



## Fritz Trümpi Surge in Politicization during World War I

*The First World War represented a turning point in the politicization process of the Vienna Philharmonic. The term "politicization" will be used for the reason that the systematic inscription of the orchestra within a political context should not be understood as a passive "political instrumentalization", but rather the result of a virulent interchange between political authorities and the orchestra, which led to the active acceptance of a politically oriented operational thinking on the part of the Vienna Philharmonic.*

*During the First World War, the orchestra saw itself confronted for the first time with diverse, politically motivated attempts at exploitation, some of which it tried to resist, others which it supported and promoted. At first, the orchestra attempted to avoid any concrete political appropriation. This was not motivated by political or ideological opposition however, as without a doubt the majority of the orchestra members belonged to the political spectrum of pro-war German nationalism. The attitude of opposition toward individual measures of governmental and military authorities was due to economic restrictions and personnel cuts affecting the organization of concerts. In general, the First World War contributed to an expansion of the orchestra's concert activities.*



Concert Program from October 3, 1914

Not even two months after the German-Austrian war mobilization had passed, the War Relief Office of the Imperial Ministry of War presented a concert "for the benefit of soldiers on the battlefield and the widows and orphans of the fallen", for which the Vienna Philharmonic assented to "perform without compensation."<sup>1</sup> This was followed by approximately 30 such concerts motivated by the politics of war in the course of the next four years.<sup>2</sup> This fact alone places the concert practice of the Vienna Philharmonic in an explicitly political context.

<sup>1</sup> Prot. AHV, 11. 9. 1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018.

<sup>2</sup> See the concert listings in Hellsberg, *Demokratie*, Pg. 388 f.



The orchestra reacted to the call of governmental and military authorities to perform 'charity' events with skepticism and in some cases emphatic refusal. In April 1915, one orchestra member suggested that "in the event of further invitations for charity events the committee should deny such requests."<sup>3</sup> In January 1916, the committee followed this advice and answered requests for political and war-related events as far as possible in the negative. Affected by this decision were, among others, the celebration of homage on the occasion of the birthday of the German emperor and Philharmonic participation in a performance of Haydn's "Creation" for the benefit of the Bulgarian Red Cross. In both cases, the orchestra decided not to participate, apparently without suffering any consequences. The orchestra cited the administration of the opera house, which refused to give permission because of the daily opera performances.<sup>4</sup>

The negative attitude regarding such new types of concerts was apparently due primarily to the considerable increase in time and effort on the part of active orchestra members - and this on top of the fact that the orchestra was already operating with fewer personnel, since a significant number of musicians had been drafted into military service. In September 1914, soon after the beginning of the war, "26 members of the association were activated at the same time"<sup>5</sup>, - almost a quarter of the entire membership. At first the committee appeared to be unperturbed. There were "no qualms about being able to find enough musicians through the use of substitutes."<sup>6</sup> One year later disillusionment had begun to set in. It was noted in a meeting of the administrative committee that "37 [members of the orchestra, F.T.] have entered military service and positions are at the current time unfilled."<sup>7</sup> The financial pressure upon the orchestra increased, due to the benefit concerts performed without compensation and also the signing of war bonds and charitable contributions. The question was soon raised if the orchestra could continue to pay compensation to the members in the military for concerts in which they had not participated. At the business meeting of September 4, 1915, a decision was made against the musicians in the military. Last year's practice "regarding the colleagues in the military is at the current time no longer possible. The share of earnings can only be allotted to those who are in a position to play the concerts." This stipulation was moderated by the annotation that a final decision cannot be made at the present time, and the shares for those not performing will be suspended."<sup>8</sup> Economic considerations clashed with a sense of responsibility towards colleagues, and until the end of the war, disagreement about how earnings should be dispersed persisted within the orchestra.

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<sup>3</sup> Prot. AHV, 24. 4. 1915. HAWPh, A-Pr-019, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Prot. KS, 13. 1. 1916. HAWPh, A-Pr-019, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Prot. KS 5.9.1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018, 42

<sup>6</sup> Prot. KS 5.9.1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018, 42

<sup>7</sup> Prot. KS 30.8.1915. HAWPh, A-Pr-019, 15

<sup>8</sup> Prot. AHV, 4.9.1915. HAWPh, A-Pr-019, 17.

Yet despite the orchestra's antagonistic attitude towards the forced participation in such charity and war concerts, which was primarily a reaction to the profound changes within the music business and, as such, a turning point in Philharmonic concert practice, the interlacing of culture and politics served as a catalyst for the Vienna Philharmonic by causing an abrupt increase in concert activity. Even in the first season of the war, between October 1914 and May 1915, the Vienna Philharmonic participated in 11 war-related concerts and thus performed in this capacity more often than in their own subscription concerts. Despite the increased number of concerts due to the war-related concerts, the orchestra decided to expand its concert activity even more during the course of the war. The committee introduced the practice of holding a public dress rehearsal of the subscription concerts effective December 1, 1917,<sup>9</sup> which effectively doubled the number of these concerts. With this decision, the orchestra departed somewhat from the previous concept of the exclusivity of the Philharmonic concerts. The double performances of the subscription concerts enhanced the status of the traditional concert activities vis-à-vis the benefit concerts, which had dominated the concert calendar for the three previous years.

