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Increased References to Vienna in the Vienna Philharmonic's Media Presence under the National Socialist Regime

The Vienna Philharmonic has always had a multifaceted media presence. It remained at a steady high under the National Socialist regime. Media attention for the Vienna Philharmonic peaked around the "Centennial Celebrations" in 1942. For that occasion, Baldur von Schirach granted the orchestra a monopolist position in the Viennese music scene, which he achieved by simply banning all other orchestra and major soloist performances during the Philharmonic's anniversary celebrations¹: The orchestra was the subject of many articles in newspapers, magazines and books, and was widely referenced in speeches and commemorative publications, even in novels. In addition, the Vienna Philharmonic's anniversary also inspired a film project: in early 1943, Willi Seibert, the former "advertising director" of the Berlin Philharmonic, approached the Vienna Philharmonic with a science fiction-themed movie project about the orchestra. However, this project never came to fruition, while a feature film about the Berlin Philharmonic was produced at the same time and was shown at German movie theaters before the war even ended.²

The main attributes that authors from widely different backgrounds ascribed to the Vienna Philharmonic were usually inspired by "national" sentiments and notions of "blood and land." References to Vienna, the "city of music," were ubiquitous, but the orchestra was rarely characterized as being directly linked to the German Reich.

The main attributes that different media outlets used to describe the Vienna Philharmonic on the occasion of the orchestra's "Centennial Celebrations" in 1942³ often relied on an unequivocal language inspired by notions of "blood and land."⁴ This paper will present an exemplary analysis of said attributes. For instance, the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, during his speech on the occasion of the orchestra's anniversary, described the Philharmonic as "representatives of the entire German territory" and addressed its "uniform national composition," which made "the Vienna Philharmonic the model of a true People's Orchestra in every sense of the word."⁵

¹ This regulation was issued upon request of the orchestra. On April 3, 1941, Walter Thomas, who was Baldur von Schirach's "cultural advisor," addressed Franz Schütz, the president of "Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde," to confirm that "no other large music performances may take place as they could interfere with the centennial celebrations and adversely affect the Philharmonic." Archive of "Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde", documents of association 1940/41, exhibit no. 34. Quoted in: Trümpi, Orchester, p. 198.

² Cf. Trümpi, Orchester, p. 225-231 about the Vienna Philharmonic film project and the "Philharmonic" feature film.

³ Cf. Trümpi, Orchester, p. 192-200 for a detailed analysis of the centennial celebrations.

⁴ Cf. Schmitz-Berning, Cornelia. Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus. Berlin / New York 2000 [1998], p. 110 ff for the general relevance of the "blood and land" figure of speech under the National Socialist regime.

⁵ Furtwängler, Wilhelm. Die Wiener Philharmoniker. Rede anlässlich ihrer Hundertjahrfeier 1942. In: Furtwängler, Wilhelm. Ton und Wort. Aufsätze und Vorträge 1918 bis 1954. Wiesbaden 1982. P. 175-183. Quote on p. 179.

Aurel Wolfram, a National Socialist official and journalist who was one of the most devoted Philharmonic propagandists between 1938 and 1945, was also partial to this line of thinking. In his article for the Philharmonic's commemorative publication dedicated to the Philharmonic's anniversary, he used a "race-oriented" approach to describe the orchestra's special features, stating that he wanted to "analyze the prerequisites [...] that allowed this one-of-a-kind orchestra to exist and to flourish, all the more because the powers of blood and land have such decisive relevance, especially in our time."⁶ However, Aurel Wolfram subsequently abandoned his "race-oriented" line of thinking in favor of attributes associated with the ethereal and the sacred. In this sense, he highlighted that the Vienna Philharmonic were "not fighters, conquerors, pioneers on unchartered musical territory, but priests and hierophant[s], preservers of the best-kept secrets of great music-making." According to Wolfram, the Vienna Philharmonic reached this status by "preserving a unique sound, which is equivalent to the spiritual substratum of music," which they considered to be superior to "the mastery of technique."⁷

Considering that Furtwängler was one of the Philharmonic's main conductors, it is quite striking that his anniversary remarks clearly echo Aurel Wolfram's analysis regarding the orchestra's relationship to 'technique.' Wilhelm Furtwängler also interpreted the Philharmonic's sound as a "natural product" that could certainly not be created "by way of technical drills." According to him, neither "the instruments" nor "the instruction" or "the skills" set the Vienna Philharmonic apart from other orchestras.⁸ He postulated that it was not primarily its musical expertise that earned the Philharmonic its "extraordinary position," but rather the fact that it was a "purely Viennese orchestra," a "group of high-profile virtuosos," all of them "sons of one land, of one city."⁹ With this description, Wilhelm Furtwängler acknowledged the Vienna Philharmonic not as representatives of the *Reich* (this position was reserved for the Berlin Philharmonic), but as representatives of a part of Germany's territory: Vienna.

