

‘Botschafter der Musik’:¹ The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Role of Classical Music in Post-War German Identity

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Abstract

This working paper looks at the role of classical music in the establishment of modern German identity. My wider doctoral research project examines the importance of music in shaping differing senses of positive collective identity in both West Germany and Austria since the 1920s, and explores the exclusion of classical music from critical memory narratives, with particular reference to musical autobiographies. This paper focuses more narrowly on the situation in Germany immediately after World War II. While traditional accounts of the period tend to deal with individual musicians, I argue that musical institutions were central to a sense of being German. A brief case study of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra illustrates the tangled relationship between music and politics, and shows the ways in which musical identity was contested. Germans saw positive continuity in their mastery of the classical tradition, while the American occupiers saw the German belief in their musical superiority as a dangerous and unstable base for national restoration. My analysis of the Orchestra reveals that classical music was adopted as a politically neutral source of national pride despite being both highly susceptible to political manipulation and implicated in past militaristic and racist ideologies from which it was supposedly aloof.

Thomas Mann once argued: ‘Soll Faust der Repräsentant der deutschen Seele sein, so müßte er musikalisch sein’.² Since the middle of the nineteenth century, classical music has indeed been the art form most closely identified with the development of the German nation, and musicians and writers have argued that the art form itself belongs to Germany. However, the

¹ ‘Ambassador(s) of Music’. All translations into English are by the current author unless otherwise noted. *Botschafter der Musik*. Dir. Hermann Stöß. Start-Film. 1952. A poster for the film and critical responses to it are reproduced in *Ein hundred Jahre Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester. Darstellung in Dokumenten*, ed. by Peter Muck, 3 vols (Tutzing: Schneider, 1982), II, p. 242.

² ‘If Faust is to represent the German soul, he would have to be German’. Thomas Mann, ‘*Deutschland und die Deutschen*’, in *The Intellectual Tradition of Modern Germany*, ed. by Ronald Taylor, 2 vols (London: Bell & Sons, 1973), II, 235.

importance of music to wider German culture does not merely lie in the accident of birth that led Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to live and work in what is now Germany and Austria. Music's prominence in German society outside the professional sphere owes much to the aesthetic principles of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Their concept of education was focused on the development of the German classical tradition, in which the importance of the creative artist to society played a major part. Artistic mastery would then lead to 'German greatness'. Since music was by definition the most German art, it played a formative role in the creation of a national culture.

The importance of music to identity formation in the nineteenth century has been well established.³ Yet the focus on the period of German unification ignores the continuing appropriation of music to provide a stable and positive sense of 'Germanness' for the modern nation. Moreover, the works that do examine German music since World War II generally explore the roles of individuals,⁴ without acknowledging the vital role of musical institutions. Major orchestras with international reputations such as the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra have become the popular standard bearers for classical music at a time when its popularity is otherwise diminishing, and have therefore had an enormous influence on the public perception of musical identity. This working paper uses a case study of the Berlin Philharmonic in the years immediately after 1945 as a key example of the utilization of musical institutions for nation-building ends. It will also investigate the contradictory ways in which the dominant cultural discourse consciously uses music to represent a revitalized nation while simultaneously denying that musical sound can ever be political.

The most explicit expression of German musical nationalism can be found in the writings and music of Richard Wagner. Despite this, instrumental music rather than Wagnerian music drama is more often deemed uniquely German. Instrumental music became prominent as an agent of identity formation precisely because its aesthetic was perceived as less aggressively nationalistic. This sense of the symphony as a manifestation of a peaceful nation is largely illusory, because it still reflects the assumed German mastery of the classical musical tradition. The struggle to justify and de-politicize such an expression of German superiority can be seen in the notebooks of the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, whom the

³ For the work in this area by Celia Applegate see: 'What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of the Nation', *German Studies Review*, 15 (1992), 21-32, Celia Applegate, 'How German Is It? Nationalism and the Idea of Serious Music in the Early Nineteenth Century', *19th-Century Music*, 21 (1998), 274-96, as well as *Music & German National Identity*, ed. by Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁴ Individuals who are often discussed include Wilhelm Furtwängler and Daniel Barenboim. See Celia Applegate, 'Saving Music: Enduring Experiences of Culture', *History & Memory*, 17 (2005), 217-37.

