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Berlin Opera Wars: Institutional Competition and the Quest for German  
Identity

by  
Rebecca Robinson

Honors Thesis

In

Department of History  
University of Richmond  
Richmond, VA

2016

Advisors: Dr. Hugh West, Dr. Ronald Crutcher, and Dr. John Treadway

**Abstract:**

In October 2000, Berlin's Minister of Culture Christoph Stölzl proposed a merger of the city's opera houses. In the midst of German reunification, Berlin was struggling financially and the cost of three separate opera houses was too much for the city to bear. This proposal to combine the former East-German Staatsoper Berlin and Komische Oper with the former West-German Deutsche Oper under the administration of "The Opera Stages of Berlin" was met with public backlash. Newspapers all over the world reported daily as the directors of both the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper—Daniel Barenboim and Christian Thielemann—fought bitterly for their respective ensembles. This work aims to place the failed merger and its public uprising in a broader context of German musical competition. The Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper have been in competition for resources and prestige since their inception. More importantly, these rival ensembles and their separate identities have fought to define "Germanness" in a cultural context. Through the use of newspapers, archival documents and personal interviews, this thesis argues that despite popular opinion, the "German Opera Wars" is not a fight between leftover east and west mentalities and loyalties. Instead, the Opera Wars represent a culture of competition in music, as well as the enduring quest to discover "What is German?"

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I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for Honors in History

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Dr. Hugh West, Thesis Director

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President Dr. Ronald Crutcher, Thesis Advisor

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Which reminds me, did you know that in Rostock and Kiel they have founded a school of Low German poetry, or rather, two schools because when we Germans start anything they always split into two at once? Hardly was the Low German school started than we had another *itio in partes* and so the Mecklenbergers are parading under their leader Fritz Reuter and the Holsteiners under Klaus Groth. But Klaus Groth has stolen a march on the other because he is a lyric poet who can be set to music and everything depends on that. Before twelve months, no, before six months are out, there won't be a single piano without a song of his perched on it all the time.

-Baron von Arne in Theodore Fontane, *Beyond Recall*  
(*Unwiederbringlich*), 1891

*Das uns're Meister sie gepflegt  
grad' recht nach ihrer Art,  
nach ihrem Sinne treu gehegt,  
das hat sie echt bewahrt:  
blieb sie nicht adlig, wie zur Zeit,  
da Höf' und Fürsten sie geweiht,  
im Drang der schlimmen Jahr'  
blieb sie doch deutsch und wahr;  
und wär' sie anders nicht geglückt,  
als wie wo alles drängt und drückt,  
ihr seht, wie hoch sie blieb im Ehr':  
was wollt ihr von den Meistern mehr?*

*Drum sag' ich euch:  
ehrt eure deutschen Meister!  
Dann bannt ihr gute Geister;  
und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst,  
zerging' in Dunst  
das heil'ge röm'sche Reich,  
uns bliebe gleich  
die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!*

-Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, 1861

*That our Masters have cared for it  
rightly in their own way,  
cherished it truly as they thought best,  
that has kept it genuine:  
if it did not remain aristocratic as of old,  
when courts and princes blessed it,  
in the stress of evil years  
it remained German and true;  
and if it flourished nowhere  
but where all is stress and strain,  
you see how high it remained in honour -  
what more would you ask of the Masters?*

...

*Therefore I say to you:  
Honour your German Masters,  
then you will conjure up good spirits!  
And if you favour their endeavours,  
even if the Holy Roman Empire  
should dissolve in mist,  
for us there would yet remain  
holy German Art*

## CHAPTER I

### OVERTURE: WE GERMANS

It was a sunny, summer afternoon in Schöneberg. We were seated on the small balcony drinking coffee, as the record of Wolf Biermann that had been playing in the other room came to a stop. Eva and Wolfgang took this opportunity to reminisce about their younger days as Green Party activists and the series of protests they attended at the Wall. These sorts of reflective academic discussions were a regular and central part of my first visit to Berlin. As both Eva and Wolfgang had worked most of their lives as teachers—Eva as *Theaterlehrerin* and Wolfgang as *Geschichtslehrer*—together they had extensive knowledge of German history and culture. It was through their knowledge and memories that I was introduced to the political significance of German music. Wolfgang, as a self-proclaimed political activist and rebel of the late 1960's and early 1970's lauded the political influence of music. Artists like Konstantin Wecker and Wolf Biermann, he claimed, truly shaped the culture and identity of modern Germany.

As a classically trained violinist, I was intrigued by the idea of music as a cornerstone of German identity. However, the music I associated with German culture was that of Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, and Wagner. Nonetheless it seemed, that recent discussion of German music and arts focused primarily on aspects of pop culture, such as the 2007 film *Lives of Others*, or iconic musicians such as Wolf Biermann and David Hasselhoff. While these cultural elements are certainly significant in a discussion of Germany's post-reunification identity, it is important to remember that Germany's legacy of linking identity to music extends far beyond the Cold War. Investigating the post-reunification fate of ensembles that have been a part of German society for over a century revealed another obstacle facing the ongoing process of reunification



and identity reconstruction. While single musicians, like Biermann, demonstrate a reaction to relevant political problems through music, long-established ensembles like the Deutsche Oper and the Staatsoper Berlin demonstrate a history of adaptation that parallels Germany's own political and social changes.

As I began my research into ensembles in Germany's musical capital, Berlin, I came across a rather unique event. In October 2000, a proposal for two of Berlin's major Opera Houses to merge under the umbrella of "The Opera Stages of Berlin" was met with extreme public backlash. After reunification, Germany was left with multiples of most vital institutions, including state-funded ensembles. Thus, cost-managing strategies such as combining two similar or identical organizations was commonplace and frankly, a necessary part of life after reunification. Despite the seemingly routine nature of institutional mergers, the public, as well as well-known public figures such as conductor Daniel Barenboim and former Minister of Culture (*Kultusminister*) Ulrich Roßhoff-Mormin publically denounced the merger.

While initially these reactions seem overblown, it is worth noting that the two main operas that this merger would have affected were the *Staatsoper* Berlin—the prestigious former East-German opera house and the *Deutsche Oper* Berlin—the equally esteemed former West-German opera house. These opera houses had vastly different backgrounds, repertoire, and audiences, even after reunification. Over a decade after reunification, former West-Germans remained loyal to the *Deutsche Oper* while former East-Germans exclusively visited the *Staatsoper*. This sense of loyalty and belonging to a specific opera house is very telling in relation to cultural identity. The significant differences between these two ensembles, as well as their audiences is a sign that the backlash against the merger was about much more than program cuts and funding. The failure of the merger can be interpreted as a representation of German

national identity. For centuries, historians and German people alike have associated German music with German identity. That ensembles of a previously divided Germany with distinct cultural identities would oppose a merger is not surprising. But, to it is a mistake to reduce this unwillingness to an identity crisis unique to reunification. Institutional competition has been central to Germany's music and general culture for centuries. As Theodore Fontane describes in the above excerpt, whether in poetry or music, German cultural institutions cannot seem to help their tendency towards competitive division. The separation of East and West Germany encouraged competition between ensembles on each side instead of continuing the competition between regional ensembles. In this way, the Cold War altered the existing pattern of competition to reflect the sociopolitical conflict of the times, but did not create a new rivalry. Similarly, the public reaction to the merger is not representative of a new national identity crisis, merely a continuation of regional competition and pride. Thus the failed merger between the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper is the result of a pattern of institutional competition that has always played a central role in German cultural politics.

## §

The link between German identity and music has always been strong, almost taking on the form of myth, even when Germany's evolving political structure was fragmented. For centuries, the legacies of Handel, Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Schubert and countless others have contributed to German pride in cultural creativity and musical excellence. Today, reunified Berlin serves as Germany's political capital, but it has been Germany's longtime musical capital. Berlin is the only city in the world that boasts six professional symphony orchestras, three opera houses, two musical conservatories, and various other musical institutions. In 1929, Berlin was recognized as "the musical capital of the civilized world...its

prestige founded on the music of the past and flourishing still....”<sup>1</sup> Despite the political turmoil of the Second World War and the physical separation of the Cold War, seventy years later, musicians still described a position in a Berlin ensemble as, “like dying and going to heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

Some claim that associating German identity with music goes far beyond the various famed composers that called Germany home. German identity has always been somewhat of a nebulous topic, largely because of the long absence of a German nature. “Germany,” until 1871, was a collection of separate states. Even then, German-speaking areas like Austria were excluded. In many ways, the creation of the German Empire served as a solution to the identity crisis. As Barbara Eichner points out, the terminology of identity and identity politics is quite subjective. For her “Germany,” “denotes the German-speaking regions and their culture in a broad sense, in order to distinguish them from the political entities.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, a “German” is, “everybody who made a point about considering him or herself as part of the larger German linguistic, historical, cultural, or ethnic community, whichever state or region they actually belonged to.”<sup>4</sup> The vague nature of these terms reveals a central issue which hampered the formation of a national German identity. Quite simply, “many Germans felt part of a German nation long before acquiring a German nation state.”<sup>5</sup> There is an implicit separation between “German” as a cultural concept as compared with “German” as a political concept. As Eichner indicates, many Germans felt a sense of cultural belonging to the then hazy concept of Germany

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Janik, “The Symphony of a Capital City: Controversies of Reunification in Berlin’s Music Community,” in *Berlin: the Symphony Continues*, ed. Carole- Anne Costabile- Heming (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), 247.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Eichner, *History in Might Sounds: Musical Constructions of German National Identity 1848-1914* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

while still maintaining skepticism about its political reality. Friedrich Schiller, in *The German Empire*, demonstrates that this conflicted identification was prevalent as early as 1797:

Deutschland? aber wo liegt es? Ich weiß das Land nicht zu finden Wo das gelehrte beginnt, hört das politische auf. (Germany? But where is it located? I do not know how to find the country. Where the learned [Germany] begins the political ends)<sup>6</sup>

Seventy-four years later, the creation of the German Empire effectively validated the “Germanness” of thousands unsure of their identity, though not even definitive boundaries and a political system still could not solve the “identity crisis.” Austria, a state that has long been tied to “Germanness,” especially through its music was excluded from this “new Germany.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, three years after the creation of the German Empire remarked on the unsettled nature of the identity problem, “It is characteristic of the Germans that the question ‘what is German?’ never dies out among them.”<sup>7</sup> At this point, the opportunity for music to play a vital role in defining a German identity becomes clear. Though French and Italian music traditions had dominated the previous centuries, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century marked a turning point in the German music tradition, “Concert societies and amateur choirs sprang up everywhere, music journals offered guidance on what to listen to and how to relate to music, while a thorough musical education became the hallmark of a cultivated middle-class upbringing.”<sup>8</sup>

In the midst of political uncertainty and turmoil, music acted as a uniting factor throughout what would become German society. This musical “boom” was not just limited to individuals and communities. Various towns and cities built concert halls, cultivated orchestras,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7.

and employed composers, therefore building music into the local economy and creating a thriving industry. By the 1870s music had already been a long established foundation of both social and economic life in Germany. Paired with a wariness towards the political manifestations of the new German Empire, cultural association with music readily replaced national pride or identity.

But it could not do the work of political nationalism. Some scholars, like Eichner, argue that, unlike traditional realizations of nationalism, German musical nationalism (except under the Third Reich), “sailed under the flag of an apolitical universalism that served to assert German superiority all the more effectively.”<sup>9</sup> But, by separating German musical “nationalism” during the Third Reich from the rest of German history, scholars like Eichner undermine their original claim. Music during the Third Reich was overtly nationalistic. Through a variety of political acts, music, literature and other various forms of propaganda, the SA imposed and celebrated an *imagined* German identity. Music and cultural institutions before and after the Third Reich were always decentralized and competitive, and thus not part of a larger national identity.<sup>10</sup>

Regional ensembles during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a sign of wealth and prosperity and therefore, various towns and regions competed for recognition in part through the prestige of their ensembles. Similarly, many of the great composers included in the myth of German musical identity, like Mozart, Haydn and Schubert, were actually Austrian, while others, like Beethoven spent much of their lives in Vienna and other non-German territories. German national identity through music is a myth created by historians to solve a self-diagnosed identity crisis. Historian Stefan Berger, in his article on German Nation building argues that German

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup> Phillip V. Bohlman, *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of a New Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 86.

history during much of nineteenth century was intentionally written in a way that could support a unified nation.<sup>11</sup> German music- or the imagined reality of German music- was employed for the same purpose. In the face of German political transition and strife through the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the arts transformed into a safer and stronger substitute for uniting Germans than fluid political ties. Football commentator Eric T. Hansen, calls this desirable alternative to national identification “das GoetheundSchillerding.”<sup>12</sup> Through this overarching idea of a national culture, Germans who have never attended theater or read poetry can adopt a pretense of an identity to which they have no tangible connection.

