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ORCHESTRAS, RADIO ENSEMBLES AND OPERA CHORUSES

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Despite financial challenges and structural changes, Germany’s publicly financed orchestras have continuously expanded their programmes, most recently achieving 9,000 concerts in a single year. Here Gerald Mertens discusses past developments, describes the ensembles’ present situation and outlines new activities.
ORCHESTRAS, RADIO ENSEMBLES AND OPERA CHORUSES

The German theatre and orchestra landscape remains unparalleled worldwide in its density and diversity. In December 2014 it was placed on UNESCO’s national list of intangible cultural heritage; Germany has applied to UNESCO for its inclusion on the international list. Roughly a quarter of the world’s professional orchestras are based in Germany.

A THUMBNAIL HISTORY

The oldest German orchestra is that of today’s Hessian State Theatre in Kassel. It was founded by Landgrave William II in 1502 when he hired a certain Henschel Deythinger as a trumpeter in Kassel’s musical retinue. Deythinger and another eight wind players joined forces with the Kassel court chapel to form one of the earliest independent instrumental ensembles under a single director, thereby laying the cornerstone for the emergence of the ‘orchestra’ as a cultural institution. The initial roots of German and European orchestra culture date back even further, to the 14th century. Storied traditional orchestras, such as the Dresden Staatskapelle, the Weimar Staatskapelle or the Mecklenburg Staatskapelle in Schwerin, were founded in the 16th century; still others were assembled at various German courts in the 17th and 18th centuries. These court and church ensembles were in turn followed in the 19th and 20th centuries by the emergence of a bourgeois orchestra culture. Beginning in the 1920s, and again after World War II, they were joined by radio ensembles and other municipal and state orchestras in both East and West Germany.

OVERVIEW

Germany’s publicly financed orchestra landscape currently consists of 129 professional ensembles. It is basically a four-tier system. The first tier is made up of the 81 theatre orchestras that play primarily 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-Buchholz and Hildesheim. Among them are ensembles that function as ‘concert orchestras with theatrical duties’, though the latter tend to predominate. The second tier consists of 29 concert orchestras (including one civic wind band) that perform largely 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, the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, to name only some of the largest of their rank. The third tier is made up of eight publicly funded chamber orchestras that generally work all year round as string ensembles without their own woodwind or brass sections. Examples include the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra in Heilbronn and the Munich Chamber Orchestra.
Orchestra. Finally, the fourth tier consists of the radio orchestras belonging to the ‘Association of Public Broadcasting Corporations in the Federal Republic of Germany’ (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunksanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or ARD), and Radio Orchestras and Choruses Ltd (Rundfunkorchester und Chöre GmbH, or ROC), in Berlin. These 11 radio orchestras or radio symphony orchestras, four big bands and seven radio choruses remain a mainstay of high-quality performance, ambitious programming and the advancement of contemporary music in Germany. Recently, in September 2016, the number of radio symphony orchestras further declined with the merger of the Southwest German Radio Orchestras in Freiburg/Baden-Baden and Stuttgart to create the Stuttgart-based Southwest German Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Professional theatre, concert, chamber and radio orchestras in Germany run a twelve-month season. They employ musicians on a full-time basis and with permanent contracts. Most of the orchestras work under collective bargaining agreements. Since the 1930s working conditions and social benefits for orchestral musicians were developed parallel to those of other employees in the public sector. The defining criteria for these 129 orchestras are that they are all, for the most part, publicly financed (from tax revenues or broadcast licensing fees), work the whole year round with a permanent membership and generally avoid playing light music or marches.

Mention should also be made of other professional orchestras and chamber ensembles that work either with a regular group of freelance musicians (usually as a private partnership or limited-liability company) or, if they have greater public funding, with permanently employed members. Among them are the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, the Bavarian Chamber Orchestra in Bad Brückenau and (project) orchestras that thrive on little or no public funding, such as the Deutsche Philharmonie Merck, the Würth Philharmonic (founded in 2017) and the Jewish Chamber Orchestra Munich. Further information on this subject can be found in Richard Lorber and Tobias Schick’s essay on ‘Independent Ensembles’.