Allies saw as the archetypal German musical figure during and after World War II. Furtwängler wrote in 1929:

Denn Deutschland – diese Frage ist rein historisch-objektiv und hat mit Nationalismus irgendwelcher Art nichts zu tun – ist der eigentliche Schöpfer der reinen Instrumentalmusik großen Stils, eine wirkliche Sinfonie ist von Nicht-Deutschen überhaupt nie geschrieben worden.⁵

The conductor's rejection of the link between German creativity and nationalism reflects the way music has been conceptualized in Germany since the nineteenth century. Drawing primarily upon the ideas of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Arthur Schopenhauer and the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, music is seen as leading its listeners to the divine rather than encouraging words and concrete thought. This reluctance to allow for extra-musical influence, coupled with the fleeting nature of sound and a belief in the timeless quality of great compositions, makes it very easy to decontextualize performances and to argue that music operated in a realm beyond worldly concerns. The subsequent conclusion, that music is an untainted and apolitical art, is unsustainable given the myriad instances where musical performances have been staged to invoke particular ideological responses. But the canard that 'absolute instrumental music is wholly incapable of declaring itself for or against a political direction'⁶ is the very reason music was able to regain its national prestige in the first years of the Federal Republic.⁷

In addition to the wider sociological implications of perceived German musical pre-eminence and the denial that music can be manipulated to political ends, the type of German culture and thus identity represented by classical music is also problematic, being deeply antithetical to modernism. By the twentieth century, as Bollenbeck observes, appeals to concepts such as 'German culture', 'German spirit', and 'German art' represented attempts to ward off a perceived cultural crisis, in which German identity was threatened by the internationalism of modernism. This modernist angst ensured bourgeois culture was not

⁵ 'For Germany – this question is purely historical and objective and has nothing to do with any form of nationalism – is the true creator of pure instrumental music in the great style. A real symphony has never been written by a non-German'. Wilhelm Furtwängler, *Aufzeichnungen 1924 – 1954* (Zurich: Atlantis Musikbuch, 1996), p. 64.

⁶ Paul Höffer, quoted in Elizabeth Janik, "'The Golden Hunger Years': Music and Superpower Rivalry in Occupied Berlin", *German History*, 1 (2004), 76-100 (p. 79).

⁷ See Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945-1955* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) for a complete discussion of this period in both West and East Germany.

immune from Nazi ideology, and was in fact quite susceptible to it.⁸ So the use of music to represent a morally upright Germany that continued to flourish despite the depredations of Nazism is deeply flawed.

Not only were classical institutions and musicians complicit to varying degrees with the Nazi regime, but the enduring German musical tradition they revered was itself extremely reactionary. The Austro-German musical canon as constructed throughout the nineteenth century favoured composers who were able to contribute to the development of musical nationalism on the basis of their racial and stylistic background. This led to the fraught reception of Felix Mendelssohn in Berlin and Leipzig and later Gustav Mahler in Vienna due to their Jewish heritage, regardless of the associations of both with major establishment institutions (the Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Vienna State Opera respectively). Franz Schubert was similarly omitted from the canon for many years as a composer mainly of songs rather than the more appropriately Germanic symphonies. Such failure to embrace outsiders continued into the twentieth century. Although culture in Weimar Germany and particularly Berlin has a radical reputation, the work of members of the Second Viennese School and other local modernists found more appreciation within their own loose musical and critical circle than with either the bulk of subscription concert audiences or those in positions of power, whose musical sympathies were more inclined towards Beethoven and Wagner. Conservative conductors in particular rarely cite inspirations more recent than Anton Bruckner.⁹

This reactionary legacy illustrates why music, generally seen as the major surviving source of modern and untainted German national pride, is actually part of a cultural sphere that is much murkier. As a result, it is difficult to accept a musical institution as a suitably reformed ambassador of 'the good Germany'. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in particular epitomized a conservative cultural agenda that definitely did not fit with the American Occupying Army's intention of 'changing German attitudes and behaviours'.¹⁰ The immediate post-War history of the Orchestra reflects its position as a major site of conflict

⁸ Georg Bollenbeck, 'German Kultur, the Bildungsbürgertum, and its Susceptibility to National Socialism', trans. by Thomas La Presti, *German Quarterly*, 73 (2000), 67-83 (p. 74).

