SYMPHONY AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRAS

The German orchestral landscape, with its 133 professional, publicly financed symphony and chamber orchestras, remains unparalleled worldwide for its density and diversity. It is basically a four-tier system. The first tier is made up of the 84 theatre orchestras\(^1\) that play in the operas, operettas and musicals mounted at Germany’s municipal and state theatres. Here the spectrum ranges from the great, internationally renowned opera houses in Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Munich to the small theatres in Lüneburg, Annaberg and Hildesheim. The second tier consists of 30 concert orchestras which perform predominantly or exclusively in concert halls. The uncontested leader here is the Berlin Philharmonic, followed by a host of other internationally acclaimed orchestras, among which are the Munich Philharmonic, the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, the Konzerthausorchester...
Berlin and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, to name only a few among the largest of their rank. The third tier comprises seven publicly funded chamber orchestras which work all year round as string orchestras without their own woodwind or brass sections. Examples include the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra in Heilbronn and the Munich Chamber Orchestra. Finally, the fourth tier involves the radio orchestras belonging to the ‘Consortium of public-law broadcasting corporations of the Federal Republic of Germany’, or ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) and the Rundfunkorchester und -Chöre GmbH Berlin (ROC).

These 12 radio orchestras or radio symphony orchestras, four big bands and seven radio choruses (see also Figure 10.3 in the article ‘Music on Radio and Television’ by Helmut Scherer and Beate Schneider) remain a mainstay of high-quality performance, ambitious programming and the promotion of contemporary music in Germany.

Germany’s so-called *Kultorchester* – a somewhat antiquated label used in collective bargaining agreements but meaning nothing more than an orchestra which works all year round with a permanent staff – are financed primarily by the public sector. The funds generally come from state or local subsidies and from radio and TV licence fees. Due to the federal structure of the country, the German *Länder* (states) are in charge of cultural affairs, and the role of the national government in funding theatres and orchestras is minimal. The financing models of the
individual states differ considerably. Some theatres and orchestras are wholly or almost completely funded by a given state. These are then usually called Staats-theater (state theatres) or Staatsorchester (state orchestras). There are a very few cases of entirely local funding by a municipality. Most theatres and orchestras benefit from mixed funding provided by the Land and by local and nearby municipalities. The box-office returns and the orchestra’s own resources vary widely according to genre (music theatre, concert etc.) and from one region to the next. On average, they account for roughly 19 percent of the budget – often less, sometimes more. Only a few theatres and orchestras are privately sponsored; fundraising in this sector is virtually non-existent.

In addition to the Kulturorchester, mention should also be made of other professional ensembles and chamber orchestras which either work on a project-by-project basis with a regular group of freelance musicians (‘project orchestras’) or,
STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA LANDSCAPE

Germany’s orchestra landscape dates back to the late 15th century. The earliest orchestra still in existence today is that of the Hessian State Theatre in Kassel, which was founded in 1502. Renowned traditional orchestras, such as the Dresden Staatskapelle, the Weimar Staatskapelle and the Mecklenburg Staatskapelle in Schwerin, were founded in the 16th century; still others were assembled at various German courts during the 17th and 18th centuries. This explains why Thuringia has a particularly large concentration of orchestras. The founding of court and church ensembles was followed, during the 19th and 20th centuries, by the establishment of a bourgeois orchestra culture in small and mid-size towns. Beginning in the 1920s and again after World War II, in East and West alike, this landscape was broadened with the addition of radio ensembles and other municipal and state orchestras. The density of orchestras is particularly high in Munich, Stuttgart and Berlin, since these cities are home to several funding entities: the state government (all three are state capitals), the municipal authorities, and public broadcasting corporations. East Germany took a targeted approach in the 1960s and began to locate theatres and orchestras in smaller communities and county seats under the slogan ‘Kultur auf’s Land!’ (culture in the countryside). Decentralisation has thus been an important feature of the orchestra landscape in Germany to the present day. Orchestras are found not only in large cities but spread more or less evenly across the country as a whole, even in rural areas (see Figure 5.1).
DISSOLUTIONS, MERGERS, NEW LEGAL FORMS

Germany’s orchestra landscape has changed dramatically since the 1990s. While the number of theatres and orchestras first grew in 1990, in the wake of German reunification, this was soon followed by a wave of adjustment and consolidation. As a result – primarily in the newly formed German states – large numbers of theatres and orchestras were merged with one another, scaled back or eliminated entirely. This occurred for financial reasons, particularly in view of the limited transitional financing provided by the German federal government. In the case of orchestras, this fate was met not only by small orchestras in a handful of rural areas or spoken theatres in the eastern section of Berlin; rather, it also affected larger orchestras in erstwhile regional capitals of the former German Democratic Republic, including Schwerin, Erfurt, Potsdam and Suhl, as well as individual radio orchestras of the former East German broadcasting network in Berlin and Leipzig.

