

Lecture Script

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Until the first Vienna Philharmonic concert on March 28, 1842, more than half a century after the death of Mozart, Vienna, the city of the great classical composers – Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven – had no professional concert orchestra. The need for performances of symphonic works was filled by ensembles specially assembled for the occasion and which were comprised partly of amateurs. Orchestras made up entirely of professional musicians were found only in the theatres.

The logical step of playing a concert with a professional orchestra was taken at the end of the 18th century, when Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart engaged the orchestra of

Vienna's Imperial Court Theatre for a cycle of six concerts. Ludwig van Beethoven also engaged this ensemble for a concert in which he premiered his first symphony. From this Imperial Court Theatre Orchestra, the Imperial Court Opera Orchestra emanated, and it was this ensemble which performed the premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under the direction of the composer himself in 1824.

Even so, it would be inaccurate to consider such performances as being comparable to professional concertizing as we know it today. Even at the premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the Court Opera Orchestra was augmented not only by members of other professional orchestras, but also by numerous amateurs. The quality of the rehearsals in those days was in no way commensurate with the high standards with which the compositions of the Viennese classical period are treated today. Even for premieres, it was customary to hold one or at most two rehearsals, and one can easily imagine how difficult it must have been, from hastily copied handwritten parts to somehow even dimly recognize the composer's intention, let alone to master the task at hand. It comes therefore as no surprise that at the premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the Trio of the Scherzo became so muddled that it was necessary for the orchestra to stop and start again at the beginning. What is more surprising is that the performers

managed to get all the way into the second movement without any similar incidents!

As amusing as this sounds, such occurrences were, in the long term, intolerable, and within the circles of educated Viennese music aficionados, the calls for a serious concert orchestra grew ever stronger. In 1841, the German musician Otto Nicolai (who later became world famous as the composer of the opera “The Merry Wives of Windsor”) was appointed conductor at the Imperial Court Opera. With Nicolai, an individual was found who was well-suited, both as an artist and an entrepreneur, to reshape Vienna’s concert scene from the ground up and bring it into conformity with modern expectations. The impetus for this development was provided by the deep-seated reverence for the works of Beethoven, not only in Vienna but also throughout large parts of Europe. A few months after the first Philharmonic concert Nicolai wrote, [and I quote] “To present to the audience Beethoven’s magnificent creations as excellently as the means at hand allow, and at the very least with the deepest love and enthusiasm – that is my duty, and that of every individual who finds himself in a position similar to mine. For this, no gratitude is due me, for the cause carries within itself its own reward.” [End of quote]. The sentiments expressed herein were widespread within Vienna’s artistic and intellectual circles.

Encouraged by influential figures of Vienna's musical life, Nicolai appeared on the concert podium, conducting a "Grand Concert" which was presented by "all the orchestra members of the Imperial Court Opera" on March 28, 1842. This concert is correctly regarded as the moment the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra was born, because all the principles of the "Philharmonic Idea", which still apply today, were put into practice for the first time:

- Only a musician who plays in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra (originally Court Opera Orchestra) can become a member of the Vienna Philharmonic
- The orchestra is artistically, organizationally and financially autonomous
- All decisions are reached on a democratic basis during the general assembly of all members
- The day-to-day management is the responsibility of a democratically elected administrative committee of twelve orchestra members

In addition to the financial incentives which the organisation of concerts offered, there were two factors which motivated the musicians to exchange the opera pit for the concert podium: artistic quality and the search for independence and freedom. Even today the Vienna Philharmonic remains a

private association which manages its own affairs autonomously and receives no public subsidies.

Even though the concerts under the direction of Otto Nicolai were extremely successful, the orchestra experienced major setbacks before attaining true stability. When Nicolai left Vienna for good in 1847, the fledgling enterprise nearly collapsed, having lost, in one person, not only its artistic but also administrative director. In 1848, revolution broke out in Vienna and throughout the Habsburg Monarchy, and the Philharmonic concerts entered a period of stagnation lasting nearly 12 years.