The imagined concept of German culture as “national” is undermined by the reality of German cultural institutions. German cultural institutions are, at their center, competitive. The previous excerpt from Thodore Fontane’s *Beyond Recall* depicts this regional competition exactly. Baron von Arne’s description of the Low German school of poetry mirrors the fate of the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper. Both sets of rivals fought to become the most prestigious, encouraged by the public rivalries between their leaders. Von Arne’s offhand comment, “when we Germans start anything they always split into two at once” rings particularly true in the context of German music and arts. Germany’s first attempt at a national theater in Hamburg demonstrates the failure of a national cultural institution due, at least in part, to rivalries.<sup>13</sup> The National Theater in Hamburg, was founded in 1767 and ran only three short seasons before

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<sup>11</sup> Stefan Berger, “Building the Nation Among Visions of German Empire,” in *Nationalizing Empires* ed. Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 247-308.

<sup>12</sup> Eichner, *History in Might Sounds*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> George W. Brandt and Wiebe Hogendoorn, *German and Dutch Theater 1600-1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 198.

dissolving.<sup>14</sup> Though this theater was part of Enlightenment efforts to define a national culture, it fell prey to competition from other performing groups in Hamburg.<sup>15</sup> There were certainly other factors that contributed to the group's failure, including poor organization, the unfavorably short Hamburg performance season, and finances; however, competition for top performers played the largest role.<sup>16</sup> The group suffered immensely when, "it had lost its best practitioners when Ackermann's ballet master, the husband of Caroline Schulze quit the theater when his wife was driven out by Sophie Hensel's intrigues, and he took the company's best dancer, the young F. K. Schroeder, with him; their mediocre replacements failed to prevent the decline."<sup>17</sup> The competition between the grand experiment of a national theater and its rivals is something that is echoed throughout other cultural institutions, especially music. In the eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries, princes competed for the best ensembles. Later local governments maintained this practice.

This is not to say that German culture is not rich or that German music is unremarkable. No, German artistic and musical culture is in fact as monumental as it is because of competition. As the various ensembles competed with each other for prestige, fame, and funding, the standard of performance increased. Thus, this competitive drive and subsequent level of excellence between cultural institutions is an inherent aspect of "Germanness." The assertion that culture acted as a stand-in during periods of political strife is simply inaccurate, as political and social conflicts are reflected in the fates of musical institutions. As we shall see, the conflict between

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<sup>14</sup> H.B. Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thoughts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 368.

<sup>15</sup> Brandt, *German and Dutch Theater*, 198.

<sup>16</sup> Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, 371.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Staatsoper Berlin in 2000 is simply one example of a much older tradition.

## §

Implicit in this case study of the failed “Opera Stages of Berlin” is the question of the state of post-reunification Germany’s national identity. I argue that the two are undeniably linked-though perhaps in a counterintuitive way. While the problems uniting these two ensembles stemmed from political insecurity and a lack of common cultural identity, these conditions did not create new or unique tensions between the ensembles. That the Cold War redefined German culture as a binary of East and West is central to the conflict. The culture surrounding each of these ensembles shifted to match the society it interacted with, therefore solidifying a culture that was distinctly East or West German. However, this is not the foundation of the conflict between the ensembles. A German culture of competition and the nearly century of rivalry between these groups motivated the backlash against the merger- not concepts of East and West Germanness. The Berlin Wall had created substantial cultural divides and separate identities that certainly added to the existing competition, but to view the separateness of these groups is not to be attributed to that alone. Though technical issues such as loss of funding and resources may have played a small role in the failed merger, the majority of the problems unifying stemmed from the implicit competition between institutions that had become a part of these ensembles’ cultures.

The story will unfold as follows. The first act of this work will look at each respective ensemble at its inception as well as the historical context in which it was formed. The first act will have three scenes: Beginnings, the Third Reich, and the Cold War. In each scene, the social and political events of the time determine how each group was perceived and ultimately affected



the culture and identity of the ensemble. The Staatsoper was originally founded in 1742 as part of Frederick the Great's court though its origins can be traced back to the sixteenth century. The Deutsche Oper, on the other hand, was a privately funded ensemble established in 1912 and only later appropriated by the German state. The social difference between eighteenth century Prussia and early twentieth-century Berlin are significant and therefore, even in their foundations, each group is completely distinct from the other.

The next scene focuses on the Third Reich. The Staatsoper was nearly two hundred years old and the Deutsche Oper was barely twenty when Hitler took office. Though one might assume that the Deutsche Oper was more susceptible to influence due to its young age, the reality is that Nazi politics limited and redefined the works, interpretation, and artists that were allowed to participate in both ensembles. The *Nazizeit* had a profound impact on the cultures of both groups and in many ways, left a blank slate for the following years to truly redefine the character of the groups.

The Cold War period is arguably the most influential on the personality and culture of each ensemble. While each Opera house's past defined and made it a unique entity, the Cold War was the first time that the houses served populations that were both physically and intellectually separated. It was during this time that the ensembles truly disengaged culturally, as they no longer served a single society. Instead, as the policies and ministrations of both the Allies and the Soviet Union shaped each "half" of the divided Germany, the opera houses began to reflect the new identities of Germany.

The second act, building on what has come before will focus primarily on dissecting the various perspectives of individuals involved in the Opera Stages of Berlin controversy. The deep roots of this conflict have not been addressed in scholarship. Historian Elizabeth Janik's work on

German identity and music, as well as music and ensembles in Berlin has been influential to the development of my research and acts as a foundation for my exploration of the Berlin Opera Wars. But I have tried to dig deeper into the story. I have used newspapers—*Die Berliner Zeitung*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Der Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Der Spiegel*, and *the Frankfurter Allgemeine*—to gauge public opinion related to the merger as well as follow the rivalry between music directors Christian Thielemann and Daniel Barenboim. While this material is valuable in understanding the wide reaching implications of this merger in the political world and public sphere, it fails to capture the experience of individuals in the art community.

To get at these perspectives, in March and July 2015, I interviewed various individuals who were members of the respective groups or knowledgeable about the event. By interviewing Berliner musicians and artists, I attempt to capture the reaction of musicians to the Opera Wars and foster a more complete understanding of reunification and the discourses surrounding the identities of each ensemble.

As a final note, the names of the ensembles change repeatedly throughout the centuries—especially the Staatsoper. For consistency, I will refer to the ensembles by their current names.

## CHAPTER II

### ACT ONE: COMPETITION ON THE SPREE

The competition between the Staatsoper and the Deutsche Oper only began in 1912, though Berlin's opera tradition began much earlier. The Staatsoper was officially founded in the eighteenth century with a legacy that began much earlier. In contrast, the Deutsche Oper was a product of the early twentieth century and began as a privately funded ensemble with democratic leanings. The difference in backgrounds and closeness of proximity launched the ensembles into a competition in which the larger, more established Staatsoper had an advantage. This competition adapted to fit the political context of the time and would continue up to the present. The Third Reich forced each group to present themselves as the ideal representation of a national Germanness; their existing rivalry magnified by the competition between the Nazi officials who acted as their "benefactors." In contrast to the direct competition for funds and notoriety the groups experienced before the Cold War, the separation of the two Germanys meant that the groups no longer needed to be rivals. Yet, the separation of the Cold War also allowed the ensembles to rediscover their identities and incorporate the rhetoric of East and West Germanness. In this way, the competition took on a more ideological presence and forced each to answer the question "What is German? — a reflection process that had begun with the inception of the Staatsoper.

The Staatsoper Berlin was founded in 1742 as the Royal Court Opera under Frederick the Great, though its origins extend as early as the sixteenth century. It grew out of the union of two separate groups—the Staatskapelle, which came first and an opera, which was created much later. The Staatsoper and the Staatskapelle were entirely separate entities. The Berlin

Staatskapelle (originally the Kurfürstliche Hofkapelle), was founded first as a court chapel by Kurfürst Joachim II of Brandenburg, Prince Elector of the Holy Roman Empire in 1570.<sup>18</sup> In this period, Berlin was a “double town;”<sup>19</sup> in some ways rehearsing the separation imposed by the Berlin wall hundreds of years later. The Spree River separated Cölln on its western bank from Berlin (referred to here as Altberlin) on its eastern. Unlike the artificially created sectors of East and West Berlin after the Second World War, these sister cities constructed inland water transportation routes, bridges, and even a common town hall that fostered trade and mutual prosperity.<sup>20</sup> While the Kurfürstliche Hofkapelle was based in Cölln, the wealth of these twin cities contributed to the success of the ensemble. By the early seventeenth century, the orchestra was one of the largest in Europe and had about thirty-seven players.<sup>21</sup> Though the Thirty Years’ War severely damaged the ensemble, it slowly recovered and its opera counterpart was established in 1696 by Elector Fredrick III.<sup>22</sup>

The start of the eighteenth century and Elector Fredrick III’s rule as King Fredrick I— King in Prussia— brought about significant changes for both Berlin and its ensembles. In the twelve-year span between 1701 and 1713, the Kurfürstliche Hofkapelle was first expanded into the much larger Königliche Kapelle and then quickly reduced to a small orchestra for courtly musical engagements and a separate brass band used for hunting and parades under King Fredrick William I.<sup>23</sup> The cities of Cölln-Altberlin were also radically transformed during this

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<sup>18</sup> Aryeh Oron, “Staatskapelle Berlin,” Bach-Cantatas, last modified May 2006, August 2010, [www.bach-cantatas.com](http://www.bach-cantatas.com).

<sup>19</sup> Gordon A. Craig, *The Germans* (Westford: First Meridian Printing, 1983), 263.

<sup>20</sup> “The Medieval Trading Center,” Berlin.de: Das offizielle Hauptstadt Portal, [www.berlin.de](http://www.berlin.de).

<sup>21</sup> Oron, *Staatskapelle Berlin*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

period. In 1710, King Fredrick I ordered that Cölln-Altberlin merge to form Berlin, the new capital of Prussia.<sup>24</sup>

Fredrick the Great's (Fredrick II) reign solidified the legacy and traditions of the Staatsoper. Not only did he bring in talented musicians to serve as *Kapellmeister*, such as Johann Joachim Quantz and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, but he also commissioned the construction of the Royal Opera House *Unter den Linden*. Architect Georg Wezeslaus von Knobelsdorff drew up the plans and construction began in July 1741.<sup>25</sup> Though the Opera house was not expected to be completed until October 1743, Fredrick the Great demanded an opening performance ten full months before the Opera House was completed.<sup>26</sup> The hall was nowhere near completion:

...surrounded entirely by scaffolding, [the theater's] portico and double staircase still in primitive stages of construction, the house could offer its audience by way of comfort only rough benches in place of the upholstery and plush the king had commanded. A huge tent hung from the roof in a drab attempt to conceal the ceiling's unfinished condition.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this, the theater unofficially premiered with a performance of Carl Heinrich Graun's *Cleopatra e Cesare* on December 7, 1742.<sup>28</sup> While this event marked the first official performance of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, and the "beginning of a 250 year successful cooperation between the Staatsoper and Staatskapelle, the official opening was delayed until October 10, 1743.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Medieval Trading Center, Berlin.de.