Parallel to this special development in the newly formed German states, however, there were also severe structural adjustments in the states of what had been West Germany – primarily in North Rhine-Westphalia. They began with the closing of the Oberhausen Music Theatre in 1992 and continued with the insolvency of the Philharmonia Hungarica (Marl) in 2001. Another case was the liquidation and insolvency of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra in 2004, which now only works as a project orchestra. The first all-German stocktaking in 1992 identified 168 publicly financed concert, opera, chamber and radio orchestras; since then, 35 ensembles have been dissolved or merged. At the close of the 2006-07 season, the Philharmonic State Orchestra in Halle was merged with the Halle Opera House orchestra to create the ‘Halle Staatskapelle’. This gave rise to an ensemble with 152 positions, making it Germany’s second-largest orchestra after the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Currently, however, debate is ongoing over a further reduction in the size of this orchestra. Recently it was decided to scale back the orchestra as part of the founding of a limited joint-stock company, but this decision has not yet been implemented, since the parties are bound by a company-wide wage agreement. At the beginning of the 2007-08 season, the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra merged with the Kaiserslautern Radio Symphony Orchestra to create the ‘Deutsche Radiophilharmonie’, headquartered in Saarbrücken.
The map of orchestra sites (see Figure 5.1) shows the orchestra landscape after German reunification in 1990 and the manner in which it has since changed, in particular through mergers and dissolutions. The mergers were particularly painful in rural areas. In the final analysis, however, they were warranted in those cases where neighbouring orchestras and music theatres were producing independent programmes for an ever-shrinking audience, as happened in Nordhausen-Sondershausen, Gera-Altenburg, Rudolstadt-Saalfeld and Greifswald-Stralsund. Dissolutions were especially prevalent in those areas where there was no longer a political majority in favour of public funding (e.g. the Brandenburg Philharmonic in Potsdam) or where the historical rationale for forming the orchestra had vanished (e.g. the Philharmonia Hungarica in Marl, the Thüringen Philharmonic in Suhl and the Berlin Symphony Orchestra).

The number of identified positions for musicians has dropped from 12,159 in 1992 to 9,922, i.e. by 2,237 positions, or roughly 18 percent. Of this reduction, 1,742 of the positions eliminated had been in the newly formed German states and former East Berlin, and 495 in the states of former West Germany.
and former West Berlin (see Figure 5.2), which has lost 82 positions since 2008 alone – twice as many as in the newly formed eastern states.

**NUMBER OF VISITORS AND EVENTS**

In spite of the structural transformation described above, the current statistics of the Deutscher Bühnenverein (German Theatre and Orchestra Association) show a growing number of concerts, from around 6,900 in the 2000-01 season to 8,700 today (see Figure 5.3). However, these figures do not cover all the 12 radio orchestras.
Symphony and Chamber Orchestras

and radio symphony orchestras or other radio ensembles. Basically, the number of concert-goers grew in East and West alike, topping the four million mark for the first time in 2007-08. This is a positive trend, and it remains to be seen how the growing number of music festivals – particularly in summer – will affect the general number of concert-goers and the rate of capacity utilisation.

The German Orchestra Union (Deutsche Orchestervereinigung, or DOV) listed about 12,700 concerts of Kulturorchester and radio ensembles (excluding big bands) for 2009, with 6,100 symphony concerts (including tours abroad), 1,200 chamber concerts and 3,700 educational events (concerts for children and young adults, concerts for school pupils and workshops held in schools) (see Figure 5.4). These statistics underline the particular importance that new orchestral activities have gained in music appreciation, an area which comprises concerts for children, young adults and school groups as well as workshops. It is encouraging to note that the number of concerts for school pupils has increased
considerably in recent years. Unfortunately it was not possible to compile precise figures for the numbers of concert-goers involved since this information is not always recorded for school or open-air events or for guest performances.

