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The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

by

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Editor's Digest

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

For long-time readers of *Harmony*, the name of this case study's author, Erin Lehman, will ring a bell. For the first issue of *Harmony*, Erin prepared an essay on the development of writings about symphony orchestra organizations since 1960. She has also worked with Harvard colleagues on studies of symphony orchestras in four countries. And for the last several years, her interest has been piqued by the concept of self-governing orchestras. She shares here her observations of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

How the Orchestra Functions

The Berlin Philharmonic was founded, as a self-governing orchestra, more than a century ago. It is a large orchestra, with 129 members, and has had a roster of legendary conductors. From its beginnings, players have been the shareholders and principal stakeholders.

Lehman explores what this means in terms of day-to-day functioning of the orchestra, from the fact that non-principal players all earn the same pay to the fact that orchestral candidates audition without a screen. She identifies four aspects of orchestra operations as critical to the institution's ongoing vitality: the self-rostering system employed by each section; the absence of an external personnel manager; players' rights to participate in smaller ensembles; and players' exclusive right to choose their own conductor.

She then turns her attention to what makes the Berlin Philharmonic work, concluding that success stems from extensive communication and collaboration, particularly among a small group of people. By the time you finish reading this essay, the words *Vorstand* and *Intendant* will roll off your tongue.

The Berlin Philharmonic's world is not without change. Just as the City of Berlin has felt the winds of change over the last several years, so has the orchestra. Sir Simon Rattle has recently been named to succeed Claudio Abbado as chief conductor. The current Intendant has announced plans to leave the orchestra. But Lehman is not worried. She concludes that notions of personal responsibility, artistic self-determination, and the paramount importance of music are the essential hallmarks of the orchestra's self-governing system.

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

In 1989, I began work with Richard Hackman and Jutta Allmendinger in a study of professional symphony orchestras, designed to explore how orchestras in four countries were structured, supported, and led, and to learn how musicians in these orchestras built their careers. We studied the similarities and differences that existed among professional symphony orchestras in East and West Germany, Great Britain, and the United States (Allmendinger, Hackman, and Lehman, 1996). Much was made of the study's findings about player job satisfaction (Holland, 1995), but that was not the study's sole or most important finding. For example, we learned much about the advantages (and disadvantages) of the typical leadership triumvirate commonly found in American orchestras (Judy, 1996). We also learned some things about the funding systems, recruitment practices, and the impact of gender composition on orchestras (Galinsky and Lehman, 1995; Lehman, 1995; and Allmendinger and Hackman, 1995). But the things that piqued my interest were the differences in organizational structures, and, in particular, the concept of a self-governing system. I wanted to find out more about self-governance, and whether and to what degree *that* made a difference in the musical outcome of an orchestra.

I started to answer my question by taking a closer look at three select orchestras. My colleagues and I studied the London Symphony Orchestra—one of London's four self-governing orchestras (Lehman and Galinsky, 1994); the Colorado Symphony Orchestra—not a true self-governing orchestra, but still an anomaly in its early partnership model (Lehman, 1997); and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra—a most democratic and conductorless ensemble (Lehman and Lee, 1996). These orchestras revealed the range of self-governing approaches musicians have taken to shape their collective musical lives in ways that harness the power of the group without stultifying the voice of the individual.

But in my view, it is the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra which offers a near-ideal example of a self-governing organization. Unlike the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, the players truly rule. Unlike the London Symphony Orchestra, there is no singular managerial leader who sculpts the orchestra's strategic direction. And in contrast with Orpheus, there is no external board which exerts the ultimate control. This unique organization is by no means perfect in its design or appeal, but it does suggest an alternative model, in part, if not in whole, for orchestra practice.