Returning to the resistance of the orchestra toward the war-related charity concerts, it should be noted that this should in no way be interpreted as opposition to German-Austrian war policies. With few exceptions, the enthusiasm for the war was specifically among Austrian (and German) artists and intellectuals very pronounced.<sup>10</sup> The majority of the Vienna Philharmonic also belonged to the political spectrum of pro-war German nationalism.

An incident which took place shortly before the outbreak of the war is exemplary of this position. In an orchestra meeting on June 12, 1914, an orchestra member of Czech heritage, Karl Jeraj, expressed his displeasure over the mention in the orchestral report of the participation of some members in a German nationalistic event.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, a solid majority of 81 members requested the removal of Jeraj from the orchestra.<sup>12</sup> An adept mediation on the part of the chairman enabled this expulsion to be rescinded,<sup>13</sup> but the incident demonstrates clearly the German nationalistic climate within the orchestra. This was evident not only in an anti-Czech, but especially in an anti-French attitude:

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<sup>9</sup> Prot. KS, 3. 11. 1917. HAWPh, A-Pr-019, 64.

<sup>10</sup> For a representative discussion of the question of the behavior of intellectuals and artists during World War I, which has been thoroughly researched in the meanwhile, see the anthology (although pertaining only to Germany) of Mommsen, Wolfgang J. (Editor) *Kultur und Krieg. Die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler und Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg*. München 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Prot. HV, 12. 6. 1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018, 39. A detailed account of this incident can be found in Hellsberg, *Demokratie*, Pg. 386 f.

<sup>12</sup> Prot. KS, 15. 6. 1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018, 40.

<sup>13</sup> Prot. AHV, 11. 9. 1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018, 43.

"Heinrich [committee member, F.T.] alluded to the spiteful behavior of the French composer Camille Saint-Saens, who in Germany has aroused wide-spread resentment and demonstrations. Under these circumstances, the Golden Oak Leaf Crown, which was awarded to the Vienna Philharmonic by the Commission of Performances at the Paris Exhibition in 1900 under the chairmanship of President C. Saint-Saens, has lost its value as an award, and assuming the approval of the orchestra, should be donated to the Austrian Red Cross to be melted down. The proposal was approved with applause."<sup>14</sup>

The fact that concert activity was also strongly infused with nationalistic overtones is best demonstrated by a propaganda tour which the orchestra made to Switzerland in 1917. Immediately noticeable is the close connection of the tour with the interests of Austrian and German foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> The establishment of amicable relationships with neutral countries played an increasingly important role in this stage of the war, and cultural propaganda was directed toward these countries accordingly. It is hardly coincidental that both the Vienna and the Berlin Philharmonic made major tours to neutral states at nearly the same time. Whereas the Vienna Philharmonic traveled to Switzerland in May 1917, the Berlin Philharmonic embarked on a "Nothern Country Tour" to the neutral Scandinavian countries in May 1917.<sup>16</sup>

Martina Nussbaumer has demonstrated convincingly that this Vienna Philharmonic tour to Switzerland had as its basis a broadly conceived Austro-Hungarian publicity campaign which attempted to cast music and Austria's intermediary role therein as a way of peacemaking and bringing peoples together.<sup>17</sup> Also recognizable in the nearly simultaneous tours of the two orchestras is a type of coordinated communication initiative of the Central Powers toward neutral foreign countries.<sup>18</sup>

In the Vienna Philharmonic tour to Switzerland, the foreign policy postulation of 'nations coming together' is enmeshed with the 'symbolic politics' which the orchestra carried out in its concert programming.<sup>19</sup> For the concert in Lausanne in French-speaking Switzerland, the Vienna Philharmonic performed only compositions of Beethoven, whereas in other cities also

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<sup>14</sup> Prot. KS, 24. 10. 1914. HAWPh, A-Pr-018, 47.

<sup>15</sup> On the purpose of these tours see also Nußbaumer, Musik, Pg. 299–317.

<sup>16</sup> Cities visited: Copenhagen 9./11. 5., Malmö 14./15. 5., Stockholm 16. 5., Gothenburg 18. 5. 1917. The conductor was Arthur Nikisch.

<sup>17</sup> Nußbaumer, Musik, Pg. 310.

<sup>18</sup> This unity of "comrades in arms" was emphasized by the guest appearances of the Berlin Philharmonic and the Imperial Ottoman Palace Orchestra in the first half of 1918 in Vienna as well as the concert tour of the Vienna Philharmonic to Berlin in June 1918. See also Nußbaumer, Musik, Pg. 309.

<sup>19</sup> Nußbaumer, Musik, Pg. 310.

Berlioz and Tchaikovsky were played. According to Felix Weingartner, who conducted the orchestra on this tour, the impression was to be avoided that tribute was being made to nearby France.<sup>20</sup> The fact that this tactic aroused numerous protests from audiences in western Switzerland demonstrates clearly that the concerts were perceived in foreign countries as intended - as governmental propagand events in the context of the war.

Thus by the end of the war, the Vienna Philharmonic was more politically involved than ever before. This was due primarily to its participation in charity concerts and tours which stood in close connection with state-run war propaganda intended for both domestic and foreign consumption. Furthermore however, although reluctantly at first, the orchestra increasingly shaped its general concert programming in a political context and in so doing began to incorporate such factors into its own self-image.

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<sup>20</sup> Weingartner, Felix. Die Wiener Philharmoniker in der Schweiz. In: Neue Freie Presse 20. Juli 1917, Morgenblatt, S. 4. Quoted in: Nußbaumer, Musik, Pg. 310.