

Musical Diplomacy between Political Realism and Cultural Idealism

East German Orchestra Tours and the Hallstein Doctrine

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Abstract

State-led musical diplomacy is an equivocal phenomenon. Its impetus is profoundly self-interested. Yet the discourses in which it is framed are often utopian, drawing on ideals both of diplomacy as a peaceful construct and of music as something that transcends politics. This article argues that political realism and cultural idealism are not antithetical where musical diplomacy is concerned, but rather go hand in hand. Charting the reception of East German orchestra tours during the era of the Hallstein Doctrine, the article examines how musical diplomacy provided the East German state with a simulacrum for the diplomatic recognition that was denied to it by NATO; how idealistic perspectives of culture facilitated this process; and how the West German government, perceiving East German concert tours as political rather than cultural activity, strove to obstruct them. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that while political realism drives musical diplomacy, cultural idealism is what makes it palatable.

Musical diplomacy—that is the harnessing by states of music and music-making in the national interest¹—is an equivocal phenomenon. From a top-down

1 This definition, which precludes international cultural relations pursued without specific political objectives, as well as transnational music making—however politicized—that has no state involvement, reflects the distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations that is made by cultural diplomacy scholars such as Simon Mark and Yüdhishthir Raj Isar (Mark 2010; Ang, Isar & Mar 2015; Isar 2024).

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perspective, its impetus is profoundly self-interested. As Jessica Gienow-Hecht argues, it serves as “an instrument of political and cultural aspirations (hegemonic power, quest for rapprochement, display of ideals)” (Gienow-Hecht 2015: 12). States use musical diplomacy to assert authority, as, perhaps most notoriously, in the competing efforts of the United States and the Soviet Union to wrest control of the new world order of the 1950s and 1960s (Caute 2003; Eschen 2004; Davenport 2009; Fosler-Lussier 2015; Tomoff 2015).² They use it to create national presence, and they use it to rebrand—a case in point being the emergence of the Eurovision Song Contest as a site for former Soviet Republics to reposition themselves as European (Miazhevich 2012; Jordan 2014). Sometimes the political instrumentalization of music is viewed apprehensively. Notable recent examples include the successful campaign to ban Russia from the Eurovision Song Contest, following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Welslau & Selck 2024), and the blocking of access by the South Korean National Intelligence Agency to the viral TikTok song “Friendly Father” glorifying the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in May 2024 (Shin 2024). More often, however, musical diplomacy is framed in decidedly utopian terms. Characteristic is the claim by United States secretary of state Antony Blinken at the launch of his country’s new Global Music Diplomacy Initiative in September 2023 that “music at its core is about a bond rooted in our shared humanity” (U.S. Department of State 2023), and musical diplomacy, by implication, a moral and ethical endeavour, aimed in the case of the United States at the promotion of global “peace and democracy” (U.S. Department of State 2024).

Blinken’s rhetoric, which finds a parallel in scholarship that identifies in music a capacity to create spaces for diplomatic relationships to emerge (Fosler-Lussier 2015: 131), to model the diplomatic behaviours—listening, dialogue, collaboration—that are a prerequisite for these relationships (Katz 2020: 55–80), and even to change minds (Rosenberg 2015), invokes a construct of diplomacy as a peaceful enterprise. This, as Iver Neumann explains, is a specifically European tradition, which “privileges European [or Western] agency.” Its application to international relations, he argues, “causes them to appear, retrospectively, more symmetrical and peaceful than they would as seen through other lenses” (Neumann 2014: 38). The positioning of music within this framework has similar origins; it draws on an Enlightenment conceptualisation of music as a universal phenomenon that can promote solidarity and peace (Mahiet, Ferraguto & Ahrendt 2014: 5). This idealism can seem incongruous with the political realism that drives musical diplomacy at state level. Yet idealism and realism go hand in hand. The persistence of assertions that music, or certain

2 There has been a surge of new literature on musical diplomacy and music and international relations over the past decade. Some crucial texts include Ahrendt, Ferraguto & Mahiet 2014; Fosler-Lussier 2015; Gienow-Hecht 2015; Miekkonen & Suutari 2016; Dunkel & Nietzsche 2018; and Rijo Lopes da Cunha, Shannon, Sørensen & Danielson 2024.

types of music, can somehow transcend politics is often what makes musical diplomacy an effective tool—it creates access for states in places where they are otherwise unwelcome.

