

Fritz Trümpi
An Association Based on National Socialist Principles



Vienna Philharmonic, 1942

After a brief period of uncertainty whether the Verein der Wiener Philharmoniker, the Association of the Vienna Philharmonic, would be dissolved and the orchestra administered henceforth by the Verwaltung der Staatstheater [Administration of the State Theatres], the so-called Stillhaltekommissar—a term variously rendered in English as Commissioner for Suspensions, Liquidation Commissar or Repression Officer—, acting in accordance with Propaganda Minister Goebbels, decided against dissolution. Having been spared disbandment, the Association was charged with implementing far-reaching changes in its statutes: important personnel decisions now required the consent of the Reich Propaganda Ministry and later that of the Reichsstatthalter in Vienna. The statutes had to include the "Aryan" and "Führer" principles. In its negotiations with the "Dienststelle Stillhaltekommissar für Vereine, Organisationen und Verbände", the Office of the Repression Officer for Associations, Organisations and Clubs, the governing body of the orchestra showed itself extremely cooperative. In 1940 they even agreed to co-opt a functionary of the Vienna Reichspropagandaamt into the governing body of the orchestra. This meant that on the institutional level the orchestra's connections to the state and to the party were reinforced several times over. Despite their status as an association, the Vienna Philharmonic assumed in the Nazi era distinctive characteristics of a Reich organisation close to the regime.

From 1908 onward, the Vienna Philharmonic had been a registered association.¹ Associations had to meet stringent political criteria after the 'Anschluss'.² In March 1938, the Vienna Philharmonic fell within the remit of the "Repression Officer for Associations, Organisations and Clubs,"³ whose task it was to "suppress" all kinds of associations through to the referendum on 10 April 1938 and

¹ Statutes of the association "Wiener Philharmoniker" [1908]. Vereinsakt, WSL, M. Abt. 119, A 32: Gelöschte Vereine [Liquidated associations], 4602/21, 9. For the story of the association's foundation cf. Hellsberg, *Demokratie*, p. 368 ff., and Trümpi, *Orchester*, p. 48-49.

² Cf. Rothkappl, Gertrude. *Die Zerschlagung österreichischer Vereine, Organisationen, Verbände, Stiftungen und Fonds*. PhD thesis, University of Vienna 1996 and Pawlowsky, Verena / Leisch-Prost, Edith / Klösch, Christian (ed.). *Vereine im Nationalsozialismus. Vermögensentzug durch den Stillhaltekommissar für Vereine, Organisationen und Verbände und Aspekte der Restitution in Österreich nach 1945*. Vienna / Munich 2004.

³ For more details see Trümpi, *Orchester*, pp. 133-138.



to make sure they were incapable of taking any kind of initiative in the intervening time.⁴ At the same time the Stillhaltekommissar was entitled to implement measures resulting in the 'gleichschaltung' of associations and organizations in Austria.⁵ The vast majority of Austria's associations and organizations fell victim to "total liquidation:" of the country's 115,000 associations and clubs only some 5,000 escaped that fate.⁶ The standard reasons given for the associations' liquidation were either their political and/or religious orientation or their allegedly "utterly superfluous character."⁷

It appears, however, that the processing of high-profile cultural institutions caused a certain irritation. In a letter dated 17 March 1938 from the "Office of the Landeskulturleiter der N.S.D.A.P./Hitlerbewegung/Österreich" to Gauleiter Bürckel, the Vienna Philharmonic is already referred to as a "National Socialist cultural association." The letter raises the question whether Bürckel's repression directive ["Stillhalte"-Weisung] applied to "events of a cultural character."⁸ The Landeskulturleiter requests permission for several concerts to take place and in particular for a "Philharmonic concert on 21 March under Knappertsbusch in the Großer Musikvereinsaal." Designed presumably to pre-empt possible reservations on the part of Gauleiter Bürckel against these concerts, a remark at the end of the letter presents the Vienna Philharmonic in the guise of indirect National Socialist election campaign aides: "We guarantee that the realization of the planned events will not result in the National Socialist cultural associations referred to in our submission losing any of the firepower that you, Herr Gauleiter, may yet demand from them in the course of the election campaign."⁹

The dealings of the Stillhaltekommissar with the Association of the Vienna Philharmonic are nevertheless full of contradictions. A first decision, of which the Philharmonic was notified on 16 September 1938, provided for the "liquidation" and "integration" of the Association into the "Staatstheater und Bühnenakademie" [State Theatre and Stage Academy].¹⁰ Even if the Association had in fact been dissolved, the decision would have been administrative rather than political in nature. However, only three months later, on 12 December, the preliminary decision was "repealed by a telephone call" after the Ministry for Propaganda and the Stillhaltekommissar had agreed not to interfere with the existence of the Association. This was confirmed in writing on 19 December¹¹ without it being made clear at that stage what organizational form the Vienna Philharmonic were

⁴ Rothkappl, Zerschlagung, p. 28.