I began conducting field and archival research on the Berlin Philharmonic in late 1997. In 1998, I had the good fortune to meet Bernhard Kerres, an associate with Booz-Allen & Hamilton in Munich, Germany. Bernhard and I are working to develop an educational case study seeking to explain the challenges this self-governing orchestra faces in a changing Germany. Much of the material contained in this article is a result of our work on that case.¹

Let me offer one last prefatory comment. Some observers have said that the Berlin case is special, and *not* relevant for the rest of the orchestra field because

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of this orchestra’s high level of public subsidy and protected status as the premier cultural emissary of Germany. I disagree. Despite its historically preeminent situation, the orchestra *is* facing the same issues as orchestras around the world—how to augment earned income in an increasingly competitive world marketplace; the precipitous decline of the recording industry; meeting the needs of future audiences. As other orchestras are learning, this one, too, must emerge from its cocoon and become more proactive in shaping its organizational strategy and its destiny. The Berlin Philharmonic is no longer immune to the sociopolitical and economic forces that have swept through German society. For

example, following the merger of East and West Berlin, the City of Berlin’s Senate, the prime funder of the Berlin Philharmonic, has been pressed to find ways to make budget cuts in order to meet all the city’s needs. Unlike in the United States, where orchestras depend on unearned income from endowments, individual philanthropy, and corporate sponsorship to balance their budgets, modern Germany has no tradition of largesse, nor does current German tax code facilitate such giving.

A Snapshot of the Orchestra

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world’s fine orchestral ensembles. Founded in 1882 as a self-governing orchestra by a group of musicians who were not pleased with the working conditions they found in the Bilsle Orchestra, this venerable 117-year-old institution has a rich and colorful past.² In surviving every historic milepost of late 19th and 20th century German history, and having had a roster of legendary conductors such as Bülow, Nikisch, Furtwangler, and Karajan, this is an orchestra whose reputation has grown to near mythical proportions.³

Leading orchestras in Germany have larger rosters than their American or British counterparts. The Berlin Philharmonic has 129 members, of whom 3 are concertmasters and another 22 are co-principals. Maintaining a comparatively large roster is intended to keep the members as completely rested and fresh for performance as possible, given the emotionally intense and physically stressful

aspects of their work. As one young player described a recent Carnegie Hall performance, “The tremolo in Bruckner’s Fifth Symphony is exceedingly difficult to play. . . . For the violinists and violists it is extremely exhausting. It’s like a marathon. But it’s *so much* fun! . . . A lot of people like to make music on a *tame* level—we don’t.”

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The Berlin Philharmonic is devoted to the German tradition of music and music making; the majority of players are German citizens. Twenty percent of the members are foreigners and eight percent of the orchestra are women. The first woman, a Swiss violinist, was hired into the orchestra in 1982. Although most of the orchestra’s newly hired players

are quite young, they join the ranks with many veterans, some of whom served under Karajan. About the changing complexion of the orchestra, one player said, “I was only about the tenth foreigner when I came into this orchestra in 1986. It was a *very German* orchestra. Then all of a sudden, about one-third of the orchestra retired in about ten years’ time. Those players were proud of their work together over the past 30 years under Karajan. Now, there are new people coming into a ‘ready-made’ institution.”

The orchestra performs some 100 concerts each year in Berlin alone, as well as throughout the Continent and overseas.⁴ It operates its own hall, the Philharmonie, located at Potsdamer Platz in central Berlin.

Terms of Employment and Self-Governance

The orchestra was designed from the start as a self-governing entity, meaning that the players were the shareholders and principal stakeholders in the organization. By 1932, the Berlin Philharmonic was operating as a limited liability corporation and the orchestra had been nationalized by its own choice. By 1952, when the German musicians’ union was formed, the players were working under the terms of a conventional master agreement called a *Tarifvertrag*.

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Although the musicians’ union negotiates collective agreements for all orchestras, the Berlin Philharmonic has its own individual agreement. Unlike other German orchestras, in which the number of services is controlled, the Berlin Philharmonic has neither restrictions on hours worked nor any official restrictions on overtime (or requirements for extra pay for overtime). In fact, there is neither a clock nor a clock mentality to be found on the stage of the Philharmonie. The workload can become much more

intense than that of leading American orchestras. During the month of April 1999, for example, the Berlin Philharmonic performed 36 services on 22 consecutive days, directly preceded and followed by multiweek international tours.

As with the handful of other self-governing orchestras around the world, such as the London Symphony Orchestra and the Vienna and Israeli Philharmonic Orchestras, equality is essential to the functioning of this musical democracy. Non-principal members of the orchestra all earn the same basic salary. There are no individual negotiations for merit pay. Principal players do earn 25 percent more, and members with families receive higher family allowances as mandated by German labor law. Orchestra members' average age is 44. Retirement is mandatory at age 65.