<sup>25</sup> Oron, *Staatskapelle Berlin*. and "History of Staatsoper," Staatsoper Berlin, www.staatsoper-berlin.de.

<sup>26</sup> *History of the Staatsoper*, Staatsoper Berlin..

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Asch, "From Prussia with Love," *History Today*, October 1992, 42.

<sup>28</sup> *History of the Staatsoper*, Staatsoper Berlin.

<sup>29</sup> Asch, "From Prussia with Love."; *History of the Staatsoper*, Staatsoper Berlin.; Though strictly for members of court and military officers.

Fredrick the Great's patronage of the Staatsoper was not just a result of his appreciation for the arts. His interest in bolstering the Staatsoper and its Opera House is deeply rooted in the dualistic rivalry between Austria and Prussia. Though Prussia began as a modest kingdom, Fredrick the Great aimed to expand and transform it into one of Europe's great powers. Austria, a German speaking state that was wealthier and established part of the Holy Roman Empire, naturally presented competition. Politically, this manifested itself through the War of Austrian Succession as Fredrick seized Silesia, a wealthy Austrian province. But the rivalry also extended into the cultural sphere. As the center of the Habsburg monarchy, Austria was already full of palaces and Baroque churches—in short, a city of culture. Fredrick aimed to compete with Austria and therefore, utilized the arts as a vehicle for national cultural competition.<sup>30</sup>

Prussia established a national *Singspiel* decades before Vienna and Vienna boasted its connection to Italian Opera.<sup>31</sup> Fredrick the Great could boast “the intimate musical atmosphere which existed, where [he] actively directed proceedings, composed and had music written especially for him to perform, was wholly lacking in Vienna.”<sup>32</sup> But Fredrick's support of the operas and other arts was not simply for the sake of Vienna. With the exception of Austria and Prussia, no other princes of the Holy Roman Empire had the military strength to give them influence in European Affairs.<sup>33</sup> These kingdoms instead continued the “German” tradition of cultural competition. Each fought for the reputation of the best cultural and academic institutions as a means of asserting influence. The rulers of each kingdom fought, almost petchily, to collect

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<sup>30</sup> Jackson V. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization: A Brief History, Volume II: Since 1500* (Boston: Wadsworth Publishing, 2014), 402.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Maning, “The national singspiel in Vienna from 1778 to 1785” (PhD diss., Durham University, 1975), Durham E-Theses Online.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 80-81.

the best artists, “Karl Theodore had the Stamitzes, the Cannabichs, Richter and Holzbauer on his payroll but missed the opportunity to add Mozart. Fredrick the Great more than doubled Johann Joachim Quantz’s salary when he lured him to Prussia from the employment of the elector of Saxony in 1740.”<sup>34</sup>

This competitive drive and demand for performers of the highest caliber continued to shape the Staatsoper even after Fredrick’s death. In 1789, three years after Frederick’s death, the opera *Unter den Linden* was opened to the public. Despite this change and the fire and war that would force the repeated rebuilding of the Opera House, the opera continued its legacy of excellence and prestige. Its first public concert was a concert in memory of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart for the benefit for his wife Constance. In the nineteenth-century, renowned musicians such as Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Richard Strauss influenced the group as its music director. Richard Wagner conducted the premieres of *The Flying Dutchman* in 1844 and *Tristan* in 1876 with the opera *Unter den Linden*.<sup>35</sup>

Though the fall of the German Empire after World War I changed the name of the previously Royal Opera House to the *Staatsoper* (State Opera), the Staatsoper maintained its tradition. The prestigious and traditional legacy of the Staatsoper embedded itself in its identity, both in its stately residence in the Opera House *Unter den Linden*, rebuilt by renowned architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1821 and its practices.<sup>36</sup> The status afforded to the ensemble by its long-standing excellence allowed it to transition into the role of leader in modern music. Conductors such as Wilhelm Furtwängler, Erich Kleiber, Otto Klemperer, Alexander von

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Oron, *Staatskapelle Berlin*.

<sup>36</sup> *History of the Staatsoper*, Staatsoper Berlin.

Zemlinsky, and Bruno Walter secured the Staatsoper's reputation as innovative and ground breaking during the 1920s.<sup>37</sup>

In comparison to the Staatsoper, the Deutsche Oper has a much shorter history. The founding of the privately funded Deutsche Oper (originally the Deutsches Oper in 1912 was viewed by some as a “revolutionary act.” The Opera was created in Charlottenburg, far away from the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, it was intended to serve as a “democratic” alternative to the Staatsoper. Not only was the Deutsche Oper larger than any other opera house in Berlin, but had no loges; promoting democracy by ensuring that all visitors had a view of the stage. The Deutsche Oper also varied in performance choices. Since its inception, the Deutsche Oper believed itself the promoter of modern musical theater, performing lesser known works, scandalous novelties, and contemporary music all the while engaging only the world's top-class conductors and singers. While the opera performed some niche pieces- unknown late 19<sup>th</sup> century oeuvres, Ernst Jrenek's *Jonny Spiel Auf*, and Kurt Weill's one Act plays *Der Protagonist* and *Der Zar Laesst Sich Photographieren*—it was still forced to compete against the Staatsoper Berlin's recent foray into modern music and the creation of a third opera in 1927—the Kroll Opera.<sup>38</sup>

The Kroll Opera was opened in 1924 and was the project of Leo Kestenberg, music assistant to the Prussian Ministry of Culture.<sup>39</sup> The Kroll Opera functioned as the second house

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “History of the Opera House at Charlottenburg,” Deutsche Oper Berlin, [www.deutscheoperberlin.de](http://www.deutscheoperberlin.de).; “Modern” is used here to describe the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement that was prominent in Weimar Germany's culture. This period rejected the sentimentality of late Romanticism that was characterized by composers such as Richard Strauss. During the Thrid-Reich, this “modernity” was censored and a more Romantic-style of music was given nationalistic purpose.

<sup>39</sup> Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 7.



of the Staatsoper. While the Staatsoper experimented with modern music, the Kroll Opera epitomized it. The Kroll was viewed as radical, so much so that it was one of the first cultural institutions attacked by the Nazi regime.<sup>40</sup> The Kroll not only created a repertoire of contemporary operas, but also mounted modernist revisions of traditional works.<sup>41</sup> The Staatsoper promoted a “modern” appearance during the 1920’s, while the Kroll Opera was the outlet for true modernism. In this way, the Deutsche Oper struggled to compete against an established “favorite.”

Financial difficulty in 1925 was the driving force between the state ownership of the Deutsche Oper. Though the opera house had been popular with the public, the original stock corporation, *Grosser Berliner Opernverein* (Grand Berlin Opera Society) could not manage higher lease payment in the economic downturn. *Grosser Berliner Opernverein* withdrew and the city of Berlin assumed ownership. Once the city of Berlin took control of the opera, it made several changes, most obviously in switching its name to the Städtische Oper.<sup>42</sup> The Städtische Oper was established as a representative site for ambitious musical theater” with one of the students of Gustav Mahler, Bruno Walter as director. Some may argue that this diversification worked. The new Städtische Oper gave a gala performance of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, arguably one of the most influential works of this period.<sup>43</sup> Though state involvement was intended to diversify and ensure the profitability of the opera house (at this point it was one of three in Berlin), competition continued, especially with the Staatsoper’s focus

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; The Kroll Opera was one of the first ensembles to be shut down by the Nazis and was closed in 1931 following much public protest against the Opera House. Hitler later repurposed the Opera house as the seat of the Reichstag after the Reichstag fire on February 27, 1933 destroyed the original Reichstag.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>42</sup> “History of the Opera House,” Deutsche Oper Berlin.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

on “modernity.” The beginning of the 1930s marks a turning point for these ensembles. Despite very different beginnings, the two main groups- the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper- were both under state control. Since the inception of the Deutsche Oper, there had been some competition between the groups, though the prestige of the Staatsoper and the novelty of the Deutsche Oper limited the intensity of this rivalry. Government censorship and control during the Third Reich changed this.

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While the Third Reich represents the biggest effort to make music national, the attempt once again fell prey to competitive impulses. During the Third Reich, both ensembles were charged with promoting nationalism through German opera- something neither had truly specialized in before. New leadership in both groups disrupted the status quo and Nazi leaders competed for control over “pet” ensembles. Censorship too forced both ensembles to perform different repertoire. In this way, despite the singular focus on creating and supporting a “national German identity” through Nazi propaganda and practices, the competition between the groups remained dominant. Writers and historians asked “What is German” and others tried to answer the question through assertions of a music or culture. Wagner proposed the concept of a Germany defined by its art. As his opera, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, demonstrates, he imagined Germany as a country in which society and institutions allow art to thrive. However, these retrospective assertions of identity were cast aside by the Third Reich’s active cultivation of national culture and identity.

Like all propaganda and appropriated work, there are glaring inconsistencies between Wagner’s “historically imagined utopia of art” depicted in *Die Meistersinger* and the Nazi state,

where some art was repurposed as superficial propaganda and other was censored all together.<sup>44</sup> Before the Third Reich, Germany's national identity and its association with music was crafted through primarily rhetorical means. Though *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, an opera about a singing competition and the cultivation of a "heil'ge deutsche Kunst," seemed to suit the Nazi agenda of advancing a National cultural identity perfectly.<sup>45</sup> It was quickly adopted as the National German Opera and promoted as a representation of "Germanness." Yet, in its role as the official German Opera, the differences between Wagner's ideal presented in the opera and the Third Reich reality exposed fissures in the policies of the Nazis as well as the illusion of a national opera. While Wagner promoted the advancement of the arts, the Nazis, through censorship and propaganda stifled the arts' ability to remain "deutsch und wahr" as his opera proposed.<sup>46</sup>

Still, no other German opera shares the close connection with the Third Reich as Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. There is no doubt that Wagner's promotion of a "holy German Art" appealed to the nationalist urges of the National Socialist regime. As the party rose to power, the *Meistersinger* was quickly appropriated as a national opera. In 1933 alone, the opera was performed by the Staatsoper Berlin on the "Day of Potsdam"—the official inauguration of the new regime.<sup>47</sup> A few months later, it was the premiere piece of the Deutsche Oper's reopening complete with a banner displaying the words, "Was deutsch und echt"—complete with a swastika.<sup>48</sup> At the Bayreuth festival in the same year, Joseph Goebbels, Reichs Minister of

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas S. Grey, "Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as National Opera (1868-1945)," in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Cecilia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 96.

<sup>45</sup> "Holy German Art"

<sup>46</sup> "*deutsch und wahr*" (German and true)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, formalized *Die Meistersinger's* role as the official opera of the Nazi Regime via radiobroadcast stating, “of all [Wagner’s] musical dramas *Die Meistersinger* stands out as the most German. It is simply the incarnation of our national identity.”<sup>49</sup> Once *Die Meistersinger* was recognized as a national opera, it was almost immediately repurposed as propaganda. In 1934, Leni Riefenstahl used *Die Meistersinger* as the soundtrack to her famous documentary *Triumph of the Will*—a film chronicling the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg.<sup>50</sup> Unsurprisingly, it was also performed as part of the 1935 “Parteitag der Freiheit” Nuremberg party rallies.<sup>51</sup>

Wagner’s work appealed to the National Socialist party for several reasons. *Die Meistersinger's* depiction and focus on the lives of common workers, social and political turmoil, and greatness of German art resonated with party members. Wagner’s work was also “relatively new but no longer offensively modern.”<sup>52</sup> Above all, *Die Meistersinger* was a thoroughly German work on which the National Socialists could rely on for an endorsement of German national pride and industry.