Professional orchestras can also be found in the realms of law enforcement, the federal police and the armed forces. However, most of them are wind orchestras or big bands. A few ad hoc orchestral formations play in commercial musical theatres for the duration of a production, mainly in Hamburg, Berlin and Stuttgart. Finally, the number of ‘spa orchestras’ (Kurorchester), an important stepping stone for music students and young professionals until well into the 1970s, has shrunk to a
negligible quantity. Owing to a shortage of funds, many health resorts now retain small orchestras, usually from Eastern Europe, but only for a single season.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS, PAY BRACKETS AND ORCHESTRA SIZE

The working conditions and salaries of musicians employed in Germany’s publicly financed orchestras are governed by a collective agreement known as the ‘Tarifvertrag für Musiker in Konzert- und Theaterorchestern’ (TVK). It applies across the board for most theatre orchestras and some concert orchestras. This blanket salary agreement for orchestras is the only one of its kind in the world. The TVK dates back to 1971 and was most recently re-ratified in 2019. As a rule, radio ensembles are subject instead to the special salary provisions of the various public-law broadcasting corporations. Theatre orchestras are assigned to pay groups A to D, depending on their membership and their number of positions. Those with no more than 55 positions are assigned to the lowest salary bracket, pay group D. Pay group C applies to orchestras with 56 to 65 positions, group B for 66 or more, and group B/F from 78, where F stands for ‘footnote’, since the bonus paid is indicated in a footnote to the table of salaries. Orchestras with 99 positions or more are placed in pay group A; those between 99 and 129 positions are again eligible for a variable ‘footnote bonus’ (pay group A/F2). For orchestras of 130 positions or more, payment of a footnote bonus is mandatory (pay group A/F1). This is the top salary bracket in the collective agreement. There are thus seven pay groups in all.
What determines an ensemble’s classification is not the number of positions actually filled, but the number shown in the budget and staff appointment scheme. For decades the grouping of theatre orchestras according to size rather than artistic accomplishments has been subject to criticism. The putative counterexamples are the six chamber orchestras in western Germany, which, although no larger than 14 to 24 musicians, nevertheless remunerate their musicians under pay group A.

Topping the salary pyramid for Germany’s orchestras is the Berlin Philharmonic, followed by the Bavarian State Orchestra, the Berlin Staatskapelle and the great radio symphony orchestras in Munich, Cologne, Stuttgart and Hamburg. At the second tier, yet usually ranking above pay group A/F1, are such ensembles as the Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin, the Munich Philharmonic, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Dresden Staatskapelle, the Dresden Philharmonic, the Bamberg Symphony, the Hamburg Philharmonic and the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne, as well as further radio symphony orchestras and radio orchestras. The other municipal and state theatre and concert orchestras are spread across the aforementioned TVK pay groups, although occasionally some can be found that remunerate their musicians at levels beneath pay group D.

The pay groups of TVK orchestras can be roughly compared as follows: members of a B-level orchestra receive approximately as much salary as a primary school teacher outside the civil service; those in an A-level orchestra earn roughly the salary of a grammar school teacher; and those in an A/F1-level orchestra achieve approximately the salary of a professor at a tertiary-level school of music. In recent years, however, these relations have shifted to the orchestras’ detriment. The musicians are, as a rule, employed on unlimited but terminable contracts, not as civil servants.

The number of female orchestra members has risen steadily since the 1960s and is continuing to do so. Women already occupy more than half of the orchestra positions in the age group from 25 to 45. However, women conductors remain an absolute rarity, especially as principal conductors. This situation will change slowly at best.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES: DISSOLUTIONS, MERGERS, NEW LEGAL FORMS

Declining number and size of orchestras owing to dissolutions and mergers

The structure of Germany’s orchestra landscape has changed dramatically since the 1990s. While the number of theatres and orchestras initially skyrocketed in 1990 in the wake of German reunification, a wave of cutbacks and consolidation soon followed. As a result – primarily in the newly formed eastern German states – several 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 federal government. In the case of orchestras, this fate was met not only by small ensembles in a handful of rural areas or spoken theatres in the eastern section of Berlin, but also by larger orchestras in erstwhile district 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. The map of orchestra sites (see Fig. 1) shows what the orchestra landscape looked like in 1990 after German reunification, and how it has changed since then, primarily owing to mergers and dissolutions.

