

Oliver Rathkolb

From the Organization Cell Group (*Betriebszelle*) State Opera to the Managing Committee (*Vereinsführung*)

To this day, there has been no successful assessment of the exact percentage of "Nazification" of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Clemens Hellsberg has in 1992 addressed the fact that at the end of the war 42% were NSDAP-members, and he also pointed out that this rate rises to 47% if affiliated organisations are included.¹ He has further calculated the "group differences" of the formal Nazification at the time of 1938 – and found differences between string players with 30% NSDAP members, woodwind players with 45%, as well as brass players and percussion with 43%. I myself, on the basis of Austrian and US-American documents, arrived in 1991 at a rate of 40% former NSDAP-members in the orchestra – about 20% of these were "illegal" members², i.e. those who during the prohibition of the NSDAP between "July 1, 1933 and March 13, 1938, after attaining the age of 18, have at one point belonged to the NSDAP or one of its paramilitary forces (*Wehrverbände*, SA, SS, NSKK, NSFK)" – so the wording in §10 of the Prohibitive Law (*Verbotsgesetz*) of May 8, 1945.

The core group of NSDAP sympathisers in the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra had in 1931/32 already organized themselves in the framework of the NSBO – the NS Organization Cell Group State Opera. The NSBO did not do the classic work of a labour union, but rather as a political organisation caused agitation for the NSDAP in the labour force of an enterprise. Its driving forces in this case were Leopold Kainz (horn), Karl Swoboda (oboe) and Wilhelm Jerger (contrabass), among others. Wilhelm Jerger subsequently served as the organization cell chairman (*Betriebszellenobmann*) and Leopold Kainz was his deputy – also during the time of the prohibition of the NSDAP (which included the NSBO). Kainz had become a member of the Philharmonic only on September 1, 1932, Swoboda a year earlier. Jerger, however, had been a member of the State Opera Orchestra since October 1, 1922, and member of the Vienna Philharmonic since 1924.

These men very skilfully motivated other colleagues to make monetary contributions and marketed prohibited National Socialist propagandistic publications such as the "*Oesterreichischer Beobachter*." With the great economical problems of the time as a backdrop, and while really only being a pseudo labour union, the success of the "cell work" (*Zellenarbeit*) is attested by the high number of "illegals." After the suppression of independent labour unions by the authoritarian Dollfuss regime, the influence of the National

¹ Clemens Hellsberg, *Demokratie der Könige*, Zürich 1992, 464.

² Oliver Rathkolb, *Führertreu und Gottbegnadet. Künstlereliten im Dritten Reich*, Wien 1991.

Socialist Organization Cell Group increased notably, even though they had been outlawed since July 1, 1933.³

The group outwardly acted very "loyal to the government" (*regierungstreu*), which is indicated, for example, by Kainz' participation in the chamber music evenings attended by Federal Chancellor (*Bundeschancellor*), Kurt Schuschnigg, the successor to Chancellor Dollfuss, who had been murdered by the National Socialists.⁴ This illegal NS cell group had perfectly prepared the takeover of power after the Anschluss and had on March 12, 1938, brought Jerger into the position of provisional leader of the orchestra. Jerger was formally commissioned on March 12, 1938, by the State Secretary of National Culture Leader (*Landeskultur-Leiter Staatssekretär*), Hermann Stuppäck, with the provisional leadership of the Association of the Vienna Philharmonic, Vienna, I., Canovagasse 4.⁵ On the basis also of newer sources – such as the registration records of former NSDAP members in the Vienna City and State Archives (*Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv*), the records of the former Berlin Document Center in the Federal Archives Berlin (*Bundesarchiv Berlin*, NSDAP membership records, SS records) as well as "Regional Files" (*Gauakte*) in the Austrian Federal Archives (*Österreichisches Staatsarchiv*) – I have once again verified all available names.

On the basis of a list of Vienna Philharmonic members released on the occasion of the 100-year anniversary celebrations in 1942, I could ascertain an initial number of 123 active members and 27 retirees.