As *Die Meistersinger* demonstrates, the incorporation of arts into national identity is a powerful nation-building strategy. At the same time, it also demonstrates that while music itself was central to the concept of Germanness, its association with identity was also completely constructed. *Die Meistersinger* represents a standard of music that the National Socialists promoted as “German.” Music was to feature, “resurgent nationalism, a conservative/traditional choice of subject matter and a preoccupation with völkish themes.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 137.; *völkish* (national or of the people)

Beyond these requirements, there was little consensus what truly “German” music consisted of. The “opera crisis” of the 1920s continued into the Third Reich as a “commitment to an idea of inner authenticity—to the presentation of a ‘truth’” that had been a part of opera in the Weimar period was steadily eroded by censorship and other factors.<sup>54</sup>

The haphazard and inconsistent nature of a national music standard can also be seen through the the careers of several composers who, initially favored by the party, were condemned by music journals and lost their standing. Georg Vollerthun was, from 1933-34, ranked as the fourth top living composer.<sup>55</sup> Still, even in 1933, music journals such as *Zeitschrift für Musik* and *Die Musik* criticized his work for being , “outdated and ideologically suspect.” One writer, Hans Kölzsch even denounced him for his, “cold ideology and snobbery” and “his reliance on a ‘hypocritical, artificial and unhealthy tyranny of style.’”<sup>56</sup> Vollerthun quickly fell out of favor; his operas were only shown for at most a season and eventually not at all.<sup>57</sup> In only a few months, the work of this minor composer that had been initially promoted by the party as ideal was kept out of production for ideological proposes. Both Graener and Vollerthun, as minor composers, were motivated by success and thus unlikely to have written works that were intentionally seditious. This example then only serves to highlight the fluidity of the ideal national music that the Third Reich struggled to shape.

While both the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper were adversely affected by the social and political context of the Third Reich, these ensembles faced a much different experience than

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<sup>54</sup> Pete Tregear, “‘Stadtluft macht frei’: Urban Consciousness in Weimar Opera,” in *Music, Theater and Politics in Germany 1848 to the Third Reich*, ed. Nikolaus Bacht (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 243.

<sup>55</sup> Erik Levi, “Opera in the Nazi Period,” in *Theater under the Nazis*, ed. John London (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 148.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

many of their counterparts. Despite the ever-changing standards for which music represented the spirit of German nationalism, the Nazis implemented a strict policy of censorship. The censorship of operatic repertoire took place in two phases. As simple public protest against certain qualities of music transitioned into law in early 1933, the SA primarily responsible for enforcing the standards of the party. Initially, these agitators simply disrupted and forcibly prevented the performance of works, “considered to be tarnished by association with the Weimar Republic.”<sup>58</sup> In addition to the physical presence of these “enforcers,” threats in the papers, as well as official party declarations contributed to this first phase of active censorship.<sup>59</sup> Not only did this first phase necessitate the suppression of controversial works, but also the removal and replacement of all theater administrators, directors, and conductors identified as “unacceptable to the regime.”<sup>60</sup>

Reichsdramaturg Rainer Schlösser was responsible for much of the second phase of censorship. Though Schlösser was accountable to both Joseph Goebbels and Hans Hinkel, Assistant president of the Reichskulturkammer (Reichs Chamber of Culture/RKK), he was responsible for both censoring plays and monitoring operatic repertoire. Much of the censorship was subjective, though works that were both German and original were often promoted. Because contemporary operatic repertoire that was popular in the Weimar republic was essentially outlawed, there was an increased demand for new acceptable music. Most classics did not violate the new moral standard, but, a return to older music, “could have easily backfired... suggesting that instead of the much-trumpeted notion of national regeneration, the Nazis had in reality

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 137-138.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 139.

instigated a period of cultural stagnation.”<sup>61</sup> A leading commentator echoed this concern after surveying the 1934-35 season. He reported that only eighteen of forty-six opera houses had performed repertoire by a living German composer and a majority of these pieces were composed by already well-established masters like Richard Strauss.<sup>62</sup> His solution echoed the currently policy—each theater should devote at least ten percent of its attention to preparing German operas and at least two should be composed by living Germans. Thus, as these censorship policies show, the creation of a distinct German cultural identity was a key aspect of National Socialist policy.

The Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper were simultaneously central to and removed from this censorship and nation building movement. As the two main Opera Houses in the Reich’s capital, they served as a mark of prestige and a showcase of German nationalism. The status of these ensembles drew the attention of several party officials, specifically Joseph Goebbels and Hermann Göring. By April 1933, Goebbels had already spent months competing with Alfred Rosenberg, the party’s chief ideologue for control of cultural affairs.<sup>63</sup> Once Goebbels was appointed as Reichs Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, he already began orienting himself to take control of a much wider range of cultural activities.<sup>64</sup> The guidelines of his ministry, according to a law passed on March 13 were, “spreading of enlightenment and propaganda within the policy of the Reichs Government and the national reconstruction of the German Fatherland.”<sup>65</sup> This broad statement of purpose paired with Goebbels’ ambition resulted

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>63</sup> Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 14-16.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-194*, ed. Louis Paul Lochner (Westport: Greenwood, 1970).

<sup>65</sup> Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, 16.

in the creation of seven departments in his Ministry, some with branches devoted to film and theater.<sup>66</sup> Rival politicians, most notably Hermann Göring also aspired for control over the nation's cultural institutions. Göring created the Preussischer Theaterrausschuss (Prussian Theatre Commission) in February 1933 as an assertion of control. As the Prime Minister of Prussia, Göring had singular control over the artistic institutions of former Prussia. Thus, the Preussisches Staatstheater and most importantly the Staatsoper Berlin were under his jurisdiction. This was a political move that struck at Goebbels' cultural control. Goebbels had previously been appointed Gauleiter (District Leader) of Berlin and therefore exercised control over all the city's organizations.<sup>67</sup>

Over the next several months, Goebbels faced challenges from countless other political opponents for cultural control of Germany.<sup>68</sup> After no small amount of politicking, he secured the position as head of the Reichs Chamber of Culture which empowered him to supervise the entire country's intellectual and cultural activities.<sup>69</sup> During this time period Goebbels, threatened by several other rivals drafted an agreement with Göring. Göring was to dissolve the Prussian Theater Commission in exchange for retaining sole authority over the Staatsoper Berlin.<sup>70</sup> No other official, including Goebbels could interfere with Göring's administrative decisions for the ensemble. During this time period, Goebbels also gained control of the Deutsche Oper (then the Städtische Oper) as result of the death of the Intendant, Max von Schillings.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries*.

<sup>69</sup> Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, 20, 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.



Though much of the disagreement between Goebbels and Göring was about institutional control, that Göring was willing to concede control over every other Prussian institution except the Staatsoper is crucial. While Goebbels certainly was focused on wide-spread institutional control, for Göring at least, the Staatsoper was exceptional. With Goebbels as the head of the Städtische Oper, there was a “conflict of interests” in the administration of these two Berliner ensembles.<sup>72</sup>

In early 1933, both ensembles were criticized by the Nazi press as agents of “cultural bolshevism.”<sup>73</sup> One newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, criticized the published repertoire of both ensembles as “prostitute operas featuring Jews and Negros.”<sup>74</sup> If the controversial repertoire was provocative to party critics, the houses’ revisionist interpretations of beloved works was even more inflammatory. In February 1933, both opera houses performed reinterpreted versions of Wagner’s early operas in memory of the fiftieth anniversary of his death. The Deutsche Oper performed *Der fliegende Holländer* produced by Carl Ebert with “modernist sets” by Caspar Neher. The Staatsoper presented *Tannhäuser* directed by Jürgen Fehling and conducted by Otto Klemperer. Both performances demonstrated a staunch disregard for the values of the Third Reich and were both denounced.

The reaction to these performances resulted in a dispute between Goebbels and Göring that represents both the struggle between the two leaders and the difference with which they controlled their respective ensembles. The SA stormed the Deutsche Oper and forced the removal of Carl Ebert. Goebbels, resolved to exercise his control over the Deutsche Oper most

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<sup>72</sup> Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, 173.; Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries*.

<sup>73</sup> Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, 173.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

certainly sanctioned and likely instigated the SA's forcible removal of Ebert.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, vicious articles in the press demanded for the removal of Heinz Tietjen, the Intendant of the Staatsoper, insisting that he should instead, "be replaced by a person with nationalist sympathies."<sup>76</sup> Though Tietjen was verbally attacked by the press, he maintained his position as Intendant of the Staatsoper. Undoubtedly, this is due to Göring's personal defiance and perhaps his close relationship with Hitler.<sup>77</sup> Whether Göring's reaction was in actual support of the Staatsoper or just a demonstration of his power, his appearance of support lasted throughout the Third Reich. In many ways, Göring was actually quite benevolent in his treatment of the Staatsoper, especially in the context of Nazi policies. Not only did the opera house manage to assert some agency in the promotion of new operas, but they also had a fair amount of leeway when performing operas. For example, the opera house was allowed to perform Zemlinsky's *Kreidekreis*, a work banned for its composer's Jewish heritage.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, despite the formalist influence of Stravinsky and Weill, the Staatsoper was allowed to present Egk's *Peer Gynt*.

The Deutsche Oper was not so lucky. Goebbels' close party ties and perhaps more rigid personal philosophy meant, "the company was less able to assume an individual identity in the manner of the Staatsoper."<sup>79</sup> Another factor that is central to the Deutsche Oper's strict control was Goebbels' völkish preoccupations. Goebbels' hoped to mitigate the opera's high bourgeois beginnings by making the opera house widely available to the public.<sup>80</sup> Not only did he ensure that repertoire was appropriate by party standards but he also reduced ticket prices

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<sup>75</sup> Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, 174.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.; Pamela Potter, "What is "Nazi Music?,"" *The Music Quarterly* 88 (2005), doi: 10.1093/musqtl/gdi019.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 179-180.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 180.; Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries*.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.; Potter, *What is Nazi Music*.

significantly.<sup>81</sup> Where the Staatsoper under Göring's control was still able to assert some limited autonomy, the Deutsche Oper was co-opted as a vehicle for party propaganda.

Even under the umbrella of extreme Nationalism, these two ensembles were still vastly different entities in competition with each other. Before the Third Reich, the Staatsoper was defined by its Royal beginnings and the prestige of its many directors and conductors. Conversely, the Deutsche Oper was a middle class experiment- privately funded with a democratic focus. These two ensembles couldn't have been more different. Though the sole purpose of German cultural institutions during the Third Reich was the construction and promotion of a unified national identity, the glaring differences that remained between these two groups signal that the competition between party leaders outweighed the fictional national cultural identity. Once again, competition remained a vital element in the fate of these ensembles.

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For both ensembles, the Cold War period represented an opportunity to “rediscover” their identities, especially under the competing pressures of the NATO alliance and Russia. Neither ensemble was in direct competition for resources and therefore theoretically free from the competition that had occurred in the Weimar Republic and under the patronage of rival Nazi officials. The Staatsoper simply fell under Soviet control while the Deutsche Oper was managed by the Allied powers.<sup>82</sup> However, the relatively fluid interactions between the two Germanys

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Janik, *The Symphony of a Capital City*, 156.; The Deutsche Oper was called the Deutsches Opernhaus when it first opened. After the state took control of the house, its name changed to Städtische Oper in 1925. In 1933, the name reverted to the Deutsches Opernhaus before adopting its current name in 1961.

before the construction of the Berlin wall if anything aggravated the rivalry. The proximity of the two ensembles, the different ideologies of government influence, and the existing impulse for competition worsened relations between the two groups.