The discourse surrounding Russian music since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War is illuminating in this context. Russia's political critics made light work of orchestrating the state's removal from the Eurovision Song Contest in 2022, given the event's reputation for national signification and political voting rather than aesthetic innovation; grist to the mill was undoubtedly the fact that Russia's entries have since 2013—with one exception in 2021—been selected internally by the state broadcaster Channel One rather than through a national public competition (Welslau & Selck 2024: 16). The reception of Russia's art music culture, in contrast, has been more ambiguous. Some institutions in the West initially responded positively to pleas from Ukraine for its allies to cease performing Russian music altogether (Tkachenko 2022; Ramel 2024). There was, however, also considerable resistance. The UK's *Guardian* newspaper reported, for example, that the Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra was "facing ridicule" following its decision in March 2022 to replace the entire programme of an upcoming concert that had been scheduled to feature Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture (Weaver 2022). Gillian Tett asserted on the same topic in the *Financial Times* that "music is not as fickle as politics." During the Cold War, she argued, Tchaikovsky's compositions had "created bridges, not barriers" (Tett 2022).

I return to the Cold War in this article to explore how conflicting concepts of musical diplomacy intersected in the conception and reception of East German orchestra tours to Western Europe and other regions in which Western art music had traction during the 1950s and 1960s. For the first two decades of its existence, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany/GDR) was rendered a hostile state outside of the Sino-Soviet Bloc by the claims of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany/FRG) to an exclusive right to represent the German nation. This was enforced through the 1955 Hallstein Doctrine, which the FRG issued with NATO support in 1955, and which stipulated that all of the FRG's diplomatic partners recognize it as the sole German state. The FRG's isolationist tactic was largely successful; the GDR found itself ostracized from international politics until 1969, when a host of non-aligned countries broke rank and extended diplomatic recognition, expediting a shift on the part of the FRG towards a politics of *détente* (Gray 2003). Yet, the implementation of the Hallstein Doctrine was a source of recurring friction between the FRG and its NATO allies and other diplomatic partners. These countries were bound to the Hallstein Doctrine for a variety of reasons, including the unwavering support for it from the United States, or, in the case of the United Kingdom, the need to keep the FRG onside as it sought entry to the European Economic Community (Berger & LaPorte 2010: 81). The doctrine was not, however, always

conducive to national interests. It was unpopular with businesses who wanted unfettered trading access to East German partners, with leftist political groups who deemed it to be discriminatory, and even with Western European conservatives, who viewed non-recognition of the GDR as inimical to the political stability in Europe that a *détente* with the Soviet Union would bring (see, e.g., Hoff 2001; Lammers 2006; and Berger & LaPorte 2010: 75–167).

A pointed source of tension was the policing that the West German government demanded of East Germany's use of culture—of sport, theatre, and of interest here, music—to circumvent NATO restrictions (Geyer 1996; Smith 2006; Dichter 2014; Dichter 2020). The GDR was fortunate in the musical institutions it had inherited in the division of Germany. By virtue of its geography, it could lay claim to such venerable orchestras as the Staatskapelle Dresden (founded in 1548), the Staatskapelle Berlin (1570), and the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester (1743), as well as newer ensembles like the Dresdner Philharmonie (1870). The international reputations of these orchestras provided a powerful channel for augmenting the political visibility of the state, and the East German government was utterly single-minded in its exploitation of this. No less relentless was the determination with which the West German government sought to shut this mode of representation down. Yet, the zeal with which the latter campaigned to block or diminish the effect of East German concert tours often set it apart from its allies. Its refusal to class these musical events as anything other than political activity was at odds with the general tendency to view the content of Cold War cultural diplomacy—whether deployed competitively or in the spirit of goodwill—as transcending political lines (Caute 2003; Fosler Lussier 2015; Searcy 2020).