A new development in January of 1860 finally brought a change of fortune, with the first of four subscription concerts taking place under the direction of the Court Opera director at the time, Carl Eckert, who was also an outstanding conductor. Since then, Philharmonic subscription concerts have continued uninterrupted, despite the Nazi dictatorship and two world wars, with the only basic change being the system of having one resident conductor for an entire season being replaced by the guest conductor system, which we have used since 1933.

Due to this guest conductor system, we are in the fortunate position of being able to work with all of the finest conductors on a regular basis, and in most cases meaningful friendships develop through our artistic collaborations. Although democratic autonomy can certainly be complicated, these

close relationships with conductors and soloists are only possible on this basis, an advantage that offsets all of the other disadvantages. The fact that we not just make music together but also negotiate, discuss and plan all common projects with our conductors, without any manager or director or politician getting in the way, enables partnerships which no other orchestra enjoys. Richard Strauss, who was closely associated with our orchestra until his death in 1949, expressed this perhaps most suitably. At the 100th anniversary celebration of the Vienna Philharmonic in 1942 he wrote: “Your artistic achievements are praised by enthusiastic listeners around the world. I express my praise in two sentences: Only one who has conducted the Vienna Philharmonic can appreciate it fully, but that remains our secret! You understand what I mean – here, as you do on the concert stage!”

Continuing with the most important dates in Philharmonic history we come to the 1870/71 season, when the orchestra moved to the newly built Golden Hall of the Musikverein building in Vienna. Since then, this hall has been our ideal musical home, with its exceptional acoustical qualities which have influenced the sound and style of our playing. Under Hans Richter, the legendary conductor of the Bayreuth premiere of Richard Wagner’s tetralogy “Der Ring des Nibelungen”, who was our subscription concert conductor

from 1875 to 1898, the orchestra's world class reputation and unmistakable tradition were established. Encounters with Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Giuseppe Verdi, Anton Bruckner, Johannes Brahms, Johann Strauss and other great composers, conductors and soloists also contributed to this aura.

The orchestra made its first appearance in a foreign country in 1900. Under the baton of Gustav Mahler, the director of the Vienna Court Opera who, in addition to countless opera performances, conducted the Vienna Philharmonic in 44 concerts, the orchestra travelled to the World Exposition in Paris. Regular concert touring began in the summer of 1922 with a journey by ship to South America. The close association between the Vienna Philharmonic and Richard Strauss is of great music-historical importance. Between 1906 and 1944, Strauss conducted numerous opera performances as well as 85 concerts at home and abroad and also drew inspiration from the sound and style of the Vienna Philharmonic. "Der Rosenkavalier", for example, is the most "Viennese" opera ever written. Another highpoint in our history was the collaboration with the great Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini between 1933 and 1937.

In 1938, politics encroached upon Philharmonic activity in the most brutal way. The National Socialists dismissed all Jewish

artists from the Vienna State Opera and disbanded the association of the Vienna Philharmonic. It was only the intervention of the great conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler which achieved the nullification of the disbandment order and saved the so called “half-Jews” and “closely-related” from dismissal and persecution. Nevertheless, the Vienna Philharmonic mourned the murder of six Jewish members in the concentration camps as well as the death of a young violinist on the eastern front.

After World War II, the orchestra continued the policy it began in 1933 of working with every conductor of repute. Especially important in the history of the orchestra after 1945 were the artistic collaborations with its two honorary conductors Karl Böhm and Herbert von Karajan, and with its honorary member Leonard Bernstein, whose 100th birthday is being commemorated by the music world this year. Soon after 1945, touring activity intensified. In 1950, the Philharmonic performed in Egypt, which represented the first and – to this day – only time which the orchestra appeared in Africa. In the spring of 1956, the orchestra made its first guest appearances in Japan and in the fall of the same year also performed in the USA and Canada for the first time. A world tour with Herbert von Karajan took place in 1959, which by way of India, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, the USA and Canada took the orchestra one time all the way around

the globe. This tour generated unparalleled attention. I was seven years old at the time and although I can still recall the reporting in the newspapers and on radio, what impressed me most was a commemorative stamp issued by the Austrian postal system.