⁹ For accounts of musical modernists in Berlin, see Gottfried von Einem, *Ich hab' unendlich viel erlebt*, ed. by Manfred A. Schmid (Vienna: Ibero & Moldern, 1995) and H.H. Stuckenschmidt, *Zum Hören geboren. Ein Leben mit der Musik unserer Zeit* (Munich: Piper, 1979). On the conservative side, Felix Weingartner, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Vienna: Wiener Literarische Anstalt, 1923), Bruno Walter, *Thema und Variationen. Erinnerungen und Gedanken*, rev. edn (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer, 1960), and Furtwängler, *Aufzeichnungen 1924 – 1954* provide a sample.

¹⁰ Richard L. Merritt, *Democracy Imposed: US Occupation and the German Public, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 34.

between the American view of music as an art in need of democratization and the German conviction that music represented noble values which had survived the baser instincts of war.¹¹

The Berlin Philharmonic had given the last official concert in the Third Reich on 11 April 1945 with a programme organized for the armament industry. The Nazi Party member Robert Heger conducted the Orchestra in Beethoven's Violin Concerto, and Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, opening the performance with the final scene from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* at Albert Speer's request. But they were not to be absent from the stage for long, and the swift resumption of performances gave rise to the myth that the Orchestra must have been innocent of Nazi complicity, since it had returned to the scene so quickly.¹² Almost as soon as the Red Army had arrived in Berlin, the Philharmonic's *Intendant* Gerhart von Westermann was trying to establish whether the Orchestra was again 'einsatzbereit'.¹³ His enquiry of 8 May was soon followed by a meeting in the flat of the clarinettist Fritz Fischer on 13 May.¹⁴ The first rehearsals were held in the Wilmersdorf Town Hall from 21 May.¹⁵

At first it seemed as though genuine change was in the air. As the first Allied troops to reach Berlin, the Red Army had officially taken control of the movements of the City's citizens, and thus its Orchestra. The Soviet Cultural Officers then engineered the appointment of Leo Borchard as the chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. Borchard had strong anti-Nazi and anti-fascist credentials, and had been one of few major musicians to reject the idea of 'inner emigration' and to actively resist the regime.¹⁶ The Orchestra had little choice but to accept his appointment, given that their preferred candidate Wilhelm Furtwängler was at the top of the American blacklist.¹⁷

Borchard and the Orchestra's first post-War performance, on 26 May 1945,¹⁸ found a middle ground between tradition, renewal, and appeasing the occupiers. The programme consisted of the return of a previously banned classic in Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's*

¹¹ This defence of the noble values of music has in fact been mounted by those most deeply involved with the Nazi regime, as in Elly Ney, *Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen. Mein Leben aus der Musik*, 3rd edn (Aschaffenburg: Pattlock, 1957), p. 193.

¹² For an account of the propaganda role played by the Philharmonic during the Third Reich, see Misha Aster, *Das Reichsorchester: Die Berliner Philharmoniker und der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Siedler, 2007).

¹³ 'Ready for action'. Muck, II, p. 187.

¹⁴ Erich Hartmann, *Die Berliner Philharmoniker in der Stunde Null. Erinnerungen an die Zeit des Untergangs der alten Philharmonie vor 50 Jahren* (Berlin: Feja, 1996), p. 36.

¹⁵ Muck, II, p. 187.

¹⁶ Matthias Sträßner, *Der Dirigent Leo Borchard. Eine unvollendete Karriere* (Berlin: Transit Buchverlag, 1999), p. 196.

¹⁷ Michael Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 199.

¹⁸ Klaus Geitel, 'Chronik aus der Geschichte des Berliner Philharmonischen Orchesters', in *100 Jahre Berliner Philharmoniker: Große Deutsche Dirigenten*, ed. by Klaus Geitel (Berlin: Severin and Siedler, 1981), p. 215.

Dream Overture, part of the Austro-German musical canon with one of Mozart's Violin Concertos, and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony as a nod to the Russians. German audiences certainly approved, travelling hours on foot for the 'memorable occasion'.¹⁹ They were also enthusiastic over the next series of concerts on 10 and 11 June, for which Borchard repeated his national balancing act by leading the Orchestra in Glazunov's Symphonic Poem of 1885, two Debussy Nocturnes and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. But these triumphant early performances created a problem. The Philharmonic's performances trumpeted the message that German culture had survived and encouraged the audience to believe that their identity as proud Germans could be salvaged. The American officer Carlos Mosely agreed that classical music was 'THE ONLY THING left that they can glory in'.²⁰ The occupiers, however, saw any signs of German glory as a negative. The continued German pride in music came from its promulgation of conservative, nationalistic traditions. And this was precisely what the branch of the American Military Government controlling musical, theatrical and literary denazification, the Information Control Division (ICD), was supposed to challenge with its brief to cause a 'revolution' in German thought.²¹ The almost unaltered Orchestra's renewed popularity did not help Information Control's drive to 'make certain that "prestige" organisations [were] one hundred percent clean'.²²

