

Fight to save Philharmonia Hungarica orchestra stirs a deep response

by Hartmut Cramer

“It is more important than ever, that the free world show it is still the free world.”

With these words, the famous conductor Antal Dorati in a recent interview motivated the political necessity of saving the refugee orchestra Philharmonia Hungarica, which was founded in Vienna in 1957, and found a permanent home in Marl, West Germany in 1959. As part of the tilt toward Moscow which has been the Bonn government’s reaction to the “New Yalta” deal between Washington and Moscow, the very existence of this orchestra is threatened.

When Russian tanks moved into Budapest more than 30 years ago, bloodily crushing the hopes of the Hungarian population fighting for human rights and dignity, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian patriots were forced to move westward, literally overnight, to save their own lives. Among them were hundreds of professional musicians who often couldn’t rescue their instruments. At that time, these patriotic musicians were welcomed by Western governments who, like now, lacked the guts to fight Moscow politically, but who at least, unlike now, wanted to give a clear political signal that they were opposed to Moscow culturally.

In the 30 years since then, the political and cultural matrix of the West has undergone a profound change. Not only has the great classical tradition in art been considerably undermined—in many cases destroyed—but the West is no longer willing to defend its cultural tradition, the very heart of its existence, against Moscow’s outrageous attacks. *Glasnost* leaves no room for artistic freedom in the classical sense.

That is the political background to the blatant attempt to destroy one of the world’s finest classical orchestras: the Philharmonia Hungarica, famous not only for its many international awards, among them the Golden Record for the only recording of all 104 Haydn symphonies, a unique artistic undertaking, but also for its formidable courage and strength in overcoming each and every obstacle threatening its existence.

Little-minded bureaucrats

Superficially, the fight for the orchestra, which has played with the world’s leading conductors and soloists like Antal Dorati, Rafael Kubelik, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Joseph Szigeti, Yehudi Menuhin, Wolfgang Schneiderhan, Henryk Szeryng, and Janos Starker, to name only a few, is about

money, as usual. When the Adenauer government in 1959 invited the Philharmonia Hungarica to settle permanently in West Germany, in the little town of Marl in the Ruhr region, the orchestra’s budget was divided as follows: 90% of the money would be provided by the federal government in Bonn and the remaining 10% in equal parts by the state government in Dusseldorf, North Rhine-Westphalia, and the city of Marl.

Now, this is being put into question. Suddenly, at the beginning of this year, the Christian Democratic government in Bonn announced its decision to cut its part to 50%, thereby condemning the orchestra to death from next year on. The whole city of Marl was mobilized, politicians were put under pressure, and in feverish negotiations behind the scenes, Bonn was forced to gradually increase its part to at least 80%, on the condition that the other two funders would double their shares. The city of Marl, though badly hit by the economic disaster in the Ruhr region, immediately agreed, but the Social Democratic government in Dusseldorf stubbornly refused.

Each and every argument was used by the cultural bureaucrats in Dusseldorf in order to justify their decision to destroy a classical orchestra: “We already have enough mediocre orchestras in our region,” and, “Do unemployed steelworkers get a job by listening to classical music?” were the standard formulas used by the people “responsible” for cultural affairs. Their boss, Cultural Minister Schwier, even explained to a stunned audience on a recent radio talk show, “Mozart’s music at his time was just entertainment; today, it is rock music which the public likes.”

Since all these silly arguments could easily be refuted by the outstanding musical quality of this orchestra, Dusseldorf in a sudden about face then argued, “Since this orchestra is so important, it is the responsibility of the federal government in Bonn to pay.” So, the buck was passed between the two “capitals.”