As long as there is a continued lack of reliable and complete data for all concerts given by *Kulturorchester*, it will be difficult to predict trends in attendance. Even more problematic is the recording and breakdown of attendance figures for such concert halls as in Dortmund, Essen, and soon in Hamburg (opening scheduled for 2012), and for major German music festivals (e.g. the Schleswig Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Rheingau festivals), where outstanding German and foreign *Kulturorchester* and many other ensembles perform but reliable figures on attendance are not kept.

According to theatre statistics, the figures for attendance and capacity utilisation at music theatre events and concerts by theatre orchestras (excluding concert orchestras) have not undergone significant change in the period under consideration. They have remained relatively high, with average capacity utilisation rates between 70 and 80 percent.²

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2 Source: Compiled by Deutsche Orchestervereinigung.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of event</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
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<td>6,027</td>
<td>5,918</td>
<td>6,075</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music education events</td>
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<td>3,747</td>
<td>3,723</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerts for children and young adults</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>972</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts for school pupils</td>
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<td>570</td>
<td>665</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshops at schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chamber concerts</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>1,136</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other concerts</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,997</td>
<td>1,691</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,369</td>
<td>12,798</td>
<td>12,684</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall figures show that publicly financed theatres and orchestras are more than just receivers of subsidies. Instead, they are influential players in the local economy. They constitute powerful forces of supply and demand at the regional level, creating bonds with highly skilled labour through their methods of production. This in turn leads to increased tax revenue for the municipality and allows local businesses to participate directly or indirectly in the theatres’ economic activities.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS, PAY BRACKETS AND ORCHESTRA SIZE

The salaries and working conditions of musicians employed in *Kulturorchester* are governed by a collective agreement known as the ‘Tarifvertrag für Musiker in Kulturorchestern’ (TVK). It applies across the board for most opera orchestras and some concert orchestras. This blanket salary situation for orchestras is the only one of its kind in the world. As a rule, for radio ensembles the special salary provisions of the various public-law broadcasting corporations apply instead. Many concert orchestras have their own wage agreements which are based on the TVK but contain terms specific to the localities involved and often special provisions for concert tours.

In the TVK area, which covers municipal and state orchestras, a distinction needs to be made in view of remuneration and ‘ranking’. Whereas the payrolls for opera orchestras are broken down into seven pay groups according to the size of the orchestra (referred to as a ‘membership size’ scheme), for concert orchestras the musicians are grouped according to a separate classification contract (‘concert orchestra wage agreement’). A third option is an individual wage agreement specific to the orchestra in question (e.g. for the Berlin Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra). For most concert orchestras, however, the basic orientation is towards the wage groups found in opera orchestras.

The parties to the wage agreements for radio ensembles are the respective broadcasting corporations and the German Orchestra Union (Deutsche Orchestervereinigung, or DOV) in its capacity as a union and professional association of orchestra musicians and radio chorus singers. The TVK and industry-wide collective agreements supplementing the TVK, as well as all orchestra-specific collective agreements for municipal and state orchestras, are generally negotiated by the
DOV with the German Theatre and Orchestra Association (Deutscher Bühnenver-
ein, or DBV) as an employers’ association, provided the orchestra employer is a
member of the DBV. If the employer is not a DBV member, the wage agreement is
negotiated directly with the DOV.

Opera orchestras are assigned to pay groups A to D, depending on their mem-
bership and their number of positions. Those with no more than 56 positions at
their disposal are assigned to the lowest remuneration category, pay group D. Pay
group C applies to orchestras with between 56 and 65 positions; group B for 66 or
more; and from 78 pay group B/F (where F stands for ‘footnote’ as the bonus paid
is indicated in a footnote to the pay scale). Opera orchestras with 99 positions or
more are placed in pay group A. For ensembles of between 99 and 129 positions, a
variable footnote bonus can be paid (pay group A/F2), while for opera orchestras of
130 positions or more, payment of a footnote bonus is mandatory (pay group A/F1).
This is the uppermost pay group. There are thus seven pay groups in all. What
decides an ensemble’s classification is not the number of positions actually filled,
but rather the number of positions shown in the budget and staff appointment
scheme. This is why there are a few orchestras that, for example, employ slightly
fewer than 99 musicians and yet are classed in pay group A. In some cases, an en-
semble is classed in a higher pay group by means of a unilateral sovereign act on
the part of the funding entity.