⁵ Rothkappl, Zerschlagung, p. 1.

⁶ Rothkappl, Zerschlagung, p. 52.

⁷ Rothkappl, Zerschlagung, p. 52.

⁸ ÖStA, AdR, 04, "Bürckel"/Materie, 2420 Kt. 160, Nr. 56. (The Stillhaltekommissar reported directly to Bürckel and was obviously less concerned with deciding vital matters than with executing decisions that were made elsewhere.)

⁹ ÖStA, AdR, 04, "Bürckel"/Materie, 2420, Kt. 160, Nr. 56. All four concerts were approved. ÖStA, AdR, 04,

"Bürckel"/Materie, 2420, Kt. 160, Nr. 55.

¹⁰ ÖStA, AdR, Reichsstatthalterei III, Box 7683, Zl. 202.816/38.

¹¹ Cf. Hellsberg, Demokratie, p. 468.

to assume henceforth. The Stillhaltekommissariat initially submitted two proposals to the minister of propaganda:

"1. The Association retains its independence and is placed under the supervision of the Reich Ministry for Propaganda. This means that the Association is dependent in practical terms on the Ministry's directives in personnel questions and in all other matters.

2. The Association is liquidated and a limited liability company is simultaneously formed as in Berlin, whose shares are the sole property of the Reich as represented by the Ministry. In this case, the Vienna Philharmonic would be stripped to being no more than an orchestra and the musicians would have to be regarded as employees of the company. Management would be in the hands of representatives appointed by the Reich."¹²

Tellingly, the first scenario was chosen, which meant that the Reich or, to be more precise, the Ministry for Propaganda was spared having to pay for the Vienna Philharmonic. Goebbels opted for the opposite of what he had done with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1934: he had made them a Reich orchestra financed from the national budget; now he refrained from formally interfering with the Vienna Philharmonic's status as an association. It is conceivable that the decision was based on financial considerations. Goebbels had presumably realized in the meantime how cost intensive an orchestra of this kind was—he was repeatedly reprimanded by the Reich finance minister for the expenditure the Berlin Philharmonic continued to cause.¹³ Goebbels told the Stillhaltekommissar in Vienna on 13 June 1939 that he had no objections against the "continued independence under association law of the 'Vienna Philharmonic'", provided "the statutes are changed in accordance with National Socialist principles and the association is placed under my direct supervision."¹⁴ In the Stillhaltekommissar's final report dated 20 July 1939, the orchestra's definitive status is defined as follows:

"1. The organization retains its independence and is placed under the supervision of the Reichsminister für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda [the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda], Berlin.

2. The assets are released.

[...] The following changes in the statutes [have] to be made: Arierprinzip, Führerprinzip.

The head of the Association is nominated by the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Berlin, in accordance with the gauleiter of the NSDAP in Vienna; the general assembly is entitled only to a right of proposal. Resolutions passed by the members require the

¹² ÖStA, AdR, Reichsstatthaltereie III, Box 7681, Zl. 201.666/38.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the financial debates concerning the Berlin Philharmonic see Trümpfi, *Orchester*, p. 147-163.

¹⁴ ÖStA, AdR/Gruppe 04, "Bürckel"/Materie, 161/2425-5.

consent of the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda to enter into force. The statutes, which are about to be newly promulgated, require the consent of the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda and will ensure the rights of Aryan members."¹⁵

Despite the enforced changes the statutes differed in one key respect from those of the Berlin Philharmonic: even though the Vienna Philharmonic were placed under Goebbels's supervision they were not collectively integrated into his ministry. And shortly after Goebbels had officially appointed Wilhelm Jerger "for the duration of three years" as "head of the Association and chairman of the Vienna Philharmonic,"¹⁶ the relevant competencies were reshuffled in the statutes approved on 7 March 1940: the right to nominate the "head of the Association" now moved from the Ministry for Propaganda to the Reichsstatthalter in Vienna.¹⁷ The statutes also enshrined the Reichsstatthalter's right to "dismiss the head of the Association and/or his deputy without prior notice." "Alterations of the statutes and the dissolution of the Association after the passing of a pertinent resolution by the general assembly" were contingent on the Reichsstatthalter's consent; the agenda likewise required the approval of the Reichsstatthalter.¹⁸ § IX of the revised statutes contains the provision that the award of honorary memberships requires "the written approval of the competent N.S.D.A.P. representative" – an explicit reference to the function of the Gauleiter rather than to that of the Reichsstatthalter.¹⁹ Similarly, it was, functionally speaking, the representative of the party rather than the Reich representative who decided questions of the revocation of membership in the orchestra.²⁰ Membership in the orchestra was tied to 'racial' criteria in any case: "Only Aryans of German or of closely related blood are eligible for membership according to the legal provisions."²¹