That left only one continent on the Philharmonic map on which the orchestra had not yet performed. Efforts to plan a concert tour to Australia spanned a period of over 35 years. It was generally the exorbitant travel expenses which doomed such attempts to failure, but one tour had to be cancelled under tragic circumstances. The conditions appeared to be favourable for an Australian tour in the year 1975, but in 1973 it had to be cancelled after the drowning death of the scheduled conductor, the 43-year-old Isztvan Kertesz. It took until 2006 before we were finally able to come to Australia and perform four concerts in Sydney under the baton of Valery Gergiev. Two years earlier we had filled in another blank spot on our map of the world when we performed for the first time here in Singapore on March 7, 2004. The concert in the Esplanade, which I recall with much pleasure, was conducted by Marcello Viotti, who, sadly, passed away in 2005 at the age of 50.

Today, the Vienna Philharmonic meets all the requirements of the modern multimedia music business while at the same

time managing to emphasize its unique individuality. This individuality is exemplified by the annual New Year's Concert, which is broadcast on television in nearly 100 countries around the world, and by the orchestra's contractually defined role as the artistic middle point of the Salzburg Festival. This individuality is also exemplified by the annual "Vienna Philharmonic Weeks" in New York and Japan, and by the "Summer Night Concert" in the gardens of Vienna's Schönbrunn Palace, which has been performed annually since 2004 and draws between 20,000 and 120,000 listeners every year, depending on weather conditions.

The ongoing encounters with the greatest musicians, which have characterized the orchestra since its founding 176 years ago, are well-documented by countless documents and memorabilia. Among numerous letters and photographs of famous musicians, the historical archives also contain items such as a pair of glasses and a pen of Johannes Brahms; a box of matches with a picture of Richard Wagner, which at one time belonged to Anton Bruckner, himself a great admirer of Wagner; and a travelling cap of Gustav Mahler. And a paperweight that was fashioned from the floor of the apartment in which Beethoven died on March 26, 1827, bears reference to the orchestra's musical roots.

Especially moving is a letter that Richard Strauss wrote to the orchestra seven weeks before he died. In this letter, Strauss thanked the orchestra for its well wishes upon his 85th birthday and sent a page of sketches for his planned tone poem, “Donau (Danube)”, which he intended to dedicate to the Vienna Philharmonic. “A couple of drops from the dried-up Danube well,” was written on the page. Strauss had marked through the notes and added in a resigned manner on an accompanying page that “The very nice birthday edition [in the Philharmonic program] pleased me very much but leaves me with a guilty conscious because it was not possible for me to fulfil my Danube promise to my dear Philharmonic friends! But when the old Pegasus gets tired, there is nothing more one can do! So please be so kind as to accept these last few drops and the hearty greetings of your loyal and devoted, Dr. Richard Strauss.”

Becoming a Member of the Vienna Philharmonic

Openings in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra are advertised internationally. The opera administration invites qualified applicants to an audition before a committee of approximately 24 orchestral musicians and one opera representative. Each member of the jury awards between two and twenty points, and candidates who attain an average of 11 or more points are allowed to continue to the next round. The first rounds are performed behind a screen, but

for the last round, when usually only two or three candidates are left, the screen is removed. The winner of the audition plays a probationary period which may last up to two years, at the end of which the jury reconvenes and either confirms the engagement, recommends an extension of the probationary period, or declines the candidate.

When the newly engaged musician takes up his or her position with the opera orchestra he or she also begins playing with the Vienna Philharmonic, without yet being a member. Application for membership in the Philharmonic may be made at the earliest after three years with the orchestra. There is no new audition, but the application is voted upon in the general assembly by the entire orchestra, with a simple majority being sufficient. Afterwards the musician becomes an active member of the Philharmonic and remains so until retirement from the opera, which is currently at age 65. Upon the retirement, one becomes an inactive member of the Philharmonic.