For decades the grouping of opera orchestras according to size rather than ar-
tistic attainments has been subject to criticism. The putative counterexample are
the five West German chamber orchestras, which, although no larger than 14 to 24
musicians, nevertheless always remunerate their musicians under pay group A.

Topping the pyramid of salaries for Germany’s Kulturorchester is the Berlin
Philharmonic, closely followed by the Munich Philharmonic and the big radio
symphony orchestras in Munich, Cologne, Stuttgart and Hamburg. At the second
tier – yet still, for the most part, ranking above pay group A/F1 – are such orchestras
as the Berlin Staatskapelle, the Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin, the Bavari-
ian State Orchestra (Munich), the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Dresden
Staatskapelle, the Dresden Philharmonic, the Bamberg Symphony and the Ham-
burg Philharmonic, as well as other radio symphony orchestras and radio orches-
These top orchestras are opera as well as concert orchestras with more than 115 posts. The other municipal and state opera and concert orchestras are spread out across the aforementioned TVK pay groups, although certainly the occasional orchestra can be found which pays its musicians at levels below pay group D.

THE STATE OF GERMANY’S OPERA AND RADIO CHORUSES AND RADIO ENSEMBLES

As with orchestra personnel, the number of opera chorus positions in German music theatres has also fallen, declining by more than 11 percent since 1993 and currently at approximately 2,900. There is also a serious lack of young talent in this area. Each year there is a need for approximately 160 new singers in German music theatres (including soloists). Some 300 trained singers graduate from Germany’s tertiary-level music schools (Musikhochschulen) and conservatories annually; of these, only about ten percent, or 30, find lasting jobs as professional singers (solo, concert, opera or radio choruses). Yet some 80 to 100 positions continue to go unfilled in opera choruses each year.

In radio choruses, the number of positions has also continually dropped since 1990. Meanwhile, due to a lack of sufficient new hiring, in some instances this has led to structural ageing among the chorus membership. By the same token there has been growth in the ranks of professional singers hired by radio broad-
casters on a project basis for larger assignments as chorus reinforcements. Radio choruses have, in the meantime, also grown indispensable as concert choirs for choral-orchestral performances by the major municipal orchestras and for CD recordings.

Ever since 2003, when several German state premiers published structural reflections on reforming Germany’s public-law broadcasting system and increasing its radio and TV licence fees, radio orchestras have also been trimmed down in various locations. The spectrum of approaches ranges from non-hiring to reductions in size to dissolution and mergers. One feature common to all of these reflections is that the affected broadcasting corporations justified them on the basis of a lower-than-expected increase in radio and TV licence fees, an increase recommended by the Commission on the Financial Needs of Public Broadcasting Corporations (Kommission zur Ermittlung des Finanzbedarfs der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten, or KEF). Particularly hard hit were the Munich Radio Orchestra, with a reduction from 71 to 54 positions, and the Vocal Ensemble of Southwest German Radio in Stuttgart. With future annual fees of more than € 7 billion, fixed
costs for the payroll of the orchestras’ artistic staff amount to some € 155 million each year, or approximately two percent. In 2004, the ARD itself had set the costs for all radio ensembles at € 0.36 of the monthly radio and TV licence fee.

NEW ORCHESTRAL ACTIVITIES –
INFLUENCING THE WORLD OF MUSIC

It is a well-known fact that concert and theatre orchestras have a wide variety of ways of influencing the world of music besides giving concerts and performing operas. In fact, all orchestras have a broad spectrum of chamber-music formations which either exist or meet on an ad hoc basis to enrich the local and regional concert scene, voluntarily and quite apart from their official duties. The realms of music schools and amateur, student, and federal and state youth orchestras, not to mention church congregations, profit in many ways from the involvement of orchestra members. Professional musicians are frequently active on a volunteer basis, not just as instrument teachers, but as soloists or expert mentors to these non-professional orchestras.