This was particularly the case for symphony orchestras, whose existence long pre-dated the Cold War and whose core canonic repertoire from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries (contemporary music was another matter) was equally at home on either side of the iron curtain. In what follows, I draw on historical state documents and media coverage across a variety of geographical sites to position East German concert tours in terms of the multilateral politics of the Cold War. I chart how orchestra tours were weaponized by the East German government to provide political representation for the GDR. I consider how this weaponization was facilitated in third countries by the tendency to view Western art music as apolitical, a tendency that found support in the political independence exhibited by East German orchestras. Finally, I offer some specific examples of West German attempts to obstruct and derail East German tours in Japan, the United Kingdom, and Cyprus. The resulting picture sheds light on the international repercussions of the Cold War “German” question. It also illustrates the complex interplay between political realism and cultural idealism that is the mainstay of musical diplomacy at state level.

Musical Diplomacy as Representation: State Perspectives from the GDR

Gienow-Hecht identifies the diplomatic power of symphony orchestras in their sheer presence. The dynamic of a conductor commanding an obedient ensemble in front of a silent audience functions, she argues, to “display leadership and symbolize the authority behind the orchestra in a foreign environment” (Gienow-Hecht 2012: 26). Whether orchestras are actually perceived as such is a matter of some debate. Katherine Statler inquires in response to the ecstatic reports of Leonard Bernstein’s tour with the New York Philharmonic to the Soviet Union in 1959: “Were those listening convinced that the United States was better equipped for world leadership simply because its musicians played well?” (Statler 2012: 72). Probably not. Nonetheless, for the East German government the rituals and symbolism of orchestra concerts offered a useful simulacrum for the pageantry of diplomatic theatre. The Hallstein Doctrine denied the GDR not only the political legitimacy that it craved, but also the staged interactions of international diplomacy that are a crucial part of the state-making process.

The performativity of international diplomacy provides tangible affirmation of mutual recognition. Indeed, as Naoko Shimazu argues “it is most often the ‘performative’ aspect of diplomacy that gives any meaning to diplomacy as far as the general public is concerned because it is the only aspect visible to non-participants” (Shimazu 2014: 243). Orchestra concerts, given their juxtaposition of the universal and the national, provided scope for enacting this display through alternative means. The formalized rituals and “universal” repertoire of the concert hall substituted for the standardized protocols of international diplomacy, while orchestras themselves functioned—like diplomats or heads of states—to articulate the national within this space. They did this both in a literal sense through the signalling of cities or states of origin in their names, and through the more general symbolic association of the symphony orchestra with the nation state—pace the proliferation in the mid-twentieth century of national symphony orchestras, alongside national airlines and national broadcasting companies, particularly in recently decolonized countries (Tan 2018; Nii-Dortey & Arhine 2010).

Particularly valued by the East German government was the extent to which the practices of national signification that were commonplace in mid-century concert culture could be harnessed to normalize the GDR beyond its borders. The custom of opening concerts by visiting ensembles with the national anthems of host and visiting countries provided one of the few junctures for the East German national anthem “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” (Risen from Ruins, composed by Hanns Eisler to lyrics by Johannes Becher in 1949) to be heard outside of the Soviet Bloc. When, for example, the Staatskapelle Dresden performed at the Festival Hall in London in September 1956—its first outing in the United Kingdom

in twenty years—a review in the *Times* noted that the orchestra “introduced to us the national anthem of the East German Republic” (“The Saxon State Orchestra” 1956). Two years later, when the Gewandhausorchester undertook its first post-war tour of the United Kingdom, the *Times* was once again struck by the rendition of the anthem; a reviewer observed, with some hyperbole, of the orchestra’s appearance at Festival Hall, that the concert “began with what is surely another premiere, the first performance in Britain of the East German national anthem” (“The Gewandhaus Orchestra” 1958). Concerts also offered occasion for the display of the East German flag, for the GDR to be designated in concert programmes and promotional materials by name rather than as the “Soviet Occupied Zone,” as demanded by the FRG, and for East German politicians, who were prevented from travelling in an official capacity by the Hallstein Doctrine, to participate in international press conferences and receptions.