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 works only on a project-by-project basis. The first all-German stocktaking in 1992 identified 168 publicly financed concert, theatre, chamber and radio orchestras; since then, 39 have been disbanded or merged. Most recently the Eisenach Orchestra and the Thuringian Philharmonic in Gotha merged at the opening of the 2017-18 season. One year earlier, in summer 2016, the two orchestras of Southwest German Radio merged with a long-term socially acceptable plan to reduce the number of musicians from roughly 200 to 119. This merger in particular was highly controversial from an artistic and culture-political standpoint, for the Southwest German Radio...
Symphony Orchestra in Baden-Baden and Freiburg had consistently devoted itself for decades to contemporary music.

Between 1992 and 2018 the number of registered positions for musicians has dropped from 12,159 to 9,746, a loss of 2,413 positions, or roughly 20 per cent. Of these cutbacks, 1,899 of the positions eliminated were from the newly formed German states and former East Berlin, and 514 in the states of former West Germany and former West Berlin (see Fig. 2). Since then a few newly created positions in isolated orchestras in the western states have even led to a slight upturn in the number of positions in former West Germany. This does not, however, imply a general trend toward consolidation.

**Changes in legal status**

The upheavals of the 1990s were accompanied by a wave of privatisations, again focusing on the new eastern states. The main reason for this is that many state structures of former East Germany, such as political districts, vanished without replacement, and several newly formed counties felt overstrained to assume sole financial responsibility for theatres and orchestras. In some cases this led to the creation of publicly financed joint administrative bodies, such as the Thuringian State Theatre of Eisenach-Rudolstadt-Saalfeld (since dissolved) or the Northern Harz City League Theatre in Halberstadt (Saxony-Anhalt), or to registered associations. In contrast, since 1990 there have also been 13 newly founded owner-operated enterprises in which the orchestra’s operations remain legally within the direct reach of the public sector but enjoy greater economic independence and leeway. The prime example of this legal form is the Leipzig Gewandhaus and its orchestra. Registered associations under private law were not always long-lived and frequently led to the founding of limited-liability companies. One problem seems to be that the legal form of the registered association does not provide appropriate tools for the running of orchestras, with their often multi-million-euro budgets and their mixed memberships of natural persons and legal entities (usually municipalities). In particular, the voluntary board members often face considerable legal, financial and liability questions that sometimes find them out of their
Fig. 1 | Publicly funded orchestras (structural developments since 1990)

Foundations

Since the early 2000s a different legal form has been chosen with ever-greater frequency as a supporting institution (or a preliminary step in that direction) for the running of theatres and orchestras: a foundation. An example can be found in Meiningen, where the theatre and orchestra foundation (under private law) also encompasses the former ducal museums. Other examples are the Württemberg Philharmonic in Reutlingen and, since 2002, the Berlin Philharmonic, the latter as a foundation under public law. Since 2004 Berlin’s three opera houses (Deutsche Oper, State Opera Unter den Linden and Komische Oper) have been maintained as the ‘Opera in Berlin’ Foundation (Stiftung Oper in Berlin) with start-up assistance from the federal government. Other foundations were newly established for the Brandenburg State Theatre in Cottbus (2004), the Nuremberg State Theatre (2004), the Bamberg Symphony (2005), the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra (2012) and the Augsburg Theatre and Philharmonic (2018).
The advantage of the increasingly popular legal form of the foundation under public law is that it generally cannot become insolvent, and must therefore be financed reliably and publicly on a long-term basis. This raises the trust of the employees and enhances the facility’s reputation in the public eye – and in the eyes of (private) donors. However, since the foundations do not have substantial capital of their own (unlike the multi-million foundations of operas and orchestras in America), these institutions, being wholly subsidised, remain dependent on financing from the public sector. As a rule, they benefit from funding agreements of up to five years’ duration, which, at present, gives them much greater planning security than is usually the case with other legal and operational forms.

Occasionally private friends and sponsors of an orchestra no longer assume the organisational form of an association, but augment or replace it with a foundation. This is the case, for example, with the Main-Franconian Theatre in Würzburg, the Northwest German Philharmonic in Herford, the South Westphalian Philharmonic in Hilchenbach, the Lower Saxon State Theatre in Hanover, the Heidelberg Theatre and Orchestra and the Eduard von Winterstein Theatre in Annaberg-Buchholz.

**FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL LEEWAY**

Germany’s professional orchestras are funded largely from public subsidies (especially from states and municipalities) or from broadcast licensing fees. The federal government has recently strengthened its commitment, whether by extending financial support to the Berlin Philharmonic and the ‘Opera in Berlin’ Foundation (from January 2018) or by launching the nationwide programme ‘Excellence in Germany’s Orchestra Landscape’ (Exzellente Orchesterlandschaft Deutschland), from which 31 orchestras based in all corners of the country have received subsidies since summer 2017. Box office proceeds and other earned income differ markedly between genres (music theatre, concert etc.) and between regions. On average, they cover approximately 18 per cent of the budget, often less, but sometimes more. Earnings cannot simply be increased at the drop of a hat: limited seating and space,
smaller catchment areas, usually affordable ticket prices and the population’s historically conditioned expectation of state cultural subsidisation leave little room for sustainable short-term boosts of income or sharp increases in admission fees.

Further, compared to other countries such as the United States, legal strictures on competition prevent sponsoring organisations of theatres and orchestras from undertaking more extensive direct marketing activities. Germany’s orchestras have fewer administrative staff, which hampers the extra advertising and marketing efforts they so urgently need to reach new strata of the public. As a rule of thumb, a German concert orchestra without a concert hall of its own has a maximum of 10 per cent of its artistic employees working in management and administration. In other words, for every 100 musicians there are roughly ten administrative employees, and sometimes not even that. In contrast, North American orchestras in particular generally have more administrative personnel, both full-time and part-time, than artistic staff. Lacking suitable direct public funding, they put far greater effort into fundraising and marketing. However, as private donors enjoy generous tax privileges, the financing of culture in the United States is also basically public, albeit indirectly. Just how sensitive non-public cultural financing in the United States can be was demonstrated by the impact of the global financial crisis in 2008-09, when the assets and earnings of North America’s orchestras and opera houses plunged, sometimes dramatically. The consequences for these institutions were severe, with cutbacks in staff, programming, projects and salaries, up to and including insolvencies (although the American term ‘bankruptcy’ does not automatically imply shutting down operations, but usually a special form of debt relief and restructuring with continued operations).

Until now, voluntary civil engagement in the broad-based organisation of professional orchestras has been as rare as it is largely unknown. Only a few institutions take advantage of the existing option of a ‘voluntary social year’ in culture.

Donors’ associations and friends’ schemes exist and are also important, for they expand the basis for regional appreciation and awareness of culture. But like sponsorship, they do not play a truly significant role in the financing of orchestras. At present, Germany’s tax laws do not offer sufficient incentives to expand income from sponsorships, donations and patronage, which in any case have only served to support isolated projects or events. Although the state of the federal budget has considerably improved, the pronouncements from the federal government give little reason to expect further relief in the near future.

EVENTS AND ATTENDANCE, BOX OFFICE PROCEEDS AND OVERALL BUDGETS

In spite of the structural transformation described above, the current statistics from the German Theatre and Orchestra Association (Deutscher Bühnenverein) show constant growth in the number of concerts, from around 6,900 in the 2000-01 season to 9,200 in 2016-17 (see Fig. 3). However, these figures only partly include events and attendance for radio orchestras and radio symphony orchestras. The number of concertgoers increased proportionately, exceeding the four-million mark for the first time in the 2006-07 season. This is a positive development, and it remains to be seen how the growing number of music festivals and open-air events, especially in summer, will also affect the general number of concertgoers and capacity utilisation at future events. Largely positive balance sheets, high capacity utilisation and glowing annual reports from many music theatres, concert halls and orchestras in recent years now point to a general positive trend.
The German Orchestra Union (Deutsche Orchestervereinigung, or DOV) listed about 13,800 events in the 2015-16 season for all orchestras and radio ensembles, including radio choirs (but not big bands). Of these, 42 per cent were symphony concerts, including tours abroad. The remaining figures were spread among chamber concerts (about 10 per cent), educational events, including concerts for children and young adults, concerts of school pupils and workshops held in schools (37 per cent), and some 11 per cent miscellaneous events. These statistics (see Fig. 4) underline the particular importance now attained by the orchestras’ many outreach activities, i.e. workshops, concerts for children and young adults, and concerts for schoolchildren. Unfortunately it was not possible to compile precise figures for the numbers of concertgoers involved since this information is not always recorded for school or open-air events or for guest performances.