There is also a welcome upward trend in the area of orchestra activities for children, young adults and families. Since 2000, with its ‘Concerts for Children Initiative’ (Initiative Konzerte für Kinder), the organisation Jeunesses Musicales Deutschland (JMD) has developed extensive activities to convey special new techniques for devising concerts for these target groups in a professional manner. Since then, more and more orchestras have taken up the cause of working with children, young people and school groups; this is shown by the figures now regularly collected (see above comments on events in music education and Figure 5.4). The Education Project organised by the Berlin Philharmonic has attracted an unwaiveringly high level of interest. Since autumn 2002, the project has been carried out with financial support from the Deutsche Bank, and both in substantive and media terms it functions somewhat as a role model. Since 2004, numerous other new activities by orchestras in schools have been developed and documented as part of the Network of Orchestras and Schools (‘Netzwerk Orchester & Schulen’). Here schoolteachers, orchestra musicians and their associations work closely together at all levels, offering opportunities for regular exchanges of experiences and for participation in continuing education events.
The Young Ears Network (‘netzwerk junge ohren’), with headquarters in Berlin, was newly established in 2007. This is a network in which various music associations in Germany, Austria and Switzerland have joined forces to work across national boundaries in order to co-ordinate and expand activities by orchestras, music theatres and concert halls, as well as music publishers and recording companies, with the aim of exposing young people in German-speaking areas to music (www.jungeohren.de). Every year the network awards the Young Ears Prize (‘junge ohren preis’) for outstanding musical appreciation projects.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The threat to the institution of the orchestra over the last few years, documented in the figures offered here, is the product not so much of a genuine ‘identity crisis’ but rather of the increasingly narrow basis for financing offered by the public authorities.

In the past, public funding was subject to heavy strain, all the more so at the state and local levels. Yet these budgets cannot be relieved through efforts to ‘freeze’ funding levels or make additional cuts in cultural support. After all, ac-
counting as it does for only approximately one percent of the overall budget, cultural funding is marginal at best. Nor can additional changes in legal forms, or an ‘escape’ from wage agreements, do anything to alter the structurally ineradicable fact that human resources costs make up roughly 85 to 90 percent of budgets in theatres and orchestras. This stands in contrast to the general public budget, in which this item only accounts for some 33 to 40 percent. If an across-the-board cut is instituted here, the strain upon orchestras and theatres is up to three times the level placed on the budget in general. This phenomenon affects future deve-

lopments just as much as the question of how to offset increasing costs – an issue frequently considered a necessary evil in the public sector generally, yet which theatres and orchestras are often expected to remedy on their own initiative. Over the medium to long term, this administrative ‘cost trap’ can lead to the closure of other cultural institutions and orchestras. Even if public subsidies are simply ‘frozen’ at current levels, this inevitably leads to reductions in staff. These institutions have few opportunities to counteract this on their own: cushioning just one percent of linear annual growth in labour costs calls for a sustained annual growth in box-office returns of around five percent. In light of resumed growth in inland revenue at the federal, state and local levels since 2006 as a result of the general
economic upturn, one wonders whether the financial circumstances of theatres and orchestras will also improve as a consequence. But given the budgetary effects of the measures taken in 2010 to counteract the latest worldwide financial crisis, it would seem that every area in the public financing of culture will come under even more strain than has hitherto been the case. From the standpoint of artistic quality, choice of repertoire, orchestra size and the tasks at hand, there are absolute limits to the staff cutbacks of recent years. Countermeasures and a change of approach are required if long-term damage to Germany’s cultural legacy is to be avoided.

Germany’s orchestras have high and at times unused potential for development, but hardly any ability to save additional money. What they need is greater latitude in their business administration, a much greater professionalisation of their management, and greater reliability for planning by means of medium-term allocation agreements that reward, rather than punish, the reasonable use of funds and higher box-office returns. Neoliberalists may espouse the theory that theatres and orchestras must make their own way in the ‘marketplace’ in the same manner as everything else. Some advocate economic Darwinism: only what ‘sells’
will survive. This flies in the face, however, of the historical fact that in every era throughout Western civilisation the highest artistic standards have been achieved by means of outside funding, whether from the church, the crown, the aristocracy or the public purse.

1 As the Deutsche Oper am Rhein has sites in Dusseldorf and Duisburg, and thus two orchestras at its disposal, the total number of theatre orchestras (84) is one higher than the number of music theatres.


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