The importance that the East German government placed on these processes of normalization emerges in its assessments of tours. Take, for instance, the post-mortem of the Gewandhausorchester’s 1958 visit to the United Kingdom. The tour was a resounding artistic success, with enthusiastic reviews in the British press. The ministry of culture’s head of music Hans-Georg Uszkoreit, who had accompanied the orchestra, focused his report primarily, however, on the political achievements that had been reaped. He described how the orchestra had “appeared everywhere as a representative of a sovereign state.”³ Each concert opened with performances of both the East German and British anthems; the BBC collaborated with East German radio to organize a simultaneous radio broadcast of one of the concerts (and with it the national anthem) in both countries; and the mayors of York and Brighton hosted receptions to welcome the orchestra and accompanying officials to their respective cities (PA AA, MfAA, M2 B 3328; see also Yaeger 2014: 72–3; and Pestel 2019: 87).

Culture beyond Politics: Third-Country Perspectives

West German officials, in the reports that they compiled of East German orchestra tours, flagged as cause for concern precisely those aspects that were highlighted for celebration by their East German counterparts. The London broadcast of the Gewandhausorchester caused anxiety in the West German foreign office, for example, because it involved direct contact between East German and British broadcasting institutions, and would result in the “promotion of the SED regime’s reputation within the zone and the weakening of resistance within the zone” (PA AA, B 95/527). The West German government was powerless to prevent such interactions itself. It relied on the Allied Travel Office (ATO) in West Berlin—which was jointly administered by the United

3 Translations from German are by the author.

Kingdom, the United States, and France—to deny East German performers the Temporary Travel Documents (TTDs) they needed to travel to NATO countries in lieu of their unrecognized GDR passports, and on foreign governments to veto entry visas. Sometimes third countries were responsive to the FRG's appeals. The Italian government, for instance, refused to issue visas for a tour by the Dresdner Philharmonie in 1955 ("DDR-Künstlern die Einreise verweigert" 1955). Yet for much of the 1950s the FRG struggled to persuade its allies to categorize East German cultural diplomacy as political activity. Petitions such as that to the UK government to impede a tour to the United Kingdom by the Berliner Ensemble in 1956 fell on deaf ears (Smith 2006: 310–16), and the West German embassy in Rome reported in 1958 that it was unable to stop a visit to the city by the GDR's Deutsches Theater, "because there are no grounds in principle for objecting to cultural performances abroad from the East Zone or East Berlin that are not of a pronounced political character" (PA AA, B 95/526).

Heightening border tensions towards the end of the decade provided the FRG with the opportunity to push for a change in policy. The ATO introduced new restrictions on TTDs from September 1960 to March 1961 in response to the "harassment" of West Germans travelling to East Berlin (Merchant 1960), which included a curtailment on travel for cultural purposes. Later that year, the erection of the Berlin Wall led to a more sustained blockade. The West German government's demand for an outright ban on travel from the GDR was rejected by the ATO partners, with one United States official describing the proposal as "picayune", but the ATO did agree to limit the issue of TTDs to travel for compassionate grounds and for reasons of trade (Historical Office 1970: 87–8). These restrictions, which precluded concert tours entirely, remained in place until March 1964. Yet, even when actively impeding East German cultural diplomacy, Western European countries did not necessarily share the FRG's abhorrence of it. Indeed, the post-Wall NATO travel ban was contentious given its direct targeting of East German citizens rather than their regime (Thomas 2009: 37–41), and generated increasing dissent as the ramifications for sporting and cultural life in the West unfolded. The absence of elite East German athletes from international competitions, for example, was a source of discontent for international sporting federations and countries holding major events; Norway notably petitioned NATO in February 1962 for the travel ban to be lifted for athletes ahead of the Holmenkollen ski jump championships (Dichter 2014: 38–41). The denial of access to third countries of cultural ensembles also led to vocal protests, such as those in the British press and parliament that followed the refusal of visas for the Berliner Ensemble to perform at the Edinburgh Festival in 1963 (Wallace 2000: 399–400; Smith 2006: 316–20).