The Vienna Philharmonic used strikingly similar language to the one used by Aurel Wolfram and Wilhelm Furtwängler when describing itself to the public at large. This is evidenced by a brief orchestra monograph published by Wilhelm Jerger, the orchestra's executive director, on the occasion of the 1942 anniversary.¹⁰ He too views the Philharmonic as a unit and emphasizes the "intimate connection" that "grew from this gifted soil."¹¹ Wilhelm Jerger takes the Vienna references one step further than Aurel Wolfram and Wilhelm Furtwängler. He went so far as to define the connection to "German art" as inherently Viennese. "The Philharmonic will remain and

⁶ Wolfram, Aurel. Wien und die Philharmoniker. In: Wiener Philharmoniker (eds.). Wiener Philharmoniker 1842-1942. Wien-Leipzig 1942. P. 28.

⁷ Wolfram, Wien, p. 44 f. Cf. Trümpfi, Orchester, p. 201ff for a detailed analysis of these attributes and references to major differences in the media presentation of the Berlin Philharmonic.

⁸ Furtwängler, Philharmoniker, p. 178.

⁹ Furtwängler, Philharmoniker, p. 178.

¹⁰ Jerger, Wilhelm. Die Wiener Philharmoniker. Erbe und Sendung. Vienna 1942.

¹¹ Jerger, Philharmoniker, p. 9.

will have to remain the most extraordinary ambassador of this city's world standing. Its liveliness and determination makes it both keeper and preserver of the major heritage of the truest German art."¹² He postulates that the Philharmonic played an important part in Vienna's ascent to "world capital of music." Also, he believes that "the city of Vienna was always loyal and devoted to its Philharmonic – and it still is."¹³ Even in the first sentence of the commemorative publication, Wilhelm Jerger writes: "In its artistic relevance, the Vienna Philharmonic, along with other local musical institutions, embodies the essence of Vienna, the city of music."¹⁴

Even though the aforementioned orchestra descriptions come from a wide variety of sources, their most striking common denominator is the unmistakably strong connection between the orchestra and the city of Vienna. As a matter of fact, the topos of the Philharmonic and the "city of music" intensified after 1938. The reasons behind this intensification are multifaceted and will be addressed elsewhere.¹⁵

Strikingly enough, it was Baldur von Schirach, the Viennese *Gauleiter* and *Reich* governor, who, in his speech on the occasion of the orchestra's anniversary, clearly diverged from the traditional interpretation of the Vienna Philharmonic. Unlike the descriptions provided by Furtwängler, Wolfram and Jerger, Baldur von Schirach makes few or no references to Vienna or the "city of music." It seems that he used the occasion to express his general views on music and music policy by lecturing about the practice of music of the "German people," the relationship between "light" and "serious" music and the opportunities and risks of the technical reproduction of music. He only mentioned the orchestra itself towards the end of his speech and praised the Philharmonic with a few words. His references to Vienna were few and far between. However, Baldur von Schirach explicitly established a direct connection between the orchestra and the *Reich*, which is a highly unusual event in the Philharmonic's media presence between 1938 and 1945: "In the Great German *Reich* of music, there were no eternal names that were not related to its history [...] They served the *Reich* wherever they played."¹⁶ It is safe to assume that Baldur von Schirach deliberately used the occasion of the Philharmonic's anniversary to modify his usual politico-cultural approach, at least verbally. As a matter of fact, his previous speeches that addressed the Philharmonic included the usual patterns of interpretation that were inherently intertwined with the "city of music."¹⁷ However, beginning in 1941, Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, became increasingly critical of Baldur von Schirach's cultural policy, even though he was torn between

¹² Jerger, *Philharmoniker*, p. 12.

¹³ Jerger, *Philharmoniker*, p. 45.

¹⁴ Jerger, *Philharmoniker*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Cf. Trümpi, Fritz. „Programmpolitik im Nationalsozialismus“.

¹⁶ „Rede des Reichsleiters von Schirach am 28.3.1942 anlässlich der Hundertjahrfeier der Wiener Philharmoniker.“ Unpublished manuscript. ÖStA, 04 AdR Kt. 49 a, no. 258. p. 8.