During the early postwar period, the now East-German Staatsoper recruited the best musicians in Berlin with promises of extra food rations and funding.<sup>83</sup> The immediate effort to invigorate post-war culture in East-Berlin can also be seen through the establishment of the Komische Oper, a niche opera house founded in 1947. The Soviets recruited celebrated Austrian stage-director Walter Felsenstein to lead this effort.<sup>84</sup> The acquisition of Felsenstein was only the first of many competitions between the two states for impressive musicians. In 1954, Erich Kleiber finally agreed, after years of negotiation, to take a position as the resident conductor of the Staatsoper.<sup>85</sup> Once Kleiber's decision reached the public, several key singers from Hamburg, Vienna and the Deutsche Oper left their positions and joined Kleiber in East Germany's Staatsoper.<sup>86</sup> Though Kleiber ultimately left his position only a few weeks after beginning, his initial commitment aggravated the Deutsche Oper and continued the predictable struggle for the best musicians.<sup>87</sup>

The competition for musicians was not limited to soloists and directors. As stated above, musicians were lured to the East with promises of funding and food rations. Though after the currency reform of 1948, West Berlin's Deutsche Oper became the more profitable option.<sup>88</sup> The

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<sup>83</sup> Janik, *The Symphony of a Capital City*, 156.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler 1945-1955* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company 2007), 204.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Kleiber left his position only a few weeks after joining the Staatsoper because he realized that his hopes of working with the Staatsoper without state/political oversight were dashed

<sup>88</sup> Janik, *The Symphony of a Capital City*, 156.

porous nature of the early border, sometimes referred to as the “nylon curtain” rather than the Iron curtain lead to continued tensions between the two nations as artists could quite easily move between the two sectors.<sup>89</sup> Walter Felsenstein, the director of the Komische Oper that the east worked tirelessly to recruit, chose to work in the East but live in the West- for many, the best of both worlds.<sup>90</sup> Many other musicians found the East Berlin funding of ensembles far superior to that of the West and the living conditions of the West much more pleasant than the East.

A 1951 report by the Deutsche Staatsoper reported that 675 of its 1052 employees lived in West Berlin. Of the minority who did live in East Berlin, many of them worked as technical staff and not musicians or performers.<sup>91</sup> This was something the Staatsoper’s committee who, “raised frequent concerns about [the figures] ideological and economic implications” grew to resent.<sup>92</sup> Though these musicians performed with the Staatsoper and only lived in West Berlin, the animosity of the committee illustrates the competition between the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper, as well as East and West went beyond employment. Even in the 1950s, the competition between these groups became more nebulous and focused on the abstract concepts of identity and belonging. For the 1951 Staatsoper committee, being part of the Staatsoper did not simply mean being part of the ensemble, but being part of a group that was part of an East German society. Some members of the committee even proposed to rid the company of its “Western Employees,” which was later rejected on grounds of necessity.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Elaine Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the German Democratic Republic: Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 73

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Throughout the 1950s the direct competition for musicians shifted to a rivalry based in recognition and prestige, for both the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper and on a broader national scale. For the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bach's death in 1950, the GDR and FRG cooperated to publish a new complete Bach edition. Two thirds of the original manuscripts needed to create the edition were in the West, while the other third was in the East. Though this was an effort driven only by necessity, it resulted in four years of close collaboration between East and West German musicologists. When the work was completed in 1954, a celebration was planned for its official presentation. However, paper shortages in the GDR meant the work would appear in East Germany much later, leaving the West Germans free to downplay and even ignore the collaborative aspect with the GDR. In the official presentation's program in September 1954, not a single work was mentioned or publicized about the GDR's participation in the new edition.<sup>94</sup> This sort of passive-aggressive competition became a regular part of interactions between East and West music groups.

In many ways, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 ironically eased tensions between East and West musical communities though inciting political problems. The physical barrier between the two sectors forced personal reflection and identity formation. Both the Deutsche Oper and the Staatsoper were free to become the most prominent opera-houses in their respective sectors. Without the direct competition for resources, both ensembles were able to form distinct identities in Cold War Germany. While ensembles in both the GDR and the FRG both performed familiar eighteenth and nineteenth century classics like Mozart and Verdi, their stances on contemporary music are what truly fostered separate identities. Ensembles in the FRG promoted the work of modernist West German composers like Boris Blacher, Aribert Reimann,

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<sup>94</sup> Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 208-209.

Werner Egk, and Hans Werner Henze.<sup>95</sup> The GDR instead promoted the socialist realist compositions of East German composers like Paul Dessau, Kurt Schwaen, Jean Kurt Forest Guenter Kochan and even some Soviet composers like Shostakovich.<sup>96</sup> In this way, while Germans in both sectors maintained an identity tied to musical excellence, separation shaped these new identities based on conceptions of eastern and western “Germanness.” Yet, to assume that the wall ended all competition between these groups is incorrect. Much like ignored incident surrounding the Bach edition, separate identities were not enough to ease tensions between the ensembles. They instead fell back on the competition that was in place since the inception of the Deutsche Oper in 1912, but this time tied to the cultural and ideological superiority of their separate “nations.”

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<sup>95</sup> Janik, *The Symphony of A Capital City*, 157.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

### ACT TWO: A GERMAN SOUND?

Though both the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper had formed their own identities and created their own performance niches during the post-war period, reunification in 1990 forced these operas back into a competition for resources. Keeping with the spirit of reunification, reforms were proposed in the late 1990's to reduce the state funding of 250 million DM spent per year on opera. The financial demands of reunification as well as perceived excess in the support for the arts—no other city in the world supported three opera houses—forced discussion of consolidation. As a result, on October 12, 2000, cultural senator Christoph Stölzl proposed a merger, combining the operas into a cost effective “Opera Stages of Berlin”— a plan that was met with a huge backlash and was officially rejected a year later.

Members of each opera were incensed— a merger would both eliminate positions and change the established identities of each group. However, the general public reacted nearly as strongly. Highly publicized reactions from both ensembles' directors played to public concerns with German identity. Newspapers all over the country reported on Berlin's “Opera Wars.” The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* had a featured piece on the ensembles, Barenboim, or Stölzl nearly every day between October and December 2000. On an administrative level, the merging of the two main opera houses- the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper, as well as the Komische Oper eliminated two music director positions. This would have left only one position for the music director of the merged operas- in turn making this role both very prestigious and very competitive.<sup>97</sup> Initially,

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<sup>97</sup> Roger Cohen, “Berlin Operas are Feuding, With Anti-Semitic Overtones,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2000. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).



the public speculated whether Barenboim (music director of the Staatsoper) or Christian Thielemann (director of the Deutsche Oper) would be given this position.

The dispute was so fraught that it attracted international attention. Not only did the *New York Times* feature several articles on the Opera Wars, but the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the New Yorker*, *Herald Journal*, *Tuscaloosa News*, *Sun Journal*, and countless other news sources also covered it. This may be due in part to Barenboim's international prominence. Born in Argentina and raised in Israel, he not only traveled extensively but was the former conductor for the Opera-Bastille in Paris and was the music director of the Chicago Symphony until 2004.<sup>98</sup> Barenboim's public role in the protest certainly attracted international attention. But, contemporary issues of reunification, German identity, and anti-Semitism also were projected onto the crisis, making the Berlin "Opera Wars" a source of international fascination.

A leading Berlin politician from the Christian Democratic party, Klaus Landowsky, summarized the situation to the *Berliner Morgenpost* in a way that would not soon be forgotten, "On the one hand you have the young von Karajan in Theilemann, on the other you have the Jew Barenboim."<sup>99</sup> Although Landowsky would insist he simply meant to praise Berlin's cultural diversity, the public was immediately frenzied. Not only had Landowsky made a seemingly insensitive and seemingly anti-Semitic comment, but also pitted Barenboim's Jewishness against a gentile, Herbert von Karajan, who as longtime conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic never disavowed his decision to join the Nazi party.<sup>100</sup> It sounded as if Nazi prejudice had not died. Though the mayor of Berlin and fellow Christian Democratic member Eberhard Diepgen

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<sup>98</sup> Wayne Lee-Gay, "Conductor or Superstar," *Lakeland Ledger*, March 22, 2004, Google News.

<sup>99</sup> Cohen, *Berlin Operas are Feuding*.

<sup>100</sup> Cohen, *Berlin Operas are Feuding*.

immediately called to reassure Barenboim “that Mr. Landowsky’s statement was in fact meant as a compliment underscoring the cultural diversity of the “new Berlin,” much of the public remained unconvinced and incensed.<sup>101</sup> Barenboim responded to the mayor by explaining, “however you read the remark, it is offensive...I find this sort of anti-Semitism so incredible, I don’t want to believe it.”<sup>102</sup> He later released a public statement conveying his astonishment to discover that, “my Jewishness could have anything to do with my position at the Staatsoper or with my music.”<sup>103</sup> Barenboim also used this platform to announce that if the merger between the two operas was approved, he would leave his position at the Staatsoper.

Though the incendiary comment was made by a politician, not a musician, anti-Semitism became the uglier side of the rivalry between the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper. Each ensemble competed for superiority, while their music conductors also competed. The promise of a single music director position for the merged ensembles also seemed to increase the tension between the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper, and consequently Thielemann and Barenboim. Though initially both conductors had announced that they would leave their positions if the merger was pursued, Thielemann later, “made clear that he would be available to head a merged Berlin Opera.”<sup>104</sup> Certainly, this furthered the feud between the ensembles as Barenboim’s advocacy for the Staatsoper and idealist vision was pitted against Thielemann’s opportunism. Ulrich Roloff-Momin, Berlin cultural official, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, a plea for Barenboim to stay, “Is it not really unbearable that even responsible politicians always emphasize the Jew

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.; Volker Blech, “Barenboim: In Deutschland kommen wieder Schatten hervor,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, February 7, 2016, [www.morgenpost.de](http://www.morgenpost.de).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

Barenboim rather than the artist of world acclaim?”<sup>105</sup> He then condemned a remark attributed to Thielemann upon hearing of Barenboim’s intent to resign, “Now the Jewish mess in Berlin is coming to an end.”<sup>106</sup> Thielemann later denied this statement and musicians from both opera houses made a statement that they had never heard such a remark. Still, that claims of anti-Semitism were forced—either by Thielemann or the media—to play a role in the enduring competition between both ensembles speaks to both the longevity and intensity of the rivalry. By juxtaposing what he saw as a German and an “Other” or outsider, Landowsky implied a sort of cultural ownership over the ability to lead a German ensemble and shape a cultural identity. Barenboim, as an Israeli-Argentinian, was in some senses an outsider to German culture. In fact, Barenboim’s Jewishness made his musical roots German. His experience with the Israeli Philharmonic in the 1950s introduced him to a style of playing that was inherently German as most of the Jewish players in the early 1950s were refugees from Germany.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Barenboim’s link to German culture is through his Jewishness, contrary to Landowsky’s dichotomy. This poses a challenge to a German national identity through music. For, if music knows no national boundaries, then music cannot truly be the basis of an exclusive national identity.

While the rivalry between Barenboim and Thielemann was perhaps encouraged by the press, the feud between Barenboim and Stölzl needed no provocation. Stölzl argued very simply that his plan made sense and would provide Berlin with a system similar to that in Paris— a national Opera with two houses. He claimed it would, “save money, while allowing the Deutsche

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Matthias Glander (clarinetist for the Staatsoper Berlin and former Orchester Vorstand) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

Oper to concentrate on a Romantic repertory and the Staatsoper on classical performances.”<sup>108</sup> Berlin, even ten years after reunification was still reeling suffering from having to support the much weaker east German currency. It was already well on its way to being one of the most financially strapped German cities.<sup>109</sup>

That this plan could save, “a hundred and twelve million dollars a year or eight million dollars more than the entire annual budget of the National Endowment of the arts” while also, “dispos[ing] of its incipient opera wars” was convincing for many politicians.<sup>110</sup> However, politically Stölzl made a misstep by choosing not to consult any of the best known German Opera intendants, something that further provoked deep-seated regional competition.

In Germany, intendants are highly regarded. As the general director for the all aspects of the opera house they, “become powerful cultural personages, not only the public face of an opera house but in a very real way its identity, and people associate them with a particular style and character, and even a particular take on Germanness.”<sup>111</sup> No intendant in Berlin had a reputation to match any of the twelve that were meeting in Zurich the day Stölzl announced his strategy. These intendants including Klaus Zehelein, intendant of the Staatsoper Stuttgart, were angry to have not been consulted. Zehelein claims that the other intendants knew all about Berlin’s opera crisis:

They knew that Berlin had lost the core of its old opera public (...liberal, educated bourgeoisie) when it lost its Jews and Social Democrats and intellectuals to Hitler, and that contemporary Berlin, especially East Berlin was largely a worker’s city and didn’t have anywhere near the audience that big cities of the west could count on....They knew Berlin’s own houses weren’t doing very much to replenish the audience they had... The

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<sup>108</sup> Cohen, *Berlin Operas are Feuding*.

