preferred to claim. Instead, the case of the Berlin Philharmonic with its preferential treatment and privileges, illustrates how flexible, cooperative, and therefore contradictory at times the Nazi apparatus could function

⁵⁵ Weiler, *Gerhard Taschner – Das vergessene Talent*, 88.

⁵⁶ Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1999), 466.

⁵⁷ Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 466-467. Speer recounts in his memoirs that after a concert in December 1944, Furtwängler had asked him whether the war could still be won. When Speer negated answered no, Furtwängler was not surprised. Speer then advised Furtwängler to leave Germany as soon as possible, for the conductor could possibly be in possible danger; some top-ranking Nazis, including Heinrich Himmler and Martin Bohrmann, had indicated a desire for vengeance against anyone who had protected Jews in the past. When Furtwängler reciprocated that he could not leave his orchestra, Speer promised that he would take care of the orchestra during the following months.

⁵⁸ Aster, *Das Reichsorchester*, 332.