The Vienna Philharmonic is an association. The highest authority, since the time of Otto Nicolai, has been the general assembly, where all important business is discussed and voted upon. Day-to-day management of the orchestra's business is implemented, also since the time of Nicolai, by a 12-person executive committee, which is elected for three

years and whose decisions can be overturned at any time by the general assembly. Signatory authority is entrusted to the chairman and the business manager, both of whom assume the major responsibility in initiating the orchestra's various projects.

The executive committee is supported in its endeavours by nine hired employees: two accountants, two employees in the ticket office, one in the historical archives, and four secretaries in the Philharmonic office who manage all concert-related business. Of course, we make use of various advisors such as lawyers and tax specialists and we use outsourcing in specialty areas such as public relations.

For the Vienna Philharmonic the most fundamental concept is grassroots democracy. Every musician, from the very first day of membership, has equal rights and responsibilities, including the right to speak and bring up subjects for discussion before the general assembly. It is of utmost importance that all office holders are active musicians, despite an ever increasing amount of administrative business. As indicated earlier, it is our autonomy which affords us the unique associations with our conductors and soloists.

Democracy, as we know very well from politics, is the most demanding of communal forms; it is, however, ideally the most efficient guarantee of personal freedom and individual self-realization. Viewed in this light, the Vienna Philharmonic has over the past 176 years offered an exemplary model of an association which consists on one hand of the sum of many individual interests, but on the other is united by a common goal – in our case, a permanent striving for artistic excellence.

Certainly we know that we are competitively engaged – there is hardly any area of life on this planet which is not subject to competition. However, in dealing with artistic endeavours of the highest level, the rules of engagement differ to a certain extent. There is no question that there are many ways to approach a great work of art: indeed, among other things, this is what marks it as such. The Vienna Philharmonic, which collaborates with almost all leading musicians, knows only too well that many different ways of interpreting a masterpiece are possible. In this sense, we not only have the highest respect for the paths which other great orchestras have taken, but hope that as many orchestras as possible find their own unique voices, as this represents an enrichment of musical life.

Our voice manifests itself on two different levels. In the artistic sector we strive to maintain the “Vienna Philharmonic sound”. This is based on several components: for one, the use of special instruments, which for all practical purposes are only used in Vienna, such as the Viennese oboe and Viennese horn. Yet, the “philharmonic sound”, best described as warm and rich in overtones, is also the result of a long music-making tradition. In some sections of the orchestra, the continuous line of teacher/student relationships extends back to 1819, the year of the foundation of the conservatory at the time of Beethoven.

In addition – and this is the second level on which our voice manifests itself –, it is clear to us that as a leading orchestra we have other responsibilities which extend beyond our making music. Art has always contained a profound, humane message; a message which essentially reminds us that there are no limits in striving for excellence. For this reason, the Vienna Philharmonic has for many years systematically worked to help charitable, social and cultural institutions, not only financially, but also in many instances by raising public awareness on a broader scale. We seek to attain to the motto of the composer whose symphonic work was a catalyst for the founding of our orchestra. They are the words with which Ludwig van Beethoven prefaced his “Missa Solemnis”: “Von Herzen – möge es wieder zu Herzen gehen.” “From the

heart, to the heart.” We believe that in this message lies the answer to many burning questions of our day, and we intend with our limited ability to give something needed by a world which in many areas threatens to sink further into a morass of hate, terror, poverty, misery, injustice and environmental catastrophes: hope. –

At the end of World War I in November 1918, the 600 year-old empire of the Habsburg Dynasty collapsed and – overnight – Austria went from being a world power to a small country. There are two documents in the Historical Archives of the Vienna Philharmonic which demonstrate in a dramatic manner the transience of political power and the immortality of great art. In 1885, the Philharmonic celebrated an anniversary for the first time – 25 years of continuous subscription concerts. Among the numerous congratulatory letters was included one anonymous message: [I Quote] “The highly esteemed musicians of the Philharmonic are kindly requested to accept the enclosed 500 Gulden as a small token of sincere and grateful good will. [Signed] A close friend and admirer.” [End of Quote] This amount corresponded to approximately one half-year’s average salary in the opera orchestra and represented an extremely generous gesture. Because of his characteristic handwriting, the attempt of the sender to remain anonymous failed. An orchestral musician of the time noted on the page that, “This anonymous person must be Brahms,” and this observation was correct.