<sup>109</sup> Jane Kramer, “Letter from Europe: Opera Wars- How German Should German Music Be?” *The New Yorker*, August 2001, ProQuest.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

intendants knew that there wasn't much energy in some of Berlin's productions; some were conventional, and others were simply bad. They knew that money got wasted, and that, in every season with three "Figaro"s to compare, there were going to be too many days with no opera in Berlin at all. They knew that Barenboim was stubborn when it came to his own limits, that his company needed a real intendant--someone who was more of an artistic director and less of a bureaucrat than the one he had. And they knew that Thielemann and his intendant, Udo Zimmermann--who was still officially at his last job, with the Oper Leipzig, and wouldn't take over the Deutsche Oper for another ten months--already disliked each other so intensely that Thielemann had even announced his resignation (he changed his mind when another conductor accepted the job and the orchestra lobbied to get him back), and that now, as one musician put it, the two men "communicated by sabotage."<sup>112</sup>

This assessment of Berlin's opera scene by other German opera managers provides intriguing insight into where Berlin's operas fit on a national scale. While Zehelein's analysis of Berlin's opera scene may be completely accurate, his critique once again exposes the myth of a German national identity through music. The merger of the two main Berlin Operas for many would act as the creation of a national German Opera. Yet, the way that Zehelein describes the Opera crisis in Berlin is both critical and removed. Quite simply, Zehelein was the acting intendant of the Staatsoper Stuttgart, and as in the days of Fredrick the Great, regional competition for prestige was endemic to the music world. Though the Staatsoper Berlin and the Deutsche Oper Berlin were both focused on the rivalry with each other, other regional ensembles watched Berlin cautiously. Perhaps Stölzl chose not to ask the other intendants because he recognized this competition.

Despite Stölzl's best intentions, Barenboim was incensed. He summarized Stölzl's plan as the, "ruin of two houses to save \$5 million out of a cultural budget of several hundred million

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

dollars,” something he clearly believed “makes no artistic or financial sense.”<sup>113</sup> Though Barenboim had no ties to East or West Germany in any way linked to national identity (except his connect to German music through his Jewish roots ), his representation of the Staatsoper’s unique culture signals that the rivalry encompasses far more history than just the few years of forced separation between East and West Berlin. The Staatsoper, Barenboim insisted, “is 250 years old, its Staatskapelle orchestra is the second oldest in the world, while the Deutsche Oper is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century creation. But instead of deciding priorities and saying one opera house, the Staatsoper, represents Germany and Berlin and must be supported, we have a muddled attempt to cement the now unaffordable cultural proliferation of the years of the Berlin Wall.”<sup>114</sup>

Barenboim’s very public protest drew the attention of many notable public figures, including business magnate Peter Dussmann. Dussmann, a longtime supporter of the Staatsoper pledged to donate \$450,000 to the Staatsoper annually for at least three years and promised to raise more funds through corporate sponsors.<sup>115</sup> Barenboim’s wealthy patron also funded an open letter protesting the merger, much like an earlier discussed below was written and signed by members of the Staatsoper. Like the first, it emphasized the importance of the Staatsoper’s history— both their personal connection to repertoire and many “bedeutene Namen.” Unlike the first, it did not address any of the technical aspects of the merger. Instead, much of the letter explained how, “Die geplante Zusammenglegung von Staatsoper und Deutscher Oper würde im Fall der Staatsoper eine über 250jährige Theatertradition, im Fall der Deutschen Oper eine knapp

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<sup>113</sup> Cohen, *Berlin Operas are Feuding*.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> “Star conductor offers rescue plan for opera house,” *Sun Journal*, November 4, 2000. Google News.

100kährige Tradition zunichte machen.”<sup>116</sup> Though much of the media coverage and discussion surrounding the merger seemed to treat the incident in relation to East and West Berlin, it is telling that the Staatsoper viewed their “künstlerische Substanz und Identität” as extending back far beyond the Cold War era separation. While the Berlin Wall had certainly aggravated an existing competition and tied each ensemble’s success with ideological superiority of competition political systems, the ensembles themselves realized that both their culture and rivalry were much deeply rooted.

In a 2003 interview, Thielemann skillfully articulated the divide between the contextual perception of the ensembles’ competition and its reality:

It’s true there isn’t a good atmosphere because everyone is fighting for subsidies. Competition is not good for cooperation... We’re both playing in the same league, The Staatsoper is older. We have a larger house and bigger repertory. We compete every evening, but when people say one is better than the other, there is always an East- West rivalry”<sup>117</sup>

While the media seemed to promote or at least reflect the public’s East and West rivalry in the context of the opera wars, the musicians of each ensemble focused far more on the institutional rivalry and unique identities of their ensembles.

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<sup>116</sup> “Die geplante Zusammenglegung von Staatsoper und Deutscher Oper würde im Fall der Staatsoper eine über 250jährige Theatertradition, im Fall der Deutschen Oper eine knapp 100kährige Tradition zunichte machen” (The planned merger of the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper will nullify, in the case of the Staatsoper a 250-year-old tradition and in the case of the Deutsche Oper a nearly 100-year-old tradition); Form letter, Deutsches Historisches Museum, online archive, October 2000, [www.dhm.de/datenbank](http://www.dhm.de/datenbank).

<sup>117</sup> Alan Riding, “Opera War in Berlin- Melodrama in 3 Acts,” *New York Times*, March 4, 2003, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

Only a few days after Stölzl's announcement, several prominent members of the Staatsoper Berlin sent out an open letter. This letter read:

Berlin's Minister of Culture, Prof. Dr. Christoph Stölzl, submitted a catalogue of measures for a reform of the structure of performing arts venues on October 12, 2000; with which, the existence of the current opera houses, theatres and orchestras in Berlin should be secured.

In the catalogue he suggests merging the two largest opera houses of the city, the Staatsoper and the Deutsche Oper, into one theatre, therefore drastically reducing the size of the combined orchestras, choirs and ballet ensembles. In total the orchestras will lose 77 jobs—40 in the choir the choirs and 16 in the ballet.

In the future, the members of the individual ensembles will be made available to every other ensemble when their own size is not enough to perform works of larger dimensions. This will result in orchestras, but also choirs and ballet ensembles, losing their artistic identity and distinctiveness in sound, style, tradition and training, and create a mere anonymous pool of artists.

Furthermore, the proposal suggests, that the State Opera would only be allowed to work with a repertoire ranging from baroque opera to the early 19th century works. The works of Wagner, Verdi, or Richard Strauss are to be taken off the program of the *Lindenoper* (*Staatsoper*) entirely. The opera house where Richard Strauss worked as general music director for twenty years—where he often conducted his own operas such as *Salome*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Der Rosenkavalier*— and in which Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* premièred, is considered to be unsuitable for the works of Strauss and Berg, which are only going to be performed in the Deutsche Oper from here on out.

If you consider this development to be dangerous and wrong, as we do, please ask the artists of the State Opera to protest against this decision. Enclosed you can find a draft of such a letter of protest.

Your protest can help to preserve the State Opera. Please send a corresponding letter to the President of the state parliament of Berlin, Mr. Reinhard Führer, 10111 Berlin (Prussian Landtag building). We rely on your support!<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Brigit Brux et al, *Letter to the Staatsoper Berlin*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, online archive, October 24, 2000, [www.dhm.de/datenbank](http://www.dhm.de/datenbank).; Original German: Der Berliner Kultursenator, Prof. Dr. Christoph Stölzl, hat am 12. Oktober 2000 einen Katalog von Maßnahmen zur Bühnenstrukturreform vorgelegt, mit dem der Bestand der Opernhäuser, der Sprechbühnen und der Orchester in Berlin dauerhaft gesichert werden soll. Darin schlägt er vor, die beiden großen Opernhäuser der Stadt, die Staatsoper und die Deutsche Oper, zu



Though brief, this letter highlights both the immediate grievances of the Staatsoper, and aspects of its history that were central to its identity. While the controlling members of the Staatsoper certainly objected to the loss of “seventy-seven orchestra positions, forty Choir positions, and sixteen Ballet positions,”<sup>119</sup> much of the letter focuses on repertoire. The merger would force the Staatsoper to only perform works from the Baroque era through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, saving the larger Romantic pieces for the Deutsche Oper. While this distinction was formed in accordance with the sizes of the respective theaters- the Opera House Unter den Linden was simply much smaller than the Deutsche Oper and could not easily accommodate the larger performances typical of the Romantic composers-the letter depicts this specialization as an assault on artistic freedom and an insult to the ensemble’s heritage.

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einem Theater zu fusionieren und hierbei die Kollektivkörper der Orchester, Chöre und Ballettensemble drastisch zu reduzieren. So sollen die Orchester 77 Stellen, die Chöre 40 Stellen und das Ballett 16 Stellen verlieren. Die Mitglieder der einzelnen Ensembles sollen zukünftig zu Aufführungsdiensten in den anderen Ensembles herangezogen werden, wenn deren Besetzungstärke zu Aufführung grösser dimensionierter Werke nicht mehr ausreicht. Dies hätte zu Folge, dass die Orchester, aber auch die Chöre und unser Ballettensemble ihre künstlerische Identität und Unverwechselbarkeit in Klang und Stil, in Tradition und Schulung verlieren und in einem anonymen Künstlerpool aufgehen würden. Darüber ist in dem Papier vorgesehen, dass an der Staatsoper zukünftig nur noch ein Repertoire von der Barockoper bis ins frühe 19. Jahrhundert aufgeführt werden darf. Die Werke Wagners, Verdis oder eines Richard Strauss sollen aus dem Spielplan der Lindenoper verschwinden. Das Haus, an dem Richard Strauss für 20 Jahre lang als Generalmusikdirektor wirkte und oft eigene Werke wie SALOME, ARIADNE AUS NAYOS UND DER ROSENKAVALIER selbst dirigierte und an den der WOZZECK von Alban Berg uraufgeführt wurde wird als ungeeignet für die Werke von Strauss und Berg erklärt, die zukünftig nur noch in der Deutschen Oper gegeben werden sollen. Wenn Sie diese Entwicklung wie wir, für gefährlich und falsch halten, so bitten Sie die Künstler der Staatsoper, gegen eine solche Entscheidung zu protestieren. Einen Entwurf für derartiges Protestschreiben finden Sie beiliegend. Ihr Protest kann zum Erhalt der Staatsoper beitragen. Bitte senden Sie ein entsprechendes Schreiben an den Präsidenten des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin, Herrn Reinhard Führer, 10111 Berlin (Preuss, Landtag). Wir sind angewiesen auf Ihre Unterstützung!

<sup>119</sup> Brigit Brux, *Letter to the Staatsoper Berlin*.

The Staatsoper's personal connection to Mozart, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Strauss, Wagner, and other celebrated figures was as important to its identity as its courtly background. Where the Deutsche Oper's novelty had given it the opportunity to experiment with both its performance space and its repertoire in the early twentieth century, the Staatsoper's prestigious background compelled the creation of the Kroll Opera for truly experimental pieces in order to maintain its reputation. Even in the Third Reich, the Staatsoper had relatively greater artistic freedom than the Deutsche Oper in part to maintain its distinction. For the merger to restrict the Staatsoper from performing Romantic works was viewed by its members as a personal attack on the ensembles' identity. Moreover, assigning this particular repertoire to the Deutsche Oper only heightened the rivalry between the two ensembles. Members of the Staatsoper were afraid not only to "lose their artistic identity and distinctiveness in sound and style, in tradition and training"<sup>120</sup> but also their perceived superiority over the Deutsche Oper.