James Smith identifies as a significant motivating factor in the protests that surrounded the latter episode the "seemingly arbitrary distinctions" that the 1961 blockade of the GDR made between travel for trade, which was permitted,

and travel for culture (or sport), which was not (Smith 2006: 319). In a debate on the ban in the House of Lords in March 1963, the liberal Lord Kilbracken remarked, for example, that:

I should have thought that when we have disagreed with a foreign Government, whether with its inhumanity or with any other aspect of it, we have always employed economic rather than artistic sanctions. We do not have to go back to the Abyssinian war (when, so far as I know, we did not try to stop Italian opera singers coming to this country) to see that is the usual way of dealing with the problem (Hansard, HL Deb., 21 March 1963).

From the perspective of the West German government, the differentiation between trade and cultural activities was entirely reasonable; the latter provided more scope for national representation than the former. Yet, in third countries where the FRG's claims to sole representation were not a priority, events such as orchestra performances were not easily perceivable as propaganda. Their content was no different to that performed by Western ensembles or, indeed, ensembles from elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc who performed freely in the West, and the signification of nation through anthems and flags was hardly unique to the GDR.

Crucial to the efficacy of cultural diplomacy, and what is often seen as a determining factor in distinguishing cultural diplomacy from propaganda, is the perception of artistic credibility—that is the independence of artists and the art that they produce from state control (Gienow-Hecht 2009: 32; Ang, Isar & Mar 2015: 372–3; Mahiet 2020). Elite East German orchestras scored highly on this front. Indeed, the East German government often struggled to control them. For one, the capacity of conductors and orchestra managers, whose participation in the international touring circuit predated the GDR, to negotiate foreign engagements far surpassed that of the inexperienced bureaucrats who had been parachuted into high-level administrative roles following the Sovietization of East Germany's cultural infrastructure (Kelly 2014: 34). For another, the struggle to attract and retain top-level conductors (see, for example, Böhm 1953; Roloff-Momin 2012: 385–6) placed considerable power in the hands of those who chose to work in the GDR such, in the 1950s, as Hermann Abendroth, who directed the Leipzig and Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestras until his death in 1956, Heinz Bongartz, who conducted the Dresdner Philharmonie, and, above all, Franz Konwitschny, who led the Gewandhausorchester, the Staatskapelle Dresden, and the Deutsche Staatsoper and Staatskapelle Berlin.⁴

4 Rudolf Kempe, for example, departed from the Staatskapelle Dresden and Semperoper to replace Georg Solti at the Bayerische State Opera in 1952, while Erich Kleiber, who returned from the United States in 1954 to resume the musical directorship of the Deutsche Staatsoper—a post he had previously held from 1923 to 1935—resigned the position after several months following a series of irreconcilable arguments with the authorities (Orzoff 2021: 343–9).

Until the East German Artists' Agency (*Deutsche Künstler-Agentur* and later *Künstler-Agentur der DDR*) was established in 1960, orchestras often organized foreign tours independently of the state bodies under whose remit this task officially fell.⁵ They also determined the music that they played, which remained firmly engrained in the canonic repertoire and performing traditions of the pre-war era. Conductors occasionally included pieces by contemporary East German composers in their programmes. These, however, were the exception rather than the rule, and often reflected personal preferences rather than the latest examples of socialist realism (Kelly 2019: 514–5; Pestel 2019: 89–91).