The new statutes seem on the whole to have been to the liking of the Vienna Philharmonic – the mandated introduction of the "Aryan" and the "Führer" principles into the statutes does not seem to have irked the Philharmonic negotiators: on 28 October 1938 Committee member Otto Strasser appealed to Kajetan Mühlmann, who had been appointed Undersecretary [Staatssekretär] for the Arts in 1938, to "exempt" from control the Association Vienna Philharmonic and, by the same token, to convert the Vienna State Opera Orchestra into a Reich orchestra.²² What is especially

¹⁵ ÖStA, AdR/Gruppe 04, "Bürckel"/Materie, 161/2425-5.

¹⁶ Letter from Goebbels to Jerger, 22 December 1939. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, AVA/Unterricht/ Sign. 15: Kt. 161, 2425/5 (Wiener Philharmoniker).

¹⁷ Statutes of the Association Wiener Philharmoniker [1940], § V. Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, M. Abt. 119, A 32: Gelöschte Vereine [Liquidated associations], 4602/21.

¹⁸ Statutes of the Association Wiener Philharmoniker [1940]. § 6 e). Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, M. Abt. 119, A 32: Gelöschte Vereine [Liquidated associations], 4602/21.

¹⁹ Statutes of the Association Wiener Philharmoniker [1940], § IX. Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, M. Abt. 119, A 32: Gelöschte Vereine [Liquidated associations], 4602/21.

²⁰ Statutes of the Association Wiener Philharmoniker [1940], § XI. Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, M. Abt. 119, A 32: Gelöschte Vereine [Liquidated associations], 4602/21.

²¹ Statutes of the Association Wiener Philharmoniker [1940]. § III. Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, M. Abt. 119, A 32: Gelöschte Vereine [Liquidated associations], 4602/21.

²² ÖStA, AdR, BKA/RStiÖ III, Kt. 7681, Zl. 201.666/38.



remarkable is the offer of collaboration Strasser extends in his letter: "[...] and [we] beg you, Herr Staatssekretär, to implement reorganization in the sense we have indicated and to give us an opportunity in this way to contribute with all our strength to the construction of the pan-German Reich [Großdeutsches Reich] and notably of Vienna as a city of music."²³ In a Vienna Philharmonic position paper entitled "Proposals regarding the reorganization of the Vienna Philharmonic and the orchestra of the Wiener Staatsoper," Strasser, speaking on behalf of the orchestra, announced the intention to implement the "reorganization of the Association's governing body in accordance with the demands of the National Socialist state" and proposed that the orchestra's power of decision regarding its musical activities, the choice of conductors, its welfare institutions and the assets of the Association should be exempt from outside interference. He also proposed that the orchestra voluntarily forego subsidies: "As it may be assumed that the Philharmonic concerts, once the present audience crisis has blown over, will revert to being exceedingly profitable as always used to be the case, subsidies will not be needed."²⁴ During the remainder of its wartime existence the orchestra continued to decline, according to the minutes of its general assemblies, subsidies from Berlin even if the treatment of the matter showed a certain ambivalence. On one occasion Jerger argued for the "necessity to manage without subsidies from Berlin" and for the orchestra "to get back on its feet under its own power",²⁵ on another, the Philharmonic eschewed any large-scale subsidization by the Ministry for Propaganda and the office of the Reich governor on the occasion of the orchestra's centenary, with a view to avoiding "any form of the Propaganda Ministry's tutelage" and to ensuring "the independence of the Association"²⁶; at the same time, however, they made sure potential losses were underwritten by the Reich governor in Vienna.²⁷ During the preparatory stage of a tour of Sweden in 1943 a new situation arose whose remedy, as was clear to everyone concerned, could not be a return to the options presented to the orchestra in 1938 of "discretionary subsidies" or a guaranteed annual grant to subsidize tours.²⁸ What was at issue was Furtwängler's fee, which Goebbels's ministry refused to pay:²⁹ "The tour is to be regarded as a done deal. What is unclear at this stage is who is going to pay Dr. Furtwängler's fee (if it had been the Berlin Philharmonic's turn to go to Sweden, the Ministry for Propaganda would have paid; as it is, we're supposed to pay the fee out of our own pocket)."³⁰ Furtwängler is said elsewhere to have waived fees of 12,000 RM for subscription concerts when he was told that the Philharmonic was not eligible for subsidies.³¹ In its subsidization policy, the orchestra seems to have tacked and veered as the situation demanded.