As seen above, the division between the two groups was steeped in a competition which established long before the imposition of the division of East and West Berlin. While the ensembles themselves understood that their traditions and histories shaped their unique and opposing identities, the general public seemed to attribute their differences to the East-West conflicts to be overcome by reunification. Initially, many individuals, especially performers, give diplomatic answers regarding competition between ensembles and reunification. One member of the Deutsche Oper explained the conflict surrounding the merger by stating:

Before reunification, the Deutsche Oper was the only show in town. It made lots of money and even had around two or three separate performances a week. Suddenly, the wall fell and no one expected it. Berlin was left with three operas and none of them could really be closed down. They couldn't close the Komische Oper as it was the "heilige Kuh". They couldn't close the Staatsoper because it was historic and

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

also somewhat of a “heilige Kuh”. And they couldn’t close the Deutsche Oper because it was successful<sup>121</sup>

This balanced observation recognizes the success of each ensemble, while also acknowledging how reunification forced the groups to re-compete for resources, something that had not been an issue during separation of East and West. A theater teacher in West Berlin and frequent opera-goer gave a similar answer, focusing primarily on the technical aspects of reunification rather than differences in identity, “The biggest conflict between East and West was for that [single] generation. There was double of everything- orchestras, theaters, etc. and in East Germany there was far more than in the West....for this reason, maybe this generation blamed reunification.”<sup>122</sup> A musician with the DSO (Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin) related the conflict between the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper to his own ensemble, “Its [name] changed because it was too similar to an east German ensemble and was confusing. Both groups played similar music and had similar names. The Japanese once asked why the same orchestra toured twice a year.”<sup>123</sup> This man argued that despite all the assertions of a divided East and West identity, many ensembles in each sector were the same, even to a confusing degree.

Yet, despite the delicacy with which they addressed the topic, when asked to elaborate, each of these individuals spoke in depth about the distinctive identities of East and West Berlin and their respective ensembles. After only a few moments, it was obvious which “Germany” each identified with. Though some of the interviewees, like the theater teacher, described the difference between East and West performers in broad terms, “...it was very obvious to tell who was from east and who was from west through the way they spoke, how often they spoke, things

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<sup>121</sup> John Dawson (retired pianist for the Deutsche Oper) in discussion with the author, July 2015.

<sup>122</sup> Anonymous (performer and retired theater teacher) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Andreas Lichtschlag (cellist with the DSO) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

like that...,” the others articulated the differences in primarily two ways: through sound and leadership style.<sup>124</sup>

Both Matthias Glander, one of the Staatsoper members who took on a leadership role in the protest against the merger and a member of the DSO, a former West German Ensemble commented on a unique “German Sound.” This sound was, “darker” with “longer vibrato,” a sound that contrasted sharply against the Western, “efficient technique and brilliant sound.”<sup>125</sup> The DSO musician explained the distinction, “In the West, musicians were influenced by Russian-Jewish musicians who traveled to America and established this school of efficient technique and brilliant sound.”<sup>126</sup> While this musician’s observation is supported by academic literature—the German School of Music was distinct from the Russian School and the Russian school did highly influence American musicians in the early twenty-first century—he was quick to add his personal assessment, “I don’t know why [East Germans] didn’t go to Moscow to study as there were many good Russian teachers there.”<sup>127</sup> This simple statement reveals that this musician identified with and supported this Western style of playing while discriminating against the East German style of playing. Matthias Glander also describes the distinction between East and West German sound. However, Glander describes how Barenboim intentionally embraced this “tradition” and underscored its centrality to the Staatsoper’s identity:

Our former conductor was very sick and could not continue ... We asked Barenboim to come and do a rehearsal. Afterwards he said, “wow, what a wonderful sound. I remember this sound from the Israeli philharmonic of the 1950’s” (all the Jewish players were refugees from Germany). It was great for him to have this old German

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<sup>124</sup> Anonymous in discussion with the author, April 2015.

<sup>125</sup> Andreas Lichtschlag in discussion with the author, April 2015.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Andreas Lichtschlag in discussion with the author, April 2015.; Ruth Elizabeth Rodrigues, “Selected Students of Leopold Auer—A Study in Violin Performance Practice” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2009), University of Birmingham Research Archive e-theses repository.

cultural sound because orchestras in the west were much more mixed- American style, French style, British style. But this old German style was a very special sound- a lot of vibrato, etc. It's a unique thing. And he was very happy about it and he wanted to develop this sound/style...on the one hand to hold this tradition and on the other hand make us a modern orchestra able to play French music and Russian music (in a Russian style). But this German sound, this good German sound is something that was really special.<sup>128</sup>

Like the DSO musician, Glander recognizes the difference between the “old German cultural sound” and the more modern West German sound. In part, this distinction can be linked to migration, the Deutsche Oper, as a part of West Germany had many more foreign musicians who joined the ensemble. In contrast, the East German Staatsoper, primarily consisted of East German musicians. However, Glander describes how, in 1992, Barenboim became the Staatsoper’s music director and chose to maintain this sound and therefore promote the Staatsoper’s identity with its Prussian roots. Thus, while the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper certainly had different identities, in which their unique sounds were essential, these identities were cultivated and reinforced even during reunification.

The leadership style and personality of each ensemble’s music director also shaped their identities. While, as the various letters of protest show, the influence of Strauss, and other notable figures certainly shaped the Staatsoper’s reputation and character, Barenboim’s leadership has had the most recent impact. Critics describe Barenboim as a force to be reckoned with:

Barenboim is peripatetic--his critics say overextended--and stubbornly at home anywhere that music is played, from Berlin to Chicago, and indeed from Bayreuth, where he put in eighteen seasons, to Jerusalem, where he took on his own government this summer by conducting selections from "Tristan und Isolde," after agreeing to its demand that he drop Wagner from his program...He made an end run around the problem by conducting an approved program and, once it was over, having a long and "very personal" debate with the audience and then playing Wagner; "brazen, arrogant, uncivilized, and insensitive," the mayor of Jerusalem

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<sup>128</sup> Matthias Glander in discussion with the author, April 2015.

said. A music critic in Berlin once described the "Barenboim sound" ...not entirely approvingly... as "a belief that, with music, everything is better in the world"<sup>129</sup>

This distinct personality undoubtable shaped the personality of the Staatsoper. According to Glander, the Staatsoper specifically recruited Barenboim after he left his appointment in Paris. Whether Barenboim's reputation or strong ideals influenced the Staatsoper's leaders to seek out Barenboim, many would argue that his leadership style suited the ensemble well. A member of the Deutsche Oper characterized Barenboim as, "like the king, like an emperor or dictator."<sup>130</sup> The DSO musician echoed this sentiment, "Barenboim too is an example of this East German authoritarianism. Some people call him "the lion" because it is either his way or no way."<sup>131</sup> The West German association between Barenboim and "East German authoritarianism" speaks to the projected influence of divided Berlin on the Operas' existing competition. Barenboim's style may be more involved than Thielemann's, but as Barenboim is not from East Germany and took control of the ensemble after reunification, the association with East Berlin is merely a construct intended to distinguish the East German backwardness of the Staatsoper from the West German modernity of the Deutsche Oper.

Yet, this is all cultivated; not a reflection of reality. Frankly, Thielemann's dedication to "Germanness" seems better suited to the Staatsoper's image than the Deutsche Oper's:

Thielemann is, by his own account, proudly provincial; he would rather be in Berlin than in any other city. A critic in Stuttgart described the Thielemann sound to me as "a hundred and twenty musicians playing German music written between 1860 and 1920. Whatever he plays, it all sounds like that." It's hard to imagine Thielemann tackling a piece by a cerebral contemporary foreign composer like Pierre Boulez (as Barenboim has often done in concerts). "I don't trust people my age who are polyglot," Thielemann told me. "I stand with my feet on the ground of German music." But the fact is, as the critic said, that everything about Thielemann "sounds" German...he practices at the Deutsche Oper on a 1911 Bechstein, under a portrait of

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<sup>129</sup> Kramer, *Letter from Europe*.

<sup>130</sup> John Dawson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

<sup>131</sup> Andreas Lichtschlag in discussion with the author, April 2015.

Frederick the Great...He writes at a Bauhaus desk. He naps on a couch under a painting of a shutter on a window in a wall of the Charlottenburg Castle. He refers to himself...as "that very rare thing for Berlin . . . a conductor born here"<sup>132</sup>

For all the “modernity” of the Deutsche Oper-one member described it as a “conveyor belt of new people and instantaneous successes”<sup>133</sup>- Thielemann is rather traditional. While the Deutsche Oper is an international group, Thielemann is expressly a Berliner. His commitment to all things “German,” as depicted by the above excerpt, seems to better represent the Staatsoper’s Prussian roots. In one of his interviews Barenboim articulated the central issue of the merger, “instead of deciding priorities and saying one opera house...represents Germany and Berlin...we have a muddled attempt....”<sup>134</sup> This focus on “Germanness” can be seen both in Thielemann’s personal life and the Staatsoper’s commitment to their Prussian heritage. Both ensembles were created during different parts of Berlin’s history and therefore represent vastly separate images of the city. The forced separation of East and West Berlin only magnified the separateness of these two ensembles and their unique representations of “Germanness. When the two states were separated, there was less direct conflict over what constituted true Germanness as both states (and ensembles) could embrace their own concept separately. Reunification forced the groups to reevaluate this question. Not only were the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper forced to compete for resources, but they were also forced to compete to represent the ideal image of Germany.

The merger of the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper is not a simply competition over resources, nor is it simply a manifestation of reunification. The rivalry between these two groups is part of a centuries old competition between regional ensembles over prestige and

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<sup>132</sup> Kramer, *Letter from Europe*.

<sup>133</sup> John Dawson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

<sup>134</sup> Cohen, *Berlin Operas are Feuding*.

representation. The proximity of these two Operas only served to escalate the pressure. Journalist Laura Kramer articulated this phenomenon in her 2001 article *The Opera House Wars*, “The Opera House Wars were about another kind of politics. They were about putting a patent on Germanness. Or, you could say, they were about the Germanness of German music- who understands it, who gets to play it and how it should be performed...”<sup>135</sup> In this way, Theilmann’s standing performance of Wagner at Bayreuth and Barenboim’s controversial performance in Israel represent this very phenomenon. Wagner is not only one of the best know German composers, but his music was central to the Third Reich. The opportunity to perform and revise Wagner is an opportunity to define modern “Germaneness”. The proposed merger of these two groups ultimately failed because it would have, as Stölzl hoped “dispose[d] of [Berlin’s] incipient opera wars.”<sup>136</sup> Competition has been a central part of German cultural politics, from Fredrick the Great’s competition with Vienna, to competition between Nazi leaders’ ensembles, to the cultural side of the Cold War. A plan to eliminate this competition by creating one single “national” opera was doomed to fail, just as the first attempt at a National Theater did years before. Former Minister of Culture in Berlin, Michael Naumann proposed making the Berlin Philharmonic a national orchestra and was met with extreme backlash and opposition.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Kramer, *Letter from Europe*.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER IV REPRISE: WE GERMANS

A culture of competition and search for Germanness continues to effect the Opera Houses to this day. Though the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper sidestepped the merger, the financial problems that motivated the proposal remained. In 2003, the Berlin government once again proposed a solution- this time acknowledging the criticism of the previous proposal. This plan intended to keep the Deutsche Oper, Staatsoper, and Komische Oper separate, but coordinate them under the Berlin Opera Foundation. This foundation would be run by a general manager responsible for supervising the long term finances of the houses and encouraging them to coordinate programs to avoid overlap.<sup>138</sup> This proposal also intended to reduce the opera budget from \$123 to \$112.5 million. This reduction would eliminate about about ten percent of the opera's work force (about 220 jobs) though only eliminating eighteen orchestra players and five singers.<sup>139</sup>

This plan acknowledged the separate identities of the ensembles and granted them relatively more autonomy than the previous proposal. Yet, the proposal was accompanied by a subtle threat. Christoph Stölzl's successor, Thomas Flierl warned against protest by claiming that the federal government must approve funds for the transition and if those funds are not included in the federal budget, "the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper will be merged and reduced to one orchestra, one chorus, and one ballet company."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Stiftung Oper in Berlin, Oper in Berlin, *www.oper-in-berlin.de*.