Today this inconspicuous note is one of the most treasured documents found in the Historical Archives of the Vienna Philharmonic and imbues the anniversary celebrations of 1885 with an abiding lustre. Even the Gold Medal of Arts and

Sciences, which the Emperor Franz Joseph I. awarded the Philharmonic on that 25th anniversary, pales in comparison. Whereas the vast empire of the Habsburgs has long disappeared, the music of Johannes Brahms, a Viennese by choice, continues to rule in concert halls all over the world.

This is certainly not an isolated case. From the Pharaohs to the Romans to the Habsburgs and the tsars: countless 'immortal' empires have been swept away. We know them only from the history books – and from the witness of the works of art which they left behind. In many cases, such as the pyramids of Teotihuacán in Mexico or Stonehenge in England, we don't even know who built these structures or which cult they served. Yet, just like the 8000 figures of the terracotta army of the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang Di, or the 40,000-year-old wall paintings of the Spanish El Castillo Cave, they are unfading testimony to mankind's search for a supreme being and our concurrent striving to reach this status ourselves.

This is confirmed by the theories of the Israeli universal historian Yuval Noah Harari, who in his 2017 published book with the title "Homo Deus", prophesizes the downfall of Homo sapiens in the form in which we know him. When humans, with intelligent technologies such as bioengineering, are able to solve such problems as illness, pain and death, they become cyborgs. This is Harari's provocative thesis which, based on the history of mankind, is not illogical, as shown by the afore-mentioned examples from Mexico, England or China, to which one can add the Pyramids of Egypt and many other structures. Harari's even more provocative conclusion, that humans will in the end be subsumed by

algorithms, incorporates artistic considerations, including computers which can write novels and compose music which is indistinguishable from that of Mozart.

Ladies and gentlemen, it may appear that I have deviated from the topic of today's lecture, but I hope that I will be able to make clear the reason for this digression. Let us return to music. At least in this domain, Austria is still a world power! Vienna is still considered the "City of Music"; in Salzburg, Mozart's city of birth, the world's leading classical music festival takes place – founded in 1920 and featuring the Vienna Philharmonic in a leading artistic role; and the music of the great composers who lived in Vienna – the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner, Brahms, Mahler, Richard Strauss, Schönberg and Berg, as well as, of course, the music of the "Waltz Kings" Johann Strauss Senior and his sons Johann Junior und Josef Strauss – continues to place its stamp on Austria's international image. It was no coincidence that Vienna held such a strong attraction for the great musicians of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Three Austrian emperors were composers, one of them, Emperor Leopold I who died in 1705, was very good. And Maria Theresia, who alongside Sissy was Austria's most popular empress, was a splendid singer, for whom even Christoph Willibald Gluck wrote compositions in which the level of difficulty indicates that she must have been an excellent performer.

It has always given me a great sense of satisfaction to belong to an orchestra that has 'Vienna' in its name. For this reason,

it is very meaningful for me to have been invited to give a lecture in Singapore about the Vienna Philharmonic and to be able to touch on characteristics that can transform a city into a musical metropolis. In the eyes of the world, Singapore is a global city. Its economic stature is just as well-known as its inner stability, its accomplishments in the areas of the sciences and the illustrious ranking of its universities.

Based on my experiences at the time of our concert here in 2004 and my contacts with several individuals from Singapore, I am of the opinion that the reason for the invitation to today's lecture lies in efforts to develop for Singapore a profile in the area of music which is similar to that which the city has so successfully developed in the afore-mentioned disciplines. The efforts of individuals such as Chng Hak-Peng have made a strong impression on me. They manifest the realization that also the arts and particularly music, are necessary to rise to being a true global city.