The call of the Schiller Institute

This deadlock was only broken when the international Schiller Institute, famous in the musical world since its April 9 conference in Milan which called for lower orchestral tuning, joined the fight and made it known to a broad public. Especially after the president of the Schiller Institute, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, issued a call to “help to save the orchestra,”

whose existence is threatened by “short-sighted politicians and little-minded cultural bureaucrats,” some of the leading artists of the world went into action:

● **Antal Dorati**, world-famous conductor, best known in the United States as the former chief conductor in Minneapolis, Dallas, and Detroit, and music director of the Washington, D.C. National Symphony Orchestra, who has conducted all the great orchestras of the world, was among the first to sign the call of the Schiller Institute. Dorati, the honorary president of the Philharmonia Hungarica, is rightly

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being considered one of the “fathers” of this orchestra, since he helped it from the very beginning in 1956, and always at crucial moments. It was under his baton that the orchestra accomplished the enormous task of recording the Haydn symphonies.

Though presently not in good health, 82-year-old Maestro Dorati gave an interview to the German cultural magazine *Ibykus*, blasting the German cultural bureaucrats. He demanded that this “critical moment become the turning point” for the orchestra, to save it once and for all, and “give it its justified place in German cultural life.”

● **Wolfgang Sawallisch**, the chief conductor at the prestigious Bavarian State Opera in Munich and one of the leading conductors in the world, also signed the call to save the Philharmonia Hungarica, an orchestra which he himself has conducted in the past.

● **Norbert Brainin**, the first violinist of the legendary Amadeus Quartet, who showed the civic courage to dedicate a Boston recital with pianist Günter Ludwig to his “good friend Lyndon LaRouche” last December, not only supported the call, but sent a personal telegram to Johannes Rau, the prime minister of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, urging him to use “all his political influence such that this orchestra is saved and its future secured.”

● **Reinhard Peters**, professor of conducting at the Folkwang Musical High School in Essen, West Germany, and internationally known because of his many concerts with the world famous Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, signed not only the Schiller Institute’s call to save the refugee orchestra, but also its call for the lower tuning. Peters was the chief con-

ductor of the Philharmonia Hungarica for many years.

● **Werner Thärichen**, the former solo tympanist of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, who worked for seven years under the great Wilhelm Furtwängler and who played with the Philharmonia Hungarica several times, also signed. Thärichen became famous recently for his book *Paukenschläge (Drumbeats)*, in which he gives a brilliant analysis of the two conductors Furtwängler and Herbert von Karajan, not mincing any words in his support for the “creative artist” Furtwängler over the “admittedly successful manager” von Karajan.

● **Franz Meyers**, a former Christian Democratic prime minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, was the first known politician to sign the call of the Schiller Institute. Meyers, a close friend of the late Konrad Adenauer, fought during 1960 to save the Philharmonia Hungarica from many attempts to destroy it then.

The members of the orchestra themselves were “more than delighted” over the call of the Schiller Institute and are presently distributing it among their friends, colleagues, guest conductors, and members of the many choruses they are performing with. To demonstrate the wave of sympathy for the orchestra: One guest conductor signed the call at a recent rehearsal with the words, “I will sign anything that is for the Philharmonia Hungarica.”

New hope for the orchestra

Indeed, there is now hope for the orchestra. In light of this impressive support by some of the world’s leading artists and faced with the perspective that a negative decision will definitely result in a public outcry for the preservation of classical culture in West Germany, the Bonn government has showed signs of its willingness to give in. Undoubtedly, this decision was facilitated by the fact that a new wave of refugees from the East is rolling toward West Germany, with up to 2 million desperate people expected in the next two years, among them at least 2,000 qualified musicians.

Since Bonn is strongly in favor of a détente policy with Soviet Russia, no matter how brutally Moscow strikes at the West, it is trying to “solve” the refugee problem in a quiet way. Some sly bureaucrats in Bonn obviously think it is “cheaper” to pay some 350,000 deutschemarks to keep the mouths of Philharmonia Hungarica supporters shut, at a time when the demand to create several new refugee orchestras could come up very soon.

The orchestra has been told it can expect—though nothing has been set down in writing—not only the necessary money to save it, but also probably additional money to pay up to 15 top string players that are badly needed. The word is that the Philharmonia Hungarica will be saved for “another five years,” during which time, “the orchestra can demonstrate what it’s worth,” as some idiot politicians dared to tell these famous musicians. This is not just outrageous, but a clear hint that the bureaucrats in Bonn and Dusseldorf want to retract their commitment as soon as it is politically feasible.