The freedom that orchestras enjoyed was a recurring source of frustration for East German officials. The ministry of culture's Hans-Georg Uszkoreit complained in 1957, for example, that the state authorities in Leipzig were unable to control the Gewandhausorchester, not least, because "the travel activities of the orchestra have been arbitrarily surrendered to the orchestra's leadership (Prof. Konwitschny and Gewandhaus secretary [Fritz] Händschke)." He also bemoaned the fact that "the programmes of almost all orchestras that went on concert tours to West Germany or abroad [in the past season] did not include any works by GDR composers, but instead followed the well-trodden paths of 'tried and tested' programmes" (BArch DR 1/8253). Uszkoreit was not wrong; Friedemann Pestel observes of the Gewandhausorchester's foreign performances that there was little to mark them musically as a product of the GDR. On the contrary, their adherence to a "traditional topos" placed them in a well-established European culture (Pestel 2019: 91). Yet, while a focus on new socialist music would certainly have served as a mark of national distinction or cultural nation branding, the imperviousness of East German orchestras to East German politics was paradoxically to the benefit of the state.

Foreign agents booked East German orchestras and foreign publics attended their concerts precisely because their performances bore no obvious traces of political influence; they evoked not the seismic divisions of Europe that had followed the Second World War, but the unchanging familiarity of pre-war bourgeois culture. When the Gewandhausorchester came to the United Kingdom in 1958, for example, it was its exalted past rather than contemporary political events that captured the imagination of reviewers.⁶ Hailing the ensemble as "one of the oldest orchestras," the *Times* reviewer claimed that the "programmes for its present tour have been designed to recall some of its

5 See, for instance, the guidelines issued by the GDR ministry of culture in December 1955, stipulating that approval for concert tours be sought before rather than after the signing of contracts with Western agents (BArch DR 1/8329). The direct contact that artists maintained with Western concert agents was a recurring bone of contention for government officials (Rosengren 2022: 179), and continued even after the founding of the East German Artists' Agency; in the 1970s, for example, a number of East German opera artists were clients of the West German theatre agent Robert Schulz (BArch DR 1/18267).

6 Henrik Rosengren charts a similar pattern in the reception of the Thomanerchor in Sweden during the early 1950s (Rosengren 2022: 172–5).

famous premières” (“The Gewandhaus Orchestra” 1958). A return visit in 1965 prompted a similar response in the newspaper; a review of a concert featuring Beethoven’s *Leonora* Overture, no. 3, Richard Strauss’s *Don Juan*, and Mahler’s first symphony was nostalgically captioned “Old Favourites are Brought to Life” (From Our Music Critic,” 1965). This sense of continuity suggested that the new socialist state was conducive or, at the very least, not detrimental to the flourishing of the Germanic musical tradition—a more nuanced perspective of the GDR than that desired by the West German government.

A particular dissonance in the campaign against East German musical diplomacy was the fact that the West German government clearly recognized the cultural value of East German orchestras, and had no problems with them performing in the FRG. Indeed, it positively welcomed their return after the hiatus in inter-German travel that followed the building of the Berlin Wall. Reporting on the first post-Wall visit by the Dresdner Philharmonie to West Germany in November 1963—while the NATO travel ban was still in place elsewhere—Friedrich von Zahn of the ministry of all-German affairs (*Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen*, BMG) celebrated “the resumption of human and artistic contacts, which can only be conducive to the declared aims of reunification” (PA AA, B 95/979). This double standard understandably rankled with the FRG’s allies; Smith quotes the British prime minister Harold Macmillan complaining in relation to the travel ban in 1963 that “W. Germany *in fact* deals with E. Germany in *every sphere* (Smith 2006: 319; italics in original). It remained a bone of contention even when NATO lifted the travel ban in March 1964. A West German foreign office official travelling to Copenhagen after the ATO had denied TTDs for the Deutsche Staatsoper to perform Kurt Weill’s *The Seven Deadly Sins* with Gisela May in the city in 1966 (Pischner 1986: 373) was warned to expect the question of “why are obstacles placed in the way of guest performances by ‘East German’ theatres in Denmark, while at the same time such guest performances are taking place in West Germany?” The advice from the foreign office was to answer that while intra-German performances “promoted the national and social cohesion of the German people,” performances in Denmark served “the international political promotion of the Soviet Occupied Zone, which is probably not the intention of the Danish government” (PA AA, B 915/1356). This explanation would have done little to satisfy those who viewed culture and politics as two distinct spheres.