The crowds who continue to throng to the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Ruhr Music Forum in Bochum, the reopened Kulturpalast in Dresden and other new or renovated venues are symptomatic of a cultural volte-face. The problems lie in precisely capturing, breaking down and incorporating attendance figures from concert halls (e.g. those in Dortmund, Essen and Hamburg) and from the maestro’s own premises are listed.

Note: The theatre statistics are based on a written survey of publicly financed theatres and orchestras regarding their business operations (venues, range of events, attendance figures, staff, financing). The figures in the time line are not always comparable, for some venues could not be used owing to construction work and/or the collected data is incomplete owing to lack of responses, especially in the earlier years. Moreover, the radio ensembles were included only as of the 2005-06 season, and then only sporadically at first. Furthermore, the attendance figures also include all events of concert orchestras as of the 2008-09 season, which partly explains the number of concertgoers involved since this information is not always recorded for school or open-air events or for guest performances.

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The overall figures show that publicly financed theatres and orchestras are more than just receivers of subsidies. Indeed, they are influential players in local economies. They constitute powerful forces of supply and demand at the regional level, creating bonds with highly skilled employees through their methods of production. This in turn leads to backflow in tax revenue and allows local business branches to profit directly or indirectly from the theatres’ and orchestras’ activities.

Fig. 4 | Events of publicly financed orchestras

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of event</th>
<th>2005-06</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
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<tr>
<td>Symphony and choral concerts</td>
<td>5,918</td>
<td>6,075</td>
<td>5,902</td>
<td>6,158</td>
<td>5,827</td>
<td>5,791</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music education events</td>
<td>3,747</td>
<td>3,723</td>
<td>4,069</td>
<td>3,752</td>
<td>4,182</td>
<td>5,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts for children and young people</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>1,102</td>
<td>1,139</td>
<td>1,382</td>
<td>1,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts for schoolchildren</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>867</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops in schools</td>
<td>2,249</td>
<td>2,086</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>1,666</td>
<td>2,064</td>
<td>2,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber recitals</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>2,195</td>
<td>2,227</td>
<td>2,212</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>1,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other concerts</td>
<td>2,997</td>
<td>3,691</td>
<td>1,649</td>
<td>2,450</td>
<td>2,259</td>
<td>1,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12,798</td>
<td>12,684</td>
<td>12,847</td>
<td>13,572</td>
<td>13,554</td>
<td>15,801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figures include all concerts given by publicly financed concert, theatre and chamber orchestras as well as radio ensembles (radio symphony orchestras, radio orchestras, radio choirs and radio big bands) in Germany, as well as concerts given by these ensembles abroad (2005-06: 526; 2007-08: 614; 2009-10: 522; 2011-12: 646; 2013-14: 470; 2015-16: 463).

Source: Compiled by the German Music Information Centre from information supplied by the German Orchestra Union (DOV).

Rheingau), which feature German and foreign orchestras and many other ensembles but fail to keep reliable attendance records. In the final analysis, long-term compilation and research in attendance must be established and expanded at the venues concerned.

According to figures from the German Theatre and Orchestra Association, attendance and capacity utilisation at music theatre events and concerts by theatre orchestras (excluding concert orchestras) have not changed significantly between the 2000-01 and 2016-17 seasons. They have remained relatively high, with average capacity utilisation between 70 and 80 per cent. More and more music theatres and orchestras are attempting to attract and retain new audiences by improving their subscription methods and programme offerings. Their success is increasingly evident: the Düsseldorf Tonhalle, for example, more than doubled its number of subscribers to over 4,900 within the space of four years, beginning in 2014. Similarly, many opera houses and concert halls have recently reported record attendance, raising the question of whether, and to what extent, the ‘audience extinction’ predicted for decades is likely to happen (see also Karl-Heinz Reuband’s essay on ‘Preferences and Publics’).
THE STATE OF GERMANY’S OPERA AND RADIO CHORUSES AND RADIO ENSEMBLES

The number of opera chorus positions in Germany’s music theatres has likewise fallen, declining by more than 11 per cent since 1993 to somewhat less than 2,900. The reason for this downturn, as with orchestra personnel, lies mainly in structural developments in the new eastern states, several of whose music theatre ensembles were particularly affected. Today, for example, the only fully-fledged music theatre in the state of Brandenburg is the State Theatre in Cottbus. The ensembles in Potsdam, Frankfurt an der Oder and Brandenburg an der Havel were disbanded altogether. Yet there is a serious lack of young talent in this area. Each year approximately 160 new singers (including soloists) are needed in Germany’s music theatres. However, of the roughly 400 trained singers who graduate from Germany’s tertiary-level schools of music and conservatories every year, only about 10 per cent build lasting careers as professional singers, whether as soloists, concert artists or members of opera or radio choruses.