Please allow me an observation. As much as I am fascinated by the theories of Yuval Harari, I do not really believe that a consummate work of art such as Michelangelo's Pietà or Mozart's "Magic Flute" can be created by algorithms, and certainly not by cyborgs, who according to Harari will usurp the position of mankind. I believe that although a computer can perhaps compose music in the style of Bach or Beethoven, he can in no way create an artistic universe such as the afore-mentioned artists have done. Can you imagine what the answer would have been, had you asked a computer in the year 1850, what will be the major problem facing urban transportation systems in the year 1950? Horse manure! A computer with the requisite calculating power would have analysed the development of cities from

prehistoric settlements up until the present, recognized humanity's insatiable demand for increased mobility and concluded that the huge projected cities of the future would need so many carriages and, of course, horses, that their manure would become unmanageable. The computer would have figured this out in only a few seconds, but would have never been able to foresee the invention of the automobile, no more than it would have predicted the printing of books or the development of the computer itself.

There is, therefore, no formula for success which a city or country can follow which will guarantee a leading role in the realm of music. Certainly one can create the requisite conditions, and in this aspect a lot has been done in Singapore. Musical education is offered in primary schools, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra has existed since 1979 and continues to develop an international reputation, and there are two outstanding concert halls. I know one of these halls, the Esplanade, from our appearance here in 2004, and I am not surprised that the Hamburg-based building data company "Emporis" chose the hall as one of the 15 most beautiful concert halls in the world. I have played in many concert halls and I can certainly agree with this ranking. Perhaps what Singapore still needs is an opera house, but I am sure that such a project will also succeed when the proper time has arrived.

And this proper time will have arrived when the knowledge of the significance of classical music has entered the consciousness of broad sections of society. It would not be enough to spend lots of money to bring the most famous orchestras, conductors, soloists and vocalists to Singapore. This would create the danger that music would be viewed as a luxury item which one can have because one can afford it. However, the arts are not a luxury article, but rather something much more. The stage director Max Reinhardt, who alongside the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss was a co-founder of the Salzburg Festival, called the arts, right in the middle of the catastrophe of the First World War, “foodstuff for all of those in need”. This includes all of humanity – we all have this need. The great creative geniuses, whether musicians, poets or visual artists, have taken paths for all of us which we would not have found without them. In their works, they sublimate the joys, sufferings, fears and yearnings of all people and, in so doing, allow us a glimpse of perfection. No computer can do that, and that is what will distinguish humans from other life forms and perhaps one day even from the cyborgs of the future.

Of course, we need the help of modern technology in order to turn a city into a leading centre of music and the arts. This will not succeed, however, with the simple aid of a computer

which – and I refer once again to my statement about the problems of the cities of the future – will never be in a position to encompass all the parameters of the human spirit and the human soul in particular. In order to create a city of music it is necessary to have the same enthusiasm which at one time captivated broad sections of the populace of Vienna, and which our founder, Otto Nicolai, expressed so wonderfully. I quote him once again: “To present to the audience Beethoven's magnificent creations as excellently as the means at hand allow, and at the very least with the deepest love and enthusiasm – that is my duty, and that of every individual who finds himself in a position similar to mine. For this, no gratitude is due me, for the cause carries within itself its own reward”.

If such enthusiasm and such an awareness of the importance of music can be implanted in the consciousness and – even more important – in the hearts of many people, then Singapore will find its way to becoming a Global City of classical music. And perhaps one day in the future, a leading artist will say something similar about Singapore as the great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius once said about Vienna, where he studied in 1890/91 and made the personal acquaintance of Anton Bruckner, Johannes Brahms and Johann Strauss: “Vienna is a place after my own taste. Everything is so friendly and big, light and clear. This air makes me crazy. Waltzes whirl around in my head, and all of them are as if from Schubert.”