Within the master agreement, the orchestra's bylaws (or *Verwaltungsordnung*) set forth the rules of governance and enshrine the orchestra's historic and traditional rights of membership. Three areas of the bylaws are noteworthy.

Those that deal with key personnel:

- ◆ The orchestra chooses its permanent conductor.
- ◆ The Intendant (general manager) is appointed by the Minister for Culture on behalf of the City of Berlin, in consultation with the orchestra which must approve the decision.

- ◆ An orchestral candidate must audition without a screen before the entire orchestra. If he or she receives a simple majority of votes of the orchestra, the candidate is accepted for "Probezeit," i.e., a probation or trial period. If the permanent conductor attends the audition, he has one vote as well. At the end of this Probezeit, or possibly before that date (there is a maximum of two years allowed for a trial period), the section in which the candidate will play offers a recommendation to the orchestra. After a

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debate, the entire orchestra then votes by secret ballot on this candidacy for permanent membership in the orchestra. To win membership, the candidate needs a two-thirds majority vote. The permanent conductor has a theoretical veto right, but it has rarely been used.

Those that deal with governing bodies:

- ◆ The Orchestervorstand (a two-person committee) is elected by the orchestra membership for three-year terms. The Vorstand have the strongest voice in all artistic and administrative decisions and are the official spokespersons for the orchestra membership;
- ◆ The Fuenferrat is a council of five players also elected from the orchestra membership, with each member serving a three-year term. This council acts as an advisory body to the Vorstand. It might be called on to advise on certain artistic matters, but its main duties are tour arrangements,

auditions, and keeping track of player work data. Although the Vorstand are paid extra for their service, the Fuenferrat are not.

- ◆ The Personalrat, as with other German companies, is an independent body which oversees personnel and working-condition issues for all employees of the Berlin Philharmonic organization, including the stagehands, technicians, and administrative staff of the Philharmonie hall, as well as the musicians. The Personalrat is an elected committee of seven representatives (serving four-year terms) representing all sectors of the organization. This committee can intervene in, and even veto, many management decisions.

Those that deal with non-governing committees:

- ◆ The Berliner Philharmoniker (GbR) is a corporate partnership composed of past and present members of the orchestra. The partnership is run by two to three players elected from the orchestra for three-year terms. It is responsible for marketing the orchestra's performance rights, and for copyrights associated with recording and filming of the Berlin Philharmonic. However, radio income is handled by the Intendant.
- ◆ The Kamaradschaft plays an important role in the Berlin Philharmonic's social fabric. Similar to an alumni committee, the Kamaradschaft serves as the principal link between past members of the orchestra and the current organization. Its activities—from obtaining concert tickets for retirees to hosting the annual Christmas party—serves to keep the ties strong and to honor past orchestra members.

Critical Aspects of the Orchestra's System

Four important aspects of the orchestra's operations reinforce the vitality of this organizational system and its membership:

- ◆ the sections' self-rostering system;
- ◆ the absence of an external personnel manager;
- ◆ the chamber music and the Herbert von Karajan Academy; and,
- ◆ the players' exclusive right to choose their own conductor.

The string section's rotation system is governed by no discernible rules or system. Players decide freely among themselves, and often quite spontaneously, where they wish to sit in the section for a given program. All positions, up to and including the first desk, are decided this way. However, the wind, brass, and percussion sections are less flexible, as a higher

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degree of instrumental specialization is necessary in these groups. But they, too, organize themselves, and independently determine their free time, not needing to seek permission from a “higher” authority. The music director is not allowed to determine seatings. However, the Vorstand bear the formal responsibility for the outcome of these internal rostering and rotation decisions. As frustrating as this may be for conductors, the Berlin Philharmonic maintains a self-rostering system because it further reinforces the concept of artistic self-determination and equality. Every member is considered to be of equal caliber and, therefore, equally capable and interchangeable. The system of rotation keeps the orchestra fully engaged throughout a season.