The Berlin Philharmonic had come under American administration later in 1945 after moving its main concert venue to the Titania Palace in Steglitz and its rehearsal rooms to Dahlem. The Americans initially thought orchestral denazification was going to plan, since Borchard's selection had allowed the Orchestra to present a repentant face. Another sign of change was the expulsion of known Nazis. Predictably, these departures dismayed the remaining players, who maintained that such '[Parteigenossen] noch das Wohlwollen des Orchesters besaßen'.²³ Denazification continued nevertheless, and even Borchard's accidental shooting and death on 23 August did not seem to derail the process. After a memorial concert conducted by a former Nazi, ICD ensured the Orchestra selected a new chief conductor who was also politically suitable. Sergiu Celibidache was Romanian by birth and Buddhist by

¹⁹ Anonymous reporter, *L.A.Z.*, Nr. 13, reproduced in Muck, II p. 190.

²⁰ David Monod, *German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 208.

²¹ David Monod, 'Verklärte Nacht: Denazifying Musicians under American Control', in *Music and Nazism: Art under Tyranny, 1933-1945*, ed. by Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2003), p. 297

²² General Robert McClure, quoted in Monod, 'Verklärte Nacht', p. 307.

²³ '[Party members] still had the goodwill of the Orchestra'. Hartmann, p. 9.

inclination, and had never supported the Nazi regime.²⁴ ICD also arranged for 'der farbige Dirigent' Rudolph Weber to conduct the Orchestra in Weber's Overture to *Oberon*, W. Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony and Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony on 2 and 3 September 1945, in an optimistic but ultimately token gesture.

Celibidache's youth and nationality were supposed to suggest a break with German cultural traditions. This was only partly true. His first concert on 29 August 1945, which was a great success, consisted inoffensively of Rossini's *Barber of Seville* Overture, Weber's Bassoon Concerto and Dvorák's *New World* Symphony. His second on 15 September was a more peculiar mixture of the 'old' and the 'new' Germans. The Andante from Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony shared the programme with one of the earliest prominent post-War performances of Wagner, with the Overture to *Tannhäuser*. This should have been a problem, since in many ways Wagner was the most tainted musician of them all. But his steady reintroduction met with surprisingly little comment in the German media, and little resistance from the ICD.²⁵ Their policy was not to comment on the ethnicity or nationality of composers, whether to emphasize positively or to condemn, as this was considered too reminiscent of the Nazis' own racial ideology. But the uncontroversial performance of Wagner actually served to reinforce the belief that musical culture did not need reforming at all, as did the rapturous crowds the Orchestra had been drawing.

This conflict between the German wish for cultural continuity and the Allied programme for cultural transformation came to a head in 1946, when the members of the Philharmonic, rather irritated by Celibidache's rehearsal techniques and his general inexperience,²⁶ began to agitate for Wilhelm Furtwängler's return.²⁷ Furtwängler's massive public profile meant that he could not be rehabilitated lightly. In the eyes of Germany and indeed much of the musical world, he represented the old German nation, even before his behaviour under the Nazis was taken into account. This conflation of musical and political identity convinced Information Control that any swift continuation of Furtwängler's career would indicate that elements of the Nazi past and traditional conservatism had bled into the new era.²⁸ Yet a speedy rehabilitation was exactly what the public demanded. They wanted Furtwängler back as a manifestation of positive German achievement in his own right, as well

²⁴ Klaus Lang, *Lieber Herr Celibidache...: Wilhelm Furtwängler und sein Statthalter – ein philharmonischer Konflikt in der Berliner Nachkriegszeit* (Zurich: M&T Verlag, 1988), p. 8.

²⁵ Wagner's works were not among those most frequently performed in Berlin between May 1945 and August 1946, but there were 53 Wagner performances between September 1946 and December 1947. Elizabeth Janik, *Recomposing German Music: Politics and Musical Tradition in Cold War Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 315.

²⁶ Hartmann, pp. 43-44.

²⁷ Lang, p. 110.