<sup>139</sup> Riding, *Opera Wars in Berlin*.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Of course, despite the warnings, protest ensued. Most of the complaints once again came from the Staatsoper who objected to the \$2.5 million budget reduction and also claimed, “the government has stolen \$7 million dollars which we earned from our tours.”<sup>141</sup> Though ultimately, the Foundation was created on January 1, 2004,<sup>142</sup> the continuous protests against cultural policies demonstrates the endurance of a deeply seeded rivalry with implications for German identity. The Staatsoper fought against the 2003 proposal even though they knew the alternative. The most recent proposal did not challenge their identity as it allowed them to maintain control over repertoire and did not force a union with the Deutsche Oper. Yet, the second proposal amplified the rivalry as it would equalize the ensembles’ funding, thus removing tangible “proof” of superiority over the Deutsche Oper.

The 2003 Berlin opera conflict is a mere retelling of a story that has taken place many times over the past hundred years. The initial feud during the Weimar Republic, the nationalist fueled party rivalry, the imposed Cold War antagonism, and even the failed merger of 2000 are all variations on the same theme. Competition between ensembles is constant and in fact, central to German culture. Whether the competition is over resources, prestige, or representations of Germanness depends on the political context, though in all the stated cases, it is a mixture of each. The most recent proposal exemplifies this. The Staatsoper was upset with the planned Foundation as it was a threat to both their resources and their prestige, as it would equalize the stipends for each group. Yet, as Barenboim explains, the dissent was also based on a concept of Germanness, “There is still an ideological problem between east and west...In East Berlin the Staatsoper was always the representative house and the Komische Oper the people’s opera house.

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<sup>141</sup> Riding, *Opera Wars in Berlin*.

<sup>142</sup> Stiftung Oper in Berlin, [www.oper-in-berlin.de](http://www.oper-in-berlin.de).

Because Flierl is from the east, he doesn't want to touch the Komische Oper, and he won't touch the Deutsche Oper for fear of being accused of being anti-western. So, without meaning to, they are about to destroy the only opera house that works."<sup>143</sup> Implicit in this statement is the belief that the Staatsoper represents—more than the other operas—true Germanness. This is where the East and West problem is relevant. Even nearly fifteen years after German reunification, there is still debate over which side represents true German identity.

The East-West conflict is only the most recent interpretation of Germany's quest to define Germanness, it has been a project that has been launched and amended throughout German history. Some, like the Nazis, try to answer this question through the cultivation of cultural works that are expressly nationalistic. Others, like in the Opera Wars of 2000 use the legacies of existing cultural institutions to promote a certain idea of Germanness. Ultimately, it is a question that may never have a concrete answer as identity is fluid and perceptions of Germanness are bound to change. In the meantime, German ensembles will continue to compete over resources, prestige or identity because that is one trait that is truly German.

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<sup>143</sup> Riding, *Opera Wars in Berlin*.

**APPENDIX**

**INTERVIEWS WITH MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS**

**1. West German woman, children's theater teacher, and performer, born in Stuttgart, lived in West Berlin since the early 1960's:**

The biggest conflict between East and West was for that [single] generation. There was double of everything- orchestras, theaters, etc. and in East Germany there was far more than in the West. While a theater in the West may have twenty performers who perform in five plays a month, in the east there may have been two hundred performers, each who performed in maybe two [shows] per month. After reunification, the people who were at the top were able to "move up"- especially in the west. I was in my peak at forty-five and successful. The problem came for other older performers who were not the best because they missed out on roles. For someone who is twenty or twenty-five, that is not a problem. They have another chance. But for someone who is like me, that was a problem. It was a little more difficult for people in the east, especially those who were not in the top. For this reason, maybe this generation blamed reunification. Those who were the losers of reunification supported the left. To this day, it is a party of old people and easy to forget about, but now there are some more young people who are supporting Putin.

In my theater groups it was very obvious to tell who was from east and who was from west through the way they spoke, how often they spoke, things like that. Now it is a little less obvious. Perhaps it would take two hours [to discern].

Before reunification, all Germans must assume guilt for the holocaust, regardless of if it was before our time. SO Germany used an "umbrella of guilt" as sort of a defense mechanism to show...the rest of Europe "we are guilty" but then to have modern discussions underneath. After reunification this was no more.

Reunification and how quickly the East modernized was somewhat of a shock to other European countries. For so long we were comfortable under the presence of the Americans that a bigger and stronger modern Germany was startling. It wasn't just Germany and the Baltic states that were affected by the fall of communism- it created a stronger Europe.

**2. West German man, born in southern Germany, moved to Berlin in the 1970's, cellist for the DSO:**

“I was born in Southern Germany in 1955 where I went to music school I moved to Berlin to escape the Draft. They granted me four years to study but it was really a race to leave before they “got you”. In Berlin there was an agreement that you could not be drafted because of the other powers. I joined the DSO (Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin). It was founded by Americans and started as their radio orchestra but has had several name changes over the past several years. It changed because it was too similar to an east German ensemble and was confusing. Both groups played similar music and had similar names. The Japanese once asked why the same orchestra toured twice a year.

After the fall of the wall, money meant the fusion of orchestras including the DSO and Rundfunk radio. This was not popular because jobs would have been lost but it ultimately didn't happen because several different funding sources couldn't agree. East Germany lost lots of orchestras and groups during reunification but the West had lost many decades before due to an economic downturn.

Differences in East and West German orchestras can be seen by way of interaction. West German orchestras were much more democratic while east German orchestras were authoritarian. A colleague of mine was in a former East German orchestra. He was complaining about some aspect of the orchestra and I suggested to write a letter to the director. My colleague was shocked. In this orchestra one must first take to orchestra leaders and then go up the different levels. It was very hierarchical. Barenboim too is an example of this East German authoritarianism. Some people call him “the lion” because it is either his way or no way.

There was also a different style of playing in the East and West. In the West, musicians were influenced by Russian-Jewish musicians who traveled to America and established this school of efficient technique and brilliant sound. This was adopted in the West. In the East the traditional “darker” German sound- longer vibrato, etc.- was popular and you could hear the difference. I

don't know why [East Germans] didn't go to Moscow to study as there were many good Russian teachers there.

East German orchestras toured in other parts of the world. Only fifty out of two- hundred for example in an orchestra were allowed to go. Often, they were Stasi or had strong family ties. No divorced people were allowed to go for fear of desertion. Some musicians fled once in other countries though there was heavy state supervision. For example, I heard of one man in Japan who paid a cab driver to take him to the German Embassy, but the cab driver took him to the wrong one. What happened? I don't know. Maybe he was punished or not allowed to travel or no longer in the orchestra. Another man fled only one year before the wall fell and joined the DSO. His family had many disadvantages during this time. They were not allowed to study, not allowed to work, etc.

...

German identity is defined by state subsidies of music- it allows more people to go [to performances] and is affordable. I hope that isn't lost.

### **3. American expat in Berlin, recently retired pianist for the Deutsche Oper:**

Before reunification, the Deutsche Oper was the only show in town. It made lots of money and even had around two or three separate performances a week. Suddenly, the wall fell and no one expected. Berlin was left with three operas and none of them could really be closed down. They couldn't close the Komische Oper as it was the "heilige Kuh". They couldn't close the Staatsoper because it was historic and also somewhat of a "heilige Kuh". And they couldn't close the Deutsche Oper because it was successful. The biggest difference between the Staatsoper and the Deutsche Oper was the performers. The Staatsoper's singers were all friends of Daniel Barenboim while the Deutsche Oper directors knew who the good singers were and booked those that would draw a crowd.

Of the three ensembles, the Staatsoper is the oldest and most mature. It's also the most expensive, but they have more money anyway. Their claim to fame is their opera house. Barenboim is like the king, like an emperor or dictator. The Deutsche Oper is a young ensemble with lots of money. It is very open and a good working atmosphere. They can't fire you after 15 years. They make their money by being fast moving. It is like a conveyor belt of new people and instantaneous successes. They book very beautiful singers and some of them can actually sing! The Deutsche Oper but also have a scholarship program. There are two scholarships for American singers, one for European singers and one for Germans each year. They don't pay very much and cast smaller roles but are a way to attract younger and international singers. The Komische Oper is young and not very well known. I know they work their singers really hard and have good connections to Russian occupiers. Their newest Komische Oper director put on a new production by Bietto. It was set in the Red Light district with obvious sexuality. It was crazy violent, really very extreme. The people from the Old DDR watched it and were incensed. A lot of them left and the Komische Oper lost something like twenty percent of its old clients. But, this controversy encouraged younger clients to so I suppose that worked out.



#### **4. Matthias Glander- clarinetist, former Orchestrvorstand of the Staatsoper, and member of the Staatsoper since 1983**

I was from east; I couldn't go to west Berlin. Staatsoper for me was the highest level of playing and tradition. One more thing, that was very important was that this orchestra was playing in two worlds: opera world and concert world. From the beginning of time the orchestra was two faces, like the Vienna philharmonic. This is something specific to this orchestra. The Deutsche Oper orchestra is a reinesoper orchestra- concerts only three to four times a year. But we are serious. We go on tour. We're going to Europe next week, Japan next year, we played the Mahler cycle in NY....

The orchestra was able to travel before as a Botschafter- a cultural ambassador for the GDR . Went on tour with Opera House since the 1960s and 70s. went to Paris, Italy, Great Britain, Japan (who had a big connection from east Germany at this time because Japanese are very interested in German culture and German music). I was on tour the first time in 1985. The orchestra was going to England and it was my first time to go West. It was a special thing, typically the people in the east couldn't go. It was forbidden because of the iron wall. For me, it was a really great feeling to jump over the wall. Of course we took a flight. Of course it was not allowed...we had to fly north and fly through Denmark and then back for political reasons.

Reunification was really great. Everyone was high [read excited?] and it was a party. But a little bit later, a half a day, you know, after a big party you have a headache. There were lots of problems-especially in Berlin. Other people in the south didn't realize the problems we had in Berlin. The mentality of the people was so different. If you are coming from a free society, you are much more self-aware, and these people [not from the west] were a lot more shy. People started a little bit to fight within the society. The west wouldn't give something to the east, and the east waited for support. We got Barenboim in 1992. Before he was chief conductor of the Bastille Orchestra but there was political trouble and intrigue against him. He was fired. Our former conductor was very sick and could not continue because of Parkinsons, so he quit his duty and the position was free. We asked Barenboim to come and do a rehearsal. Afterwards he said, "wow, what a wonderful sound. I remember this sound from the Israeli philharmonic of the

1950s” (all the Jewish players were refugees from Germany) It was great for him to have this old German cultural sound because orchestras in the west were much more mixed- American style, French style, British style. But this old German style was a very special sound- a lot of vibrato, etc. It’s a unique thing. And he was very happy about it and he wanted to develop this sound/style and on the one had to hold this tradition and on the other hand make us a modern orchestra able to play French music and Russian music (Russians style). But this German sound, this good German sound is something that was really special.

We are the former east German orchestra and we have the old state opera house since 1742. Fredrick the greats’ first order was to build up an opera house because he was very interested in cultural things...the orchestra was already there since 1500s. He decided not only to play concerts, but also operas. SO this opera has a very old tradition in berlin. Since eighteenth century it was the musical center of berlin and created a bürgerliches Musikleben. Bach composed the the Brandenburg concerts. Since 1918 when the empire was stopped, it changed from Hofkapelle to Staatskappelle. In the end of the nineteenth century more and more orchestras were established and a new opera house was build 1912- Deutsche Oper. More too- Oper Komic and Metropol theater for operettas. Then WWII the result was dividing Germany into four parts and the same with berlin. But we already had three opera houses in berlin, SO- DO- opera comic- and one more maybe?

The situation we had before war was same as after. Then we had cold war and when the wall came down, it was normal. Just the financial situation around 2000 was a reason to think about some collaboration and some fusion. There was a Bankenskandal and Berlin was becoming very poor. So then they thought let’s put together everybody. But it doesn’t make sense to bring together different ensembles, different orchestras together that don’t have any connection- any geimeinsame tradition- they had their own tradition. It is really very complicated to match them.

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