In contrast to most other orchestras in the world, the Berlin Philharmonic has no personnel manager or similar functionary. Musicians are, for example, individually responsible for adhering to bus, train, or plane schedules when on tour. Missing a connection for whatever reason results simply in the musician having to buy his or her own replacement ticket at his or her own expense. The functions typically performed by the personnel manager in an American orchestra are taken up by the Fuenferrat and the members of the orchestra themselves.⁵

In addition to their work with the full orchestra, players are permitted to take part in the 26 smaller ensembles which exist independently of the organization,

“... players are permitted to take part in the 26 smaller ensembles which exist independently of the organization, and are allowed to use the Philharmonic’s name if they so choose.”

and are allowed to use the Philharmonic’s name if they so choose. These ensembles are autonomous, and range from the famous 12 Cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic to the Scharoun Ensemble Berlin and the Philharmonic Wind Quintet. There are also opportunities for teaching, and many players give private lessons. Some players hold teaching professorships at local music schools, and some are faculty of the orchestra’s own Herbert von Karajan Academy, a separate legal entity founded by its namesake. This is a small enterprise to which selected, promising young musicians from around the world come to study as fellows for a period of two years. These musicians gain training through private lessons, primarily with principal players of the Berlin Philharmonic, and through opportunities to perform with the orchestra when substitutes are

needed. In this way, the orchestra develops new candidates for its own ranks, and several current members of the orchestra are alumni of the Academy.

Arguably, the most important feature of this orchestra is the right of the players to choose their own chief conductor. Few other orchestras in the world allow musicians this authority. This right is expressly stated in the bylaws, and is a principal tenet of the organization. Technically speaking, the musicians did not select Bülow, Nikisch, or Furtwangler. Those individuals were proposed by

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the Wolff Concert Agency, and the orchestra simply ratified their appointments. Karajan, although also approved by the orchestra, had been waiting in the wings. Certainly, those conductors had the confidence and vote of the players. But, to be more precise, in 1989, Claudio Abbado was the first permanent conductor actually to be elected by the orchestra membership, following a selection process designed and carried out solely by the orchestra members. When the vote was taken, players had to be present (no proxies were allowed) and a two-thirds majority was required. At that time, there was much debate

among players as to the leader they wanted—and should have—on the podium, and the ramifications of their choice.

In 1999, the considerations were even more significant. As much as Claudio Abbado was celebrated for his work with the orchestra, his plan to leave in 2002 represents a turning point. Abbado has been described as a living link to the past, the Romantic era. The orchestra faced the decision of whether to replace him with an older, established conductor—linking to that tradition—or to find a new, perhaps younger, but potential powerhouse.⁶ As much as the choice was a monumental issue for the orchestra, it was also significant for the next music director. Said one veteran player:

This is a strange beast. We are an obstreperous bunch. Think about it: we elect our own music director democratically and then give him enormous authority. But we may also fight him along the way. We are fiercely independent, but we tolerate our conductors. How can they (music directors) live with this? Not all conductors can deal with this. It's like the Roman consuls. They were given dictatorial power for two years and then they were out. Not many conductors can handle this duality/dichotomy.

Leadership and Leadership Relationships

There are a number of constituencies that both formally and informally influence one aspect or another of the Berlin Philharmonic's operation—from external forces, such as local politicians and German labor law, to the internal committee structure and the full orchestra itself. For example, the Minister for Culture not only conveys the annual appropriation from the City of Berlin's Senate, but also its wishes and concerns. These might include such items as who they would like to see as Intendant or even chief conductor, and the level of domestic touring in Germany. Then there is the Personalrat, mandated by German labor law, which can intercede in anything having to do with workplace conditions, and even on some administrative decisions. Orchestra members, in addition to selecting their own conductor and their fellow players, also select and vote on candidates for Intendant. This choice, as that of the chief conductor, must have

the consent of the Senate, through the Minister of Culture who finalizes the contracts, because both the chief conductor and the Intendant are employed and paid by the Senate, as are members of the orchestra.

To be sure, the organization's leadership is vested first and foremost in the Vorstand, and then further through the Intendant and chief conductor. The chief conductor is expected to set the musical direction for the organization by designing a compelling artistic approach for the orchestra. He suggests what repertoire he will perform in the 30 percent of the season's programs he leads, as well as which guest conductors and solo artists should be invited during a particular season. It is up to the Intendant then to work out these arrangements. The Intendant's role is fundamentally one of coordination and implementation. He also has responsibility for the organization's administration and financial operations, and deals with the Minister for Culture on matters having to do with the annual budget and quarterly accounting.⁷ The Vorstand must be fully apprised of and can intervene in all of these areas at any time. For example, the conductor seeks agreement with the Vorstand about his artistic plan, including guest conductors, soloists, repertoire, and even touring; the Vorstand discuss with all conductors (chief and guest) the number of rehearsals that will be needed (or should be used); together with the conductor and/or Berliner Philharmoniker, the Vorstand approve recording projects; and they are informed of important budgetary concerns.