²⁸ Monod, 'Verklärte Nacht', p. 307.

as for the reinforcement his fame would bring the Berlin Philharmonic as a source of positive identity. The Orchestra was again, as concert programmes proudly noted, ‘ein maßgebender Faktor im europäischen Musikleben’, with ‘[die] edelste Aufgabe..., die Brücken zwischen den Menschen erneut zu schlagen’.²⁹ ICD desperately maintained that Furtwängler’s only contribution to the revitalization of German and European musical life would be a negative one,³⁰ but after the intervention of the American Military Governor, General Clay, the conductor’s clearance was confirmed in April 1947.³¹

The centrality of the Furtwängler case to the entire process of musical denazification highlights the importance of the Orchestra he led to both occupying and local authorities. American anxiety over the impact Furtwängler’s artistic reunion with the Berlin Philharmonic would have on prospects for the development of a non-national conception of German music were justified when the German public greeted his return to the podium on 22 May 1947 with ‘eine minutenlange Ovation’.³² One audience member proclaimed: ‘at last we could truly believe...that the war was finally over’.³³ Indeed, the concert did mark a return to pre-War patterns of cultural life. Furtwängler rejected American-inspired changes in musical direction by rejoining the Orchestra with a programme that was all Beethoven, comprising his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, as well as the politically-charged Overture to *Egmont*.³⁴

While the restoration of the classical German culture represented by Beethoven to the centre of German life was emphatically not what the Americans wanted, it was central to various indigenous plans for reconstruction. According to the historian Friedrich Meinecke, classical art forms offered Germans an anchor in a time of misfortune,³⁵ and reflected the ‘inner German soul’ that had remained in opposition to the Nazis.³⁶ Meinecke argued in *The German Catastrophe* in 1946 that Germany’s spiritual culture needed to be nourished in order for Germany to regain a place in the international community.³⁷ The ethics of such cultural continuity were secondary to the need to promote stability and redevelopment. For the Berlin

²⁹ ‘A decisive factor in European music life’, with ‘[the] most noble job of once again building bridges between people’. Anon., ‘Auftakt’, *Programmheft*, September 1946, reproduced in Muck, II, p. 201.

³⁰ Monod, ‘Verklärte Nacht’, p. 308.

³¹ Ibid.

³² ‘A minute-long ovation’. Anon., ‘Pfungstgeschenk für Berlin: Furtwänglers Wiederkehr’, *Neues Deutschland*, 28 May 1947, reproduced in Muck, p. 207

³³ An anonymous audience member, quoted in John Ardoin, *The Furtwängler Record* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 60.

³⁴ Daniel Gillis, *Furtwängler and America*, (New York: Manyland Books, 1970), p. 89.

³⁵ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, trans. by Sidney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 112.

³⁶ Meinecke, p. 115.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 116-17.

Philharmonic, this justified their role in the reconstruction of Germany's reputation and their excusal from dealing with the past.

The long-term culture of disengagement paradoxically enabled the Berlin Philharmonic's political agency to become more apparent. The vagaries of post-War history allowed its exculpation from Nazi involvement, and restored its place as an honourable cultural institution close to the heart of all Germans, and as a suitable representative of the nation. The Orchestra's first international appearance as an agent of cultural restitution was its 1948 English tour, organized after an invitation from the Oxford Committee for promoting friendship and understanding with Europe the previous year.³⁸ There were no objections to receiving the orchestral personnel as honoured guests, and the tour was so successful that the Philharmonic was subsequently invited to perform at the newly founded Edinburgh Festival in 1949. The Festival's stated aim was to 'provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit',³⁹ and the Orchestra's burgeoning international success similarly provided a platform for national pride to be re-expressed. Konrad Adenauer recognized this, taking an active involvement in sponsoring the Philharmonic as a source of international renown as its first post-War tour to America was being arranged. He wrote directly to Furtwängler in July 1953 to express his delight 'dass damit Berlin...als Botschafter deutscher Kultur in Amerika auftritt'.⁴⁰ The American authorities did not share Adenauer's enthusiasm for the Orchestra as positive ambassador, preventing Furtwängler from entering the country. But the ban was the final attempt at reinforcing a different conception of culture, something that had long been abandoned elsewhere. Walter Legge, for example, masterminding swathes of new recordings from London by artists he had recruited semi-legally in the ruins of Vienna, argued that his aim was to sell records, and his 'best-selling artists [had] had no choice as to which side of the fence they should temporarily sit'.⁴¹ Wilhelm Furtwängler's death in November 1954 and the intensifying of the Cold War provided the final justification for the normalization of cultural relations with Germany, and in 1955 the Americans let the Berliners back in under their new conductor, Herbert von Karajan.