In radio choruses, too, the number of positions has dropped continuously since 1990. Due to inadequate new recruitment, this has sometimes 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 broadcasters on a project-by-project basis as choral reinforcements for larger assignments. Radio choruses have, in the meantime, also become indispensable as concert choirs for media recordings and choral-orchestral performances by major municipal orchestras. At present Germany has seven radio choruses, namely those in Hamburg, Cologne, Stuttgart, Munich, Leipzig and two in Berlin.

Since 1 January 2012, Germany’s radio and TV licensing fees have no longer applied to pieces of equipment but to households in general, and in early 2014 the federal states ratified a 48-cent reduction of the monthly fee to €17.98. As a result, the cost structures of public broadcasting have been increasingly called into question. Before then, the Commission on the Financial Needs of Public Broadcasting Companies (Kommission zur Ermittlung des Finanzbedarfs der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten, or KEF) had even recommended that the states introduce a larger reduction of 73 cents. The reason for their recommendation was the states’ political promise to make the licensing system ‘cost-neutral’ on 1 January 2012. The proper amount of the licensing fee is still being debated between the federal states, the KEF and the broadcasting corporations, and will doubtless continue in the years to come.

However, the broadcasting corporations are not allowed to directly access the additional revenue actually resulting from this change. In fact, judging from their own accounts, their subsidisation has hardly changed at all. As the costs of their staff and pension schemes have risen owing to labour agreements and inflation, the pressure on the general financial situation of the broadcasting corporations continues to mount. Their predicament may become extremely difficult, or even life-threatening, for some radio ensembles if states were to lower the income from radio advertising without compensating for these losses from the structural fee surplus. An initial step in this direction was taken in autumn 2015 by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia when it changed the WDR law accordingly. In contrast, TV advertising revenue could be offset only by having all the states alter the Interstate Broadcasting Agreement (Rundfunkstaatsvertrag). In all of this, it should not be forgotten that, taken together, the musical ensembles of the ARD broadcasting network (orchestras, choruses, big bands) cost roughly €170 million each year, which merely amounts to some 41 cents of the monthly licensing fee for private households.
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 to influence the world of music besides giving concerts and performing operas. In fact, all orchestras have a broad array of chamber-music formations which either exist permanently or convene on an ad hoc basis to enrich the concert scene, voluntarily and often quite apart from their official duties. The realms of music schools and amateur, student, and national or 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. To choose one example, the Berlin Philharmonic has entered a partnership with the National Youth Orchestra that involves musical work at many levels. Some 50 further partnerships exist between professional and youth orchestras throughout Germany.

There is also a welcome upward trend in orchestra activities for children, young adults and families. In 2000, the organisation Jeunesses Musicales Deutschland (JMD), with its ‘Concerts for Children Initiative’ (Initiative Konzerte für Kinder), developed extensive activities to convey special new insights in the professional design of concerts for these target groups. Since then, more and more orchestras have taken up the cause of working with children, young people and school groups, as is shown by the figures now regularly collected (see Fig. 4). The education projects of the Berlin Philharmonic have attracted an unwaveringly high level of attention. Since autumn 2002 they have been carried out with financial support from Deutsche Bank, and both in substantive and media terms they initially functioned somewhat as a flagship. Since 2004, numerous other new activities by orchestras in schools have been developed and documented, e.g. as part of the ‘Network of Orchestras and Schools’ (Netzwerk Orchester & Schulen) and in the ‘Children to Olympus!’ Competition (Kinder zum Olymp!), sponsored by the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States (Kulturstiftung der Länder). Here school musicians, orchestra musicians and their associations work closely together at all levels, offering opportunities for regular exchanges of experiences and for participation in continuing education programmes.

For many orchestras outreach projects have become common practice, whether introductory talks, concerts for children and adolescents or school classes attending a rehearsal.