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Communication and Collaboration

In the final analysis, the operational success of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra turns on the relationships among three to four people who must be in constant contact and agreement with one another. The bylaws of the organization make it self-governing, but its leadership in action is based on the notion of “Mitbestimmung” or co-determination. The present Intendant said, “It is a fascinating subject because it works so well. As long as everything goes well, there is no question about this form of governance.” The Intendant had a long and productive working relationship with Claudio Abbado before coming to the

Berlin Philharmonic. And he feels a collegiality with the two Vorstand. “They often solve [internal orchestral] problems themselves although they keep me informed. And I am always presenting my ideas for consideration.” In fact, the Intendant and the Vorstand find themselves in constant communication—either face-to-face during rehearsal breaks backstage, in the Philharmonic's offices, or by cell phone at all hours of the day or night. According to the Intendant, the rules of their working

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relationship are not formalized. For him, the relationship is akin to what sociologists call symbolic interaction: “You create rules by the actions you take.” One former Vorstand reinforced this notion: “You need two things: good people and you need the rules. But the best is when it works *without* rules!” The working relationships and balance among these key individuals are critical for the organization. The orchestra, too, is concerned that the organization’s leaders are all focused on the long-term health of the institution. Right now, there is a clear and mutual understanding about what needs to be done.⁸

One important characteristic of a good Vorstand, according to one, is that “he have his ear in the orchestra,” meaning a Vorstand must know what the orchestra is thinking; to be in touch with the other orchestra members. But each Vorstand has the five members of the Fuenferrat to help in this regard. The Fuenferrat are important in the leadership structure because they extend the Vorstand’s ability to reach and even poll the entire orchestra when need be, and they manage details for which the Vorstand do not have time. Communication is further facilitated by full orchestra meetings which are typically held on a bimonthly basis, or as needed. With all the impending decisions in 1999, the orchestra met monthly. Vetting important orchestra decisions is a key operating principle of the organization, but often there are sensitive issues that cannot be shared with the full orchestra. Some members are concerned by the potential for “a lack of transparency” in organizational decision making. And yet, to the Vorstand, this is a necessity. As one of them said, “Everything is transparent, *except* for the secrets.”

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Other important characteristics of the Vorstand are the ability to think strategically, to plan ahead, to take responsibility, and to have “strong nerves” for the tremendous demands placed on them (there is no reduction in orchestra services nor generous compensation for taking the Vorstand position). Burnout is a hazard. As a former Vorstand described it, “This job needs a lot of time. It’s very hard. You’re always working. And you can’t afford to be everyone’s friend: not between the conductor and the orchestra, and not between orchestra members.” About his experience, he said, “We were involved with the Intendant all the time. We were always together talking and deciding things. We were not so involved with the budget. That’s the Intendant’s responsibility, but we certainly know what problems there are. The role is like one of a judge. You are always having to find compromise—and then having to explain that to the orchestra.”

Cultivating Participation

Cultivating member participation is a vital part of this democratic organization. Responding to a question about how players are developed into future leaders, a former Vorstand said, “Now there is a big generation change in the orchestra. Over the last 10 years, we have hired 60 new members and most of them are younger. They will need more time within the orchestra before they become

interested and before they can become good orchestra leaders.” In fact, the orchestra requires that players be members of the orchestra for at least five years before they can run for election. (This has been reduced from a ten-year minimum). To be nominated, a candidate needs just five player signatures. Still, participation is always an issue. Often there is only one candidate for a vacant post, yet an election must still be held. For example, October 1998 was the triennial election of the Vorstand. Only the current Vorstand indicated their interest in running for the two posts. In light of this, and concerned for the health of the process, one of them initially stepped aside and encouraged two other players to run. However, the present Vorstand won the necessary majority votes.