Musical Diplomacy without Representation: The West German Offensive

Given the lack of international appetite for outright bans on culture, the West German government spent much of the Hallstein era attempting to reduce the impact of East German musical diplomacy. In the case of orchestra tours, it

did this by agitating to restrict who could travel, and to prohibit all displays of nation. What this involved in practice prior to the post-Wall travel ban can be observed in the efforts of the West German foreign office to obstruct the three-week tour that the Gewandhausorchester undertook of Japan in the spring of 1961. This tour—the first to Japan by an East German orchestra—illuminates the global nature of the cultural Cold War. Japan, given its post-war rehabilitation by the United States as a key bulwark against the Soviet Union in East Asia, was officially supportive of the Hallstein Doctrine. Yet the signing of the controversial United States–Japan Security Treaty in 1960 had unleashed a wave of anti-American and leftist opposition that was to the GDR’s advantage (Miller 2019: 191–226). Transcending these tensions, meanwhile, was a voracious appetite for Western art music from both sides of the Western Cold War divide (Fosler-Lussier 2015: 27–30). The director of the Osaka Festival Michi Murayama, who invited the Gewandhausorchester to Japan, even tried to unite the two sides on stage. In 1958 she had proposed that the tenor Jan Preece from the New York Metropolitan Orchestra perform in concert with the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, and she was keen with the 1961 festival for the Gewandhausorchester and New York Philharmonic Orchestra to share a line-up (Langenkamp 2014: 380, 388–9).

Long before the West German government entered the picture, the Gewandhausorchester’s trip was mired in controversy. The GDR’s *Deutsche Konzert- und Gastspielsdirektion* had brokered a contract for the orchestra with the Osaka Festival through the Paris-based impresario Alfred Safarti in September 1960, which comprised a run of performances in Osaka as well as dates in other Japanese cities. News in Japan, however, that Murayama was planning for these latter dates to include an appearance at the 1961 Tokyo East–West Music Encounter (EWME) met with resistance from Japanese left-wing music circles. The EWME, which was curated by Nicholas Nabokov and the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, had become a target of the prevailing anti-American sentiment, with its critics opposed—among other things—to its anti-communist mission, as evidenced in the absence from its programme of any ensembles from the Soviet Bloc. Yet, its critics were also keen to prevent the tokenistic addition of the Gewandhausorchester, fearing that this might alleviate public pressure on the festival and lead to increased government support (Langenkamp 2014: 371–95; Sheppard 2019: 327–32). Accordingly, the composer Mitsukuri Shūkichi, acting in his capacity as secretary of the Japanese section of the International Music Council of UNESCO, petitioned the Soviet embassy in Tokyo in September 1960 for the orchestra to boycott the EWME (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 995). He met with no resistance. Unsurprisingly, neither the Soviet nor East German governments wanted to see the orchestra performing at a US-backed event. Murayama retracted the proposal, and the Gewandhausorchester went on to play fifteen dates in Japan the following

spring (the tour spanned 13 April to 4 May 1961) including two full cycles of Beethoven's symphonies, once at the Osaka Festival and again in Tokyo, the latter independently of the EWME (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/84973: a).⁷

The West German foreign office did not fix its attention on the tour until February 1961, when the Japanese consulate in West Berlin supplied it with a list of the orchestra's visa applications. Focusing its sights on "individuals who do not belong to the musical ensemble but to the entourage" (PA AA, B 95/876: a)—in line with the NATO distinction between politics and culture—the foreign office recommended the denial of visas to some 7 out of 114 applications. Included in this group were functionaries from the ministry of culture, among them Uszkoreit (who was designated on the list the East German concert agency provided to the Japanese embassy as a "musicologist"), the journalist Lothar Kusche, and several interpreters whose status was deemed to be dubious. A subsequent list of thirteen applications met with further denials, including for four string players, whose papers—received at least a month in advance of the orchestra's departure—had ostensibly arrived too late to be processed (PA AA, B 95/876: b and c).