Up to this point, 60 NSDAP memberships (including their respective identification numbers and accession dates) could be documented – that is to say, in 1942 about 49 percent of active Vienna Philharmonic musicians were members of the NSDAP. Up to the end of the war, only one more musician who was not a member of the NSDAP was admitted. In Mai 1945 the Austrian authorities at first classified 24 memberships as "illegal," whereby not only membership in the NSDAP, but also active membership in the NSBO was an issue. On average, the "illegals" are born after 1900 – Kainz and Jerger, for example, born in 1902, and Swoboda are of one generation – which is atypical considering the usual age pattern of the NSDAP, but collectively there is a broad distribution of age. The average age for the base year 1938 however – around 37 years – corresponds well with the approximate age of the core group of the basic cell, Jerger and Kainz. Both lacked being shaped by the First World War, and thus "frontline experience" (*Fronterlebnis*) is not a general element in the explanation of motives for joining the NSDAP.

³ This is indicated by the numerous questionnaires for admission to the NSDAP in the Vienna City and State Archives (*Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv*) that have survived in the Archives of the Republic (*Archiv der Republik*) in Vienna or the Federal Archive Berlin (*Bundesarchiv Berlin*).

⁴ Hugo Burghauser, *Philharmonische Begegnungen*, Zürich 1979, 120.

⁵ Archive of the Republic, Vienna, Stillhaltekommissar, 37-C2/8(1), questionnaire of March 31, 1938.



In the following, I will give a brief profile of the two dominating activists of the NSBO cell group and try to analyze their character with regard to their socialisation and their role from 1938 to 1945, while also illustrating differences in their actual conduct towards persecuted orchestral members and the NS regime.

Wilhelm Jerger's actual name was Jerabek⁶, and he was born in Vienna in 1902. It could not be determined when the name change – obviously to delete the Czech traces – was effected. His father, a hairdresser, had come from Komotau/Chomutov in Bohemia to Vienna, but had kept his name. Jerger studied music theory and conducting at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (*Akademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst*). It was here, where he studied with the renowned musicologist Guido Adler, who, as a Jew, after 1938 was persecuted and whose daughter Melanie was murdered in Maly Trostinec in 1942. Adler himself died in Vienna in 1941.



Wilhelm Jerger, ca.1942

According to his son, Veit, Jerger was evidently deeply influenced by his Catholic upbringing in the Schottengymnasium in Vienna.⁷ In his enrolment volume at the University of Vienna, he lists "German" as his "ethnicity" and not "German-Aryan", as did the radical German nationalists. Politically, he fits well into the so-called "Catholic-National interlayer" (*Katholisch-nationale Zwischenschicht*) of the NSDAP – from which came also Arthur Seyss-Inquart, for example.⁸

He was engaged as contrabassist in the State Opera Orchestra in 1922, and two years later he became a member of the Association of the Vienna Philharmonic. Jerger was also active as a

⁶ First discovered by Maren Seliger, *Scheinparlamentarismus im Führerstaat "Gemeindevertretung" im Austrofaschismus und Nationalsozialismus. Funktionen und politische Profile Wiener Räte und Ratsherren 1934 - 1945 im Vergleich, (= Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 6) Münster 2012, 576.*

⁷ Journal, Veit Jerger (written before 2006), p.9. I thank Ms. Saskia Kuhlmann for providing me with extracts of the journal.