¹⁷ Cf. Trümpi, *Orchester*, p. 221 f.

suspicion and envious acknowledgment.¹⁸ A mere two weeks before Baldur von Schirach's above-mentioned Philharmonic speech, on March 15, 1942, Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that Baldur von Schirach would "now show greater restraint and do his very best to create the highest-possible maximum consistency between Viennese cultural policy and the *Reich's* cultural policy."¹⁹ It was probably against this background that Baldur von Schirach decided to focus his Philharmonic speech on the *Reich* as much as possible. However, that did not help matters much. Joseph Goebbels was irritated that Baldur von Schirach had, in his speech, once again interfered with the direction of German cultural policy. He, Joseph Goebbels, would make sure that such remarks would come to an end.²⁰ This example vividly illustrates that the Vienna Philharmonic's image, as presented by the media, had underpinnings in actual politics. Sometimes, high-ranking decision-makers of the National Socialist propaganda apparatus made modification attempts on short notice.

An unambiguous memo written by Walter Thomas, Baldur von Schirach's cultural advisor, proves that the Philharmonic was aware of the persisting conflict between Joseph Goebbels and Baldur von Schirach.²¹

In "Eine Schicksalssymphonie" ("A Symphony of Fate"), an epic Viennese family novel by Friedrich Schreyvogel published in 1941, the Vienna Philharmonic is presented as deeply intertwined with Vienna.²² Fictional Philharmonic-related episodes abound in this chronologically narrated story that starts in the late 19th century and ends after World War I. These episodes reinforce the "city of music" ambience, presented against the background of a technology and progress-averse and anticapitalist 'old Vienna' scenery. Especially the passages about the relationship between music and war are worth mentioning, for they are clearly related to war-specific cultural propaganda. Even though Friedrich Schreyvogel had set his story during World War I, it is apparent that he also had World War II in mind. His thoughts about the heroic relationship between music and war legitimize the entertainment program targeted at soldiers and workers implemented by the *Wehrmacht* via the "Kraft durch Freude" organizations.

One of the novel's characters, Kronawetter, is a cellist with the Philharmonic and does not oppose the orchestra's participation in the war: "If they will have us, we will go all the way to the front."²³ Author Schreyvogel creates a connection between the activities of musicians and soldiers:

¹⁸ Cf. Trümpi, Orchester, p. 163-179 for information about the pronounced rivalry between Goebbels and Schirach regarding cultural policy.

¹⁹ Fröhlich, Elke (ed.). Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil II, Diktate 1941-1945. Vol. 3. Munich/New Providence/London/Paris 1996. P. 474.

²⁰ Fröhlich, Elke (ed.). Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil II, Diktate 1941-1945. Vol. 3. Munich/New Providence/London/Paris 1995. P. 65. Entry dated April 8, 1942.

²¹ Memo by Walther Thomas, cultural advisor, for his superior Müller, March 15, 1943, unregistered document.

²² Schreyvogel, Friedrich. Eine Schicksalssymphonie. Roman der Wiener Jahrhundertwende. Berlin 1941.

²³ Schreyvogel, Schicksalssymphonie, p. 443.



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"Musicians are fearless. Those who have understood the simplest of counterpoints will know that nothing in this world is achieved without a fight."²⁴ The author lets his Philharmonic cellist describe the relevance of music for war as follows: "Those who grasp the meaning of a Beethoven symphony will eventually be better soldiers, I swear!"²⁵ In this sentence, the author's intention of exploiting music for war through the Philharmonic becomes apparent. Baldur von Schirach, in his speech on the occasion of the "Mozart week of the German *Reich*" in 1941²⁶, claimed that Mozart is an inherent part of the strength that allows Germans to fight wars in the first place.²⁷ This idea is consistent with Friedrich Schreyvogel's statement that those who understand Beethoven are better soldiers. Against that background, it can be said that by weaving the Vienna Philharmonic into his story, the author successfully reactivated the "city of music" topos hitherto focused on the past. His novel (which was republished in 1944 and 1952) also contributed to the National Socialist war propaganda via the Vienna Philharmonic.²⁸

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²⁴ Schreyvogel, *Schicksalssymphonie*, p. 443.

²⁵ Schreyvogel, *Schicksalssymphonie*, p. 443.

²⁶ Schirach, Baldur von. *Rede zur Eröffnung der Mozartwoche 1941*. Weimar 1943.

²⁷ Schirach, *Rede [Mozartwoche]*, p. 8.

²⁸ Cf. Trümpi, *Orchester*, p. 223 ff.