²³ ÖStA, AdR, BKA/RStiÖ III, Kt. 7681, Zl. 201.666/38.

²⁴ ÖStA, AdR, BKA/RStiÖ III, Box 7681, Zl. 202.666/1938.

²⁵ Prot. KS of 21 October 1939. HAWPh, A-Pr-030: Protokolle 1938-44, 7.

²⁶ Prot. KS of 6 September 1941. HAWPh, A-Pr-030: Protokolle 1938-44, 26.

²⁷ Prot. KS of 26 March 1941 and Prot. KS of 6 September 1941. HAWPh, A-Pr-030: Protokolle 1938-44, 24 und 26.

²⁸ ÖStA, AdR, BKA/RStiÖ III, Box 7681, Zl. 202.666/1938.

²⁹ For the background cf. Trümpi, *Orchester*, p. 305-306.

³⁰ Prot. KS of 3 April 1943. HAWPh, A-Pr-030: Protokolle 1938-44, 41.

³¹ Prot. OHV of 14 January 1943. HAWPh, A-Pr-030: Protokolle 1938-44, 37.

In the context of the postulate of "independence", which – in view of the changes in the Statutes discussed above – was a gross misrepresentation anyway, attention is to be paid to the composition of the Committee, the governing body of the Association. While the Committee outwardly continued to be manned in the traditional way after the 'Anschluss,' a representative of the Reich Propaganda Office took part from May 1940 in the meetings of the Executive Council [Vorstandsrat] – as the Committee was now called for a time. Aurel Wolfram was installed immediately after the 'Anschluss' as an advisor in the Cultural Department of the Reich Propaganda Office, explicitly charged with the "special task" of "establishing a connection with Berlin."³² Wolfram had been cultivating contacts with the Vienna Philharmonic for some time in the past; these were now intensified considerably through his participation in the committee meetings (between May 1940 and his dismissal from the Propaganda Office³³ in October of the same year); shortly after his dismissal, Wolfram opted in December 1940 for joining the ranks of the "founders" of the Vienna Philharmonic, which involved an annual fee of 333 RM.³⁴

Wolfram's entry into the Executive Committee [Vorstandsrat] of the Vienna Philharmonic was not, on the evidence of the minutes, ordained from above; on the contrary, the National Socialist propaganda functionary was unanimously co-opted by that body: "Dr. Aurel Wolfram is Viennese [...] and a sincere and faithful friend of the Vienna Philharmonic, who has always been prepared to stand up for the Vienna Philharmonic. His co-optation into the Executive Committee would consolidate this valuable friendship and would create a favourable impression in the outside world for the Vienna Philharmonic by virtue of the position that Dr. Wolfram occupies as the first cultural advisor at the Reich Propaganda Office in Vienna. Strasser and Kainz are also in favour of co-opting Dr. Wolfram to the Executive Committee. His admittance was unanimously passed."³⁵

This act meant that the Vienna Philharmonic were strengthening yet again – and in an unprecedented manner – their ties to the state and to the NSDAP.³⁶ Their status as an association would have left them a certain latitude in their choice of emphasis. The changes in the Statutes and the composition of the Executive Committee based on party political criteria made the Vienna Philharmonic assume distinct characteristics of a Reich organisation close to the regime.

³² Shorthand minutes, meeting of the Advisory Board of the Kulturrederei der Stadt Wien, 17 June 1939. WSL, Ratsherren, B 4, Sitzungsniederschriften; Tagesordnungen, Verhandlungsschriften aus dem Bereich des Kulturredereits 1939–1945.

³³ Zu den Hintergründen der Entlassung vgl. Trümpi, Orchester, p. 169 ff.

³⁴ Buch "Vereinsmitglieder", G Nr. 162. HAWPh, Depot Staatsoper. Der Kontakt Wolframs zu den Wiener Philharmonikern dürfte über rein berufliche Beziehungen deutlich hinausgegangen sein. In einer politischen Beurteilung der "Gestapo" zuhanden der Gauleitung Vienna vom 21. 2. 1941 heißt es: "Besonders engen Kontakt hat W[olfram]. mit den Wiener Philharmonikern [sic]." ÖStA, Gauakt Wolfram, Nr. 312.291.

³⁵ Prot. KS, 6. 5. 1940. HAWPh, A-Pr-30.

³⁶ Zu Wolframs NSDAP-Biographie vgl. Trümpi, Orchester, p. 169-170.



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