This action illustrates how far and how quickly the reformist goals of cultural denazification had evaporated, as well as the speed with which the Berlin Philharmonic had

³⁸ Letter from Ernst Fischer to Tom Hutton, dated 11 October 1948, reproduced in Muck, II, p. 218

³⁹ This expression is generally attributed to the Festival's first director, Rudolf Bing, and is still used in both tourist information and official Festival documents.

⁴⁰ 'That with the tour Berlin...[would] appear as an ambassador of German culture in America.' Letter from Konrad Adenauer to Wilhelm Furtwängler, dated 13 July 1953, reproduced in Muck, II, p. 256

⁴¹ Walter Legge, quoted in Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, *On and off the Record: A Memoir of Walter Legge* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 73.

reacquired respectability, transforming itself from Nazi cultural flagship into neutral ambassador. Unlike Furtwängler, Karajan had been an active if rather unpopular member of the Nazi party, but this did not prevent his transformation into the leader of a group of artists officially unaffected by the politics of the past. Any German qualms over his appointment related to his demand for a lifetime contract rather than his former Party membership.⁴² However, the senator Joachim Tiburtius convinced the Berlin Senate that a life-long appointment would be enormously helpful in providing the continuity of classical culture they craved.⁴³

As an orchestral policy, cultural continuity met with approval on both sides of the political fence. It also demonstrated the Philharmonic's ability to be simultaneously political and apolitical. The reason Jewish and other persecuted musicians such as Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer and Paul Hindemith returned to work with the Philharmonic again, without facing the disapproval from American Jewish lobby groups that had derailed Yehudi Menuhin's American career after his early appearance with Furtwängler and the Orchestra in 1947, was music's apparent ability to transcend political differences. Yet the material fact of their return made the extremely political point that the Germany represented by music was again an acceptable member of the international community. In administration, the *Intendant* appointed in 1960, Wolfgang Stresemann, was certainly happy to view the Orchestra as a diplomatic as well as artistic entity. Although he was the first émigré rather than supposed 'inner emigrant' to take on a guiding role with the Philharmonic, and even though his experiences in America and as the son of Gustav Stresemann had given him a different political perspective to its autocratic chief conductor Karajan, they shared the belief that the Austro-German classics were the ultimate expressions of all musical possibilities.⁴⁴ Stresemann also remained convinced that the music of the Berlin Philharmonic could help to rebuild Germany's international reputation, and was involved in the arrangements which saw the Orchestra play at the dedication of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral in June 1962. Herbert von Karajan disliked concerts which were supposed to carry political messages, and refused to conduct for the occasion, but the Orchestral management were still eager to accept such opportunities.⁴⁵

⁴² Herbert von Karajan and Richard Osborne, *Conversations with Karajan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 75.

⁴³ Klaus Lang, *The Karajan Dossier*, trans. by Stuart Spencer (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 25-26.

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Stresemann, *...und abends in die Philharmonie. Erinnerungen an große Dirigenten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1994), p. 247.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Stresemann, *Zeiten und Klänge. Ein Leben zwischen Musik und Politik* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997), pp. 301-02.

The actions of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra as a supposedly politically neutral ‘ambassador of music’ in the immediate aftermath of World War II, representing the Federal Republic of Germany abroad at a time when it had neither a Foreign Ministry nor a diplomatic corps,⁴⁶ highlight the extent to which the Americans’ challenge to the sense of German superiority derived from music had failed, leaving the sublime idea of music to triumph. More broadly, the narrative account of the Orchestra’s reconstruction reveals the public and political support for it as a way to maintain a traditional sense of national identity. Owing to music’s admittedly ephemeral nature and ostensibly apolitical aesthetic, this form of identity also contained a built-in excuse for not dealing with the past. Writers have argued against the idea that a close national relationship with music is productive, beginning with Thomas Mann in *Dr Faustus* and continuing more powerfully in Austria with Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Bernhard. Yet the notion that a sense of identity based on classical music is not an ideal foundation for a modern society has not been assimilated into wider political discourse. Even though classical music no longer dominates Germany’s cultural scene to the extent it once did, the ‘Germanness’ of a composition or performer still acts as the ultimate litmus test. The classical music scene is still a place where proclamations of German superiority are unlikely to meet with a negative response.

⁴⁶ *Wilhelm Furtwängler: Dokumente. Berichte und Bilder. Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Karla Höcker (Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1968), p. 125.