⁸ Brigitte Behal, *Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten deutsch-nationaler katholischer Eliten im Zeitraum 1930-1965: ihr Weg und Wandel in diesen Jahren am Beispiel Dr. Anton Böhms, Dr. Theodor Veiters und ihrer katholischen und politischen Netzwerke*, dissertation, Vienna 2009.

composer, and after 1938 he repeatedly took a stand for Jewish colleagues and orchestral members with Jewish wives, as illustrated in the contributions of Bernadette Mayrhofer. After he had already intervened for Robitsek, Tyroler, Starkmann, Glattauer and Stwertka on October 23, 1941, he continued to make efforts to avert the deportation of Viktor Robitsek until the day before, October 27, 1941.⁹ He emphatically called the attention of Walter Thomas, chief advisor (*Generalreferent*) to Reich- and Gauleiter Schirach, to the poor state of health of Robitsek and his wife, Elsa. She died on May 20, 1942 and her husband on June 10, 1942 in the ghetto Litzmannstadt, as a result of the inhumane living conditions. In both cases his intervention failed because of Baldur von Schirach, despite having been successful in 1938 in the case of Geringer, who was released from the concentration camp Dachau after Jerger's repeated interventions at the request of Mrs. Geringer.

Surrounding Baldur von Schirach to this day is the nimbus of the "different type" of National Socialist top official with good middle-class roots, an interest in culture, whose father was the artistic director of the National Theatre Weimar from 1909 to 1918 and his mother a US American. In actual fact though, in a closed meeting of councilmen (*Ratsherr*) on June 6, 1942, in which Jerger's participation as councilman is highly likely, Baldur von Schirach "prided himself" "that by late autumn or autumn of this year, all Jews will be removed from the city and the removal of the Czechs will be commenced, since this is the necessary and proper response to the criminal act committed upon the deputy Reich Protectorate (*Stellvertretender Reichsprotector*) in Bohemia and Moravia."¹⁰ Just weeks after that, the four remaining Philharmonic musicians of Jewish descent were deported and murdered, or died as a result of the extreme conditions of imprisonment.

The horn player Leopold Kainz had arrived at the Vienna State Opera Orchestra at about the same time as Jerger (1921) and joined the NSDAP in the first district already in February 1931. Subsequently, during the time of the ban on the party, he acted as Deputy Cell Group Chairman (*Zellenobmannstellvertreter*) of the Organization Cell Group State Opera.¹¹ As his special merits for the NSDAP before 1938, Kainz lists "... house searches, interrogations of the State Police and for some time was under surveillance by the State Police." It is noteworthy, by the way, that Police High Commissioner (*Polizeioberkommissar*) Dr. Roman Loos¹², who was a sponsor of the Vienna Philharmonic, prevented his arrest by the timely disposal of incriminating evidence. In addition, it was confirmed to Kainz in May 1938 that he had established the Organization Cell Group State Opera already in 1931.

⁹ AdWPh, folder Wilhelm Jerger, letter to Walter Thomas, October 27, 1941.

¹⁰ Vienna City and State Archives, Bürgermeisterakten 349/46.

¹¹ Archive of the Republic, Vienna, regional file (*Gauakt*) Josef Kainz, personnel questionnaire, filled in in handwriting, May 24, 1938.

¹² <http://www.towson.edu/nurembergpapers/Volume%20X/366Volume%20X%20Document142.htm>, Interrogation Summary, Nürnberg, February 10, 1947. Loos joined the NSDAP in 1933 and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel (*Oberstleutnant*) of the Military Police (*Feldpolizei*) at the Balkans in 1943.

In his memoirs, Burghauser describes – without mentioning any names – one of the "... most uncontrolled defiers of the old regime, the same horn player, who in most recently bygone times used to play along in the chamber music evenings that were arranged by Austrian aristocrats in their apartments, and that were regularly attended by Dr. Kurt Schuschnigg. The fresh-baked spokesman for greater Germany later prided himself with the appropriate authorities by reporting and denouncing the notable personages in attendance."¹³

Another former member of the orchestra who was forced to emigrate to the USA also vividly describes the political atmosphere of the days following the Anschluss: He could "well remember these men, as they ran around Vienna with swastika armbands and treated the remaining members of the orchestra with the arrogance and brashness typical of Nazis."¹⁴

Towards the end of the war however, his enthusiasm vanished, and in February 1945 the NSDAP party offices negatively noted his refusal to participate in the local group (*Ortsgruppe*). In further consequence, Kainz as chairman of the State Opera Orchestra vigorously pursued the financial betterment of the orchestral members – also towards the Reich offices in the Ministry of Information (*Propagandaministerium*).