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About this experience, the younger of the two candidates who were not elected said: “I felt a little young to be doing this, but on the other hand, I had ideas—like transforming the Philharmonie hall into a more dynamic place to attract people to Potsdamer Platz. We need restaurants and more modern marketing. The problem with the election is that there is no way to really share your ideas. The vote is based mostly on personal reputation.” In the end, this player was glad he was not elected, but he was still very concerned about his orchestra and its situation: “Politically, we’re all dilettantes and we’re not professional managers, but the goal is to maintain this musical environment—because it’s what brings out our best.” The other candidate, an orchestra veteran, was also rather relieved. “I am a free man!”

Nevertheless, he was also concerned about the issues at hand for the orchestra and its future. As he said, “The orchestra is somewhat unsettled now. There is the impending change in conductorship. We are very concerned about our compensation. We work extremely hard. But we do it for the music. This is why you join the orchestra.”

Despite impending changes within the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra organization, players appreciate their special brand of music making. Most players would agree that they are “a bunch of strong-minded individuals.” As one young member put it, “We are spiritual brethren here. We all see music the same way! It’s great when you have like-minded people to work with. We don’t know much about management. And this orchestra may not be for everyone, but it’s great for us!” A former Vorstand reinforced the point with a wry smile, “You know good people often have strong personalities. Sometimes it would be easier to have people who would just go along. But all we need is a majority and the other 49 percent can be upset. This is a democracy.”

“The Philharmonic Spirit”: An Outgrowth of Organizational Structure

In addition to having an impressive roster of permanent and guest conductors, the Berlin Philharmonic has worked with the greatest composers and solo artists of the day—from Richard Strauss in the 1890s to Paul Hindemith in the 1950s and Hans Werner Henze in the 1990s, and from famed violinist Yehudi Menuhin in the 1920s to Anne-Sophie Mutter in the 1990s. But perhaps most importantly, the orchestra itself is composed of some of the finest musicians in the world. Each is of soloist caliber, and many are showcased in the orchestra’s own concerts. Arguably, the orchestra’s most distinguishing marks are not only the tremendous talent of its members, but also the high standard they set for themselves—and to which they adhere from generation to generation. To be a “Philharmoniker” has always been considered by many a great accomplishment, and similar to membership in an exclusive club. Moreover, it is often said that the Berlin Philharmonic has a certain, special spirit, a “Philharmonischer Geist,” an unparalleled “esprit du corps.” The essence of that Philharmonic spirit comes from two sources: its legal and operating structure, and its few, but inviolate, group norms.

Remarkably, the special spirit of the Berlin Philharmonic is passed on and imbues each player. This is apparent during performances when all members evidence a deep sense of responsibility for the outcome of the concert. It is an individual’s personal responsibility to rise to the occasion and deliver his or her best performance. Orchestra members don’t count on an external agent to make this happen, or to be used as excuse for a poor performance. As one former Intendant said, “The orchestra would never sink below a certain level, for their pride would not allow it. If conditions are unfavorable, if a guest conductor lacks the power to inspire them, or cannot establish real [contact] with the orchestra, it will do anything it can on its own to guarantee a good performance. . . . It is an orchestra that intellectually participates in the solution of difficult passages, individual problems of intonation, and questions of ensemble.”⁹

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Closing Thoughts

These notions of personal responsibility, artistic self-determination, and the paramount importance of the music itself are the essential hallmarks of the Berlin Philharmonic’s self-governing system. In this author’s view, these ideas begin to explain the difference between orchestra organizations whose overall performance is “clearly outstanding” versus those which are “average or typical.” Rarely, among the hundreds of musicians I have interviewed in the past 10

years, have I heard the resounding comments that are captured below. Resources and historical and political circumstances notwithstanding, there are lessons to be learned from the kind of enthusiasm and commitment that the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra system fosters. Indeed, it is palpable.

“This evening will be a great performance. Because people give *everything*. It’s a natural thing, too. Everyone pulls for the best. Because we’re treated very well and when you’re treated well, you feel special and you want to do well. You also think to yourself, *this is the Berlin Philharmonic!* You can’t let any slip-ups happen.”

“This is the second time this week that I’ve played Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and I still get very excited and on the edge of my seat about it. Why? If we let our standard go down, it goes quickly. The more comfortable you get around people, the more comfortable it gets. But sometimes, it’s very *uncomfortable*—especially if you don’t know your part, for example. Then people (fellow players) make comments indirectly and it hurts. It has the intended effect.”

“If I died and came back to life, I’d still want to be a musician in this orchestra. To be a soloist is glamorous, but lonely. Here, we are part of a big family.”