Attending a rehearsal and sampling instruments with the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra. Opposite page: a Kulturradio children’s concert with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.
The Young Ears Network (‘Netzwerk Junge Ohren’), with headquarters in Berlin, was newly established in spring 2007. Here various music associations in Germany, Austria and Switzerland work jointly across national borders to co-ordinate and expand the outreach activities of orchestras, music theatres and concert halls, as well as music publishers and recording companies, mainly in the German-speaking countries. Every year the network awards its internationally acclaimed Young Ears Prize (‘Junge Ohren Preis’) for outstanding musical outreach projects in the German-speaking countries.

Another important contribution from orchestras to the social discourse was their extraordinary commitment when faced with the waves of refugees that arrived in Germany from autumn 2014 on. More people than ever before were now seeking refuge from war and persecution. In an impressive number of projects and events, orchestras throughout Germany launched music-education projects for refugees in every age group, mounted welcome and benefit concerts and helped in other ways to tackle questions of migration and integration.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The challenges imposed on the institution of the orchestra over the last few years, as documented in the above figures, lie not so much in a genuine ‘identity crisis’ but rather in the altered nature of Germany’s radio and TV licensing fees and, in some states, in the still overly narrow funding of orchestras and theatres in regional and local budgets. Most states and municipalities have by now come to realise that freezing or slashing funds for culture can have grave consequences while offering no budgetary relief. After all, accounting as it does for approximately 1 per cent on average of the overall budget, cultural funding is marginal at best. One structurally ineradicable problem is that human resources make up roughly 85 per cent of budgets in theatres and orchestras, whereas they account for only some 30 to 45 per cent of the general public budget. If an across-the-board cut is instituted here, the strain upon orchestras and theatres is up to three times greater than on the budget in general. This phenomenon affects future developments just as much as the question of how to offset increasing costs – an issue frequently considered a necessary evil in the public sector, yet which theatres and orchestras are often expected to remedy on their own. Over the medium to long term, this economic ‘cost trap’ can lead to the imperilment of further cultural institutions, including orchestras. Even ‘freezing’ public subsidies at current levels inevitably entails staff...
reductions. These institutions have few opportunities to counteract this on their own: cushioning just 1 per cent of linear annual growth in labour costs calls for a sustained annual growth of around 5 per cent in box-office returns. Owing to the growth in tax revenues at the federal, state and local levels since 2015, the financial circumstances of many theatres and orchestras have again improved. But as the ‘Solidarity Pact II’ for the eastern German states comes to an end in 2019, and as the so-called ‘debt brake’ goes into effect in all federal states by 2020 at the latest, it is obvious that every area of the public financing of culture will have to be placed on a more solid footing than has hitherto been the case. In the near future the crux will fall on the structural improvement of municipal financial resources.

Germany’s publicly financed music theatres and orchestras will continue to face a vicious battle for public resource allocations in the future. In recent decades, the arguments that cultural and financial officials have brought forth for the alleged need for further cutbacks have proved untenable. The staff reductions of recent decades were subject to absolute limits imposed by artists, scores, casting and mission. Since then a contrary trend and a change in thinking have taken hold.

But equally imperative, if the German orchestra landscape is to continue to thrive and develop, are the political will toward this end, the skill of active participants in cultural policy and administration, and the improved qualification of management personnel in cultural operations. All are called upon to prove their social relevance more forcefully than hitherto, over and over again.

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Germany’s orchestras have a high and at times unused evolutionary potential. What they need is more latitude in their business affairs, more professionalism in their management, and greater reliability of planning through medium-term funding agreements that reward rather than punish sensible resource allocation and higher box office proceeds. True, neoliberals of the 1990s may have propounded the theory that theatres and orchestras must make their own way in the ‘market-place’ like everything else. Many espoused economic Darwinism: only what sells will survive. But this flies in the face of the historical fact that in every era throughout Western Civilisation the highest artistic standards have, to the present day, been achieved through ‘outside funding’, whether from the church, the aristocracy or the public purse.

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1 A detailed listing of changes in business form since German reunification in 1990 is provided by the German Music Information Centre using information supplied by the German Orchestra Union. See http://www.miz.org/intern/uploads/statistik95.pdf (accessed on 28 May 2019).

2 German Theatre and Orchestra Association, ed., Theaterstatistik 2016/17 (Cologne, 2018).
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