The new leadership of the Vienna Philharmonic, under general manager (*Geschäftsführer*) Otto Strasser (candidate for NSDAP membership since July 1, 1938, member since April 1, 1940) and provisional leader (*kommissarischer Leiter*) Wilhelm Jerger (NSDAP-member since 1932 and member of the SS), had already since June 2, 1938 tried to achieve an improvement in the payments to the State Opera in terms of Reich legal provisions. The intended raise to the status of "Reich-Orchestra" (*Reichsorchester*) was for the time being denied by the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*), because the tariff regulation of cultural orchestras "for the country of Austria" should only subsequently come into effect.

It is impossible at this point to determine with certainty how far membership in the NSDAP could have facilitated an admission to the orchestra, especially in the days after "March 1938." There is one documented case, that of viola player Adolf Löffler. In 1935 he was punished with a three month detention for the collection of NSDAP membership dues.¹⁵ Löffler was at that time engaged in the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. A total of 13 out of 26 musicians who were hired after the Anschluss joined the NSDAP or were already members. There was political intervention only in the case of Löffler.

¹³ Hugo Burghauser, *Philharmonische Begegnungen. Erinnerungen eines Wiener Philharmonikers*, Zürich/Freiburg, 1979, 120.

¹⁴ Wiener Kurier, September 13, 1946, 4.

¹⁵ Archives of the Republic, regional file (*Gauakt*) Adolf Löffler, March 19, 1903.

In many aspects a special case is that of trumpet player Helmut Wobisch, who was admitted in 1939. He had already joined the NSDAP in 1933, participated in the unsuccessful July Putsch in 1934, and was a member of the SS since November 1934,¹⁶ where he attained the rank of Sergeant (*Unterscharführer*) in 1944. Since 1940, he also acted as member of the Reich Security Head Office's (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, SD), but also as teacher at the College of Music (*Musikhochschule*) in Vienna, as well as leader of the education of wind players in the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*). As a member of the SD, he also authored political informant reports concerning other musicians, which have partly survived.¹⁷

Especially unusual is the case of the trumpet player Franz Dengler. He joined the NSDAP a month before the Anschluss, but for 16 years had been in a long-term relationship with a Jewish woman. In October 1945 she confirmed that he had supported her in 1942/43 when she went underground and hid from deportation. He had been in the NSDAP to protect her.¹⁸

Another case is Franz Bartolomey (II.), who was the only party member of the Vienna Philharmonic who was expelled from the NSDAP in 1942 for hiring a painter who was married to a Jewish woman.¹⁹ At the end of the war, he stayed after a short holiday with his family in western Austria and was immediately expelled as a "renegade Nazi," even though in contrast to his 55 remaining colleagues he no longer belonged to the NSDAP. Obviously there was here a strong group within the Vienna Philharmonic that de facto accused him of treason for not returning to Vienna at the end of the war.

These examples indicate how manifold the concrete modes of behaviour could be and that only today an individual assessment of specific actions during National Socialism is actually possible. Exactly such an assessment, however, did not take place after 1945, because – with four exceptions – the orchestra was collectively denazified as quickly as possible, against allied resistance, without considering concrete, individual behaviour.

© Oliver Rathkolb

<http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/>

All rights reserved. Permission granted for personal use only. Subsequent use and reproduction for any other purposes is forbidden.

¹⁶ Federal Archives Berlin, SS-Personalakte Helmut Wobisch, handwritten résumé.

¹⁷ Oliver Rathkolb, *Führertreu und Gotbegnadet. Künstlereliten im Dritten reich*, Wien 1991, 19.

¹⁸ Vienna City and State Archive, NS-Registrierungsakten, Franz Dengler.

¹⁹ Cf. Franz Bartolomey, *Was zählt, ist der Augenblick. Die Bartolomeys. 120 Jahre an der Wiener Staatsoper*, Wien 2012.