“We have a huge, wide-ranging repertoire, and in the 1970s, we would do four to five different programs on each tour. Karajan would only rehearse the key or tough parts and leave the rest for performance. That created a great deal of tension. I remember having a record player in my hotel room—rehearsing and sweating! We never played a complete piece in rehearsal! In fact, we sometimes would ask Karajan for *more* rehearsal time!”

“Who motivates me? Each player on each side of me. They are superb musicians and so they encourage me. You *want* to do well.”

“Every one of these players is of soloist quality. In fact, many of us had to make the hard choice of whether to stay principal in another orchestra or come here as a section player. As an example, there might be 17 other good bowing ideas besides the concertmaster’s, but we have all subjugated ourselves to the greater whole—the orchestra—and the music. We don’t allow our individual agendas to take precedence or get in the way. When that happens, the group will rein in an errant player.”

“For other orchestral players, their work is nine o’clock to five o’clock, and then there is private or family life. For us, *this is our life*. We have all committed completely to it.”

“If I died and came back to life, I’d still want to be a musician in this orchestra. To be a soloist is glamorous, but lonely. Here, we are part of a big family.”

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Notes:

- ¹ I would like to express my thanks to the Symphony Orchestra Institute which has, in part, funded this research. The case will be available through the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government case collection, which can be accessed at < www.ksg.harvard.edu > .

- ² At the time of the orchestra's founding in 1882, Berlin was just developing as the capital of the Wilhelmine German Empire. Given this fact, the radical nature of the musicians' decision to start their own enterprise cannot be overstated. By deigning to form a democratic organization in a most unrepublican period in world history, the orchestra had created an anomaly. Moreover, as with many entrepreneurial undertakings, the newly formed "Philharmonic Orchestra (formerly Bilsle Orchestra)," as they called themselves, was not free from strife. "It staggered from one crisis to another and one never knew if it would survive." But in time, and with the instrumental help of a local impresario, Hermann Wolff, and his wife Louisa, the orchestra found success. It was Wolff's concert agency that was responsible not only for helping the nascent ensemble with concert dates, but also for discovering conductors for the group, and soliciting private contributions to help the "Philharmonic ship" stay afloat. Except for a brief period when a Philharmonic Society was established to generate dues and donations, the Philharmonic Orchestra depended on ticket sales and tours to make ends meet (Stresemann, 1979).
- ³ Herbert von Karajan, who long coveted Furtwangler's post at the Philharmonic, was the orchestra's fourth permanent conductor, serving from 1954-1989. Given his tenure, it is hard to encapsulate in just a few words the lengthy and legendary "marriage" between Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic (volumes have been written about the man and the subject). One thing was indisputable, however: Karajan brought the orchestra to a level of artistic excellence, fame, and fortune—especially in their early partnership—that few other orchestras could ever rival. They had critical acclaim, hundreds of recordings, films, TV broadcasts, international tours, the Salzburg Easter and Summer Festivals, the Pflingsten and Berlin Festivals, and increasingly generous incomes.
- ⁴ For more information about the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, visit their Web site at < www.berlin-philharmonic.com > .
- ⁵ Moreover, the German Musicians' Union has no formal role in the orchestra's operations. Players are not even required to be members of the union, which functions more as a professional association. Union representatives, however, do get involved to help, as needed, when it comes to negotiating the Berlin Philharmonic's contract, but the last time the contract was negotiated was in 1971! As one player said, "It is important to know that we do not have an adversarial climate here between the Orchestra and the City Senate, our employer."
- ⁶ It was announced that Sir Simon Rattle has been selected to succeed Abbado.
- ⁷ Unlike the orchestra, the administrative and technical staff view the Intendant as their immediate employer. A more traditional employer/employee relationship exists in this area and contrasts starkly with the attitude and

powers of the orchestra. As one player observed, “The Intendant’s main job is to serve the needs of the orchestra, not his own career goals.”

- ⁸ During Karajan’s tenure, the power balance had been skewed in his favor initially, but by the end, Karajan was at war with his own Vorstand, the orchestra, and even the Senate.
- ⁹ Stresemann, Wolfgang. (1979). *The Berlin Philharmonic from Bülow to Karajan*. Berlin, Germany: Stapp Verlag Publishers, p. 114.