The foreign office also took measures to limit the extent to which the orchestra could represent the GDR while it was in Japan. A particular concern at this point was the new East German flag (the German tricolour overlaid with the GDR's state symbols of a hammer and compass encircled in a wreath of wheat) that had been introduced in 1959. The flag, which was referred to by the West German government as the *Spalterfahne* (flag of division), was banned immediately in the FRG (Meyers Feinstein 2001: 51); preventing its display in third countries was challenging, however, particularly when NATO interests were in competition with those of non-government bodies. Heather Dichter's account of the 1961 International Ice Hockey Championships, which were underway in Switzerland as West German foreign officials were scrutinizing the Gewandhausorchester's visa applications, is revealing in this regard. When the championship playoffs resulted in a match between East and West Germany, the West German government pressured the International Ice Hockey Federation to suspend the practice of the winning team having its national anthem performed and flag displayed at the end of the match. The Federation refused, so rather than run the risk of West German players and attending politicians having to pay their respects to the GDR flag and anthem, the West German government withdrew its team and forfeited the match (Dichter 2014: 24–7).

7 This gave rise, as Langenkamp notes, to the unusual situation wherein on the evening of 26 April 1961 Tokyoites "could pick from a concert menu of two Western symphony orchestras—the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein in uptown Metropolitan Festival Hall and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under Franz Konwitschny in downtown Hibiya Hall" (Langenkamp 2014: 391).

In the case of the Gewandhausorchester, the West German foreign office requested that the Japanese embassy release approved visas to players only on receipt of individually signed guarantees declaring a commitment to refrain, or risk deportation of the entire orchestra, from all “political activity” in Japan, including: “performing the national anthem of the ‘German Democratic Republic’ ... displaying the flag or emblems of the ‘German Democratic Republic’ ... [and] any activity that is contrary to Japan’s established principle of recognizing only the Federal Republic of Germany or which could be interpreted in this sense” (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 16645: a). This proved unenforceable. When Murayama forwarded the guarantee at the behest of the Japanese ministry of justice to the East German concert agency to distribute to the Gewandhaus players, the agency threatened not only to cancel the tour, but also to sue the Osaka Festival for breach of contract (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 16645: b). There was more desire in Japan to hear the Gewandhausorchester than to appease the FRG, and Murayama exerted considerable political sway; her family owned one of Japan’s largest daily newspapers, the *Asahi Shimbun*, which was sponsoring the tour (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/84973: a). Accordingly, the requirement for the players to sign the guarantee was dropped. Murayama did go some way to appeasing the FRG by placing a moratorium at the festival that year on all national flags and anthems (PA AA, B 95/876: d). The East German government nevertheless enjoyed one coup; as the Gewandhausorchester’s conductor Franz Konwitschny reported in the *Berliner Zeitung* on his return home: “The fact that the posters, programmes, and invitations everywhere stated that the Gewandhausorchester came from the German Democratic Republic was a political success in itself” (Slf 1961; for details of the signage, see SAPMO-BArch DY 30/84973: a).

The East German government inadvertently closed the door on this mode of national representation several months later by building the Berlin Wall. When East German orchestras began touring internationally again in the mid-1960s, NATO had conceded to the West German government’s request that the display of the GDR flag and performances of the GDR anthem be prohibited altogether in NATO countries (Blasius, Hölscher, and Kosthorst 1995: doc. 91). The West German foreign office policed this new stipulation vigilantly, placing its embassies on high alert ahead of concert tours to ensure that any attempts at “propaganda” were shut down, and sending reminders to foreign governments hosting East German orchestras that the issue of TTDs and visas was now conditional on recipients engaging in no “political activities” (see e.g., PA AA, B 95/1165). Consequently, apart from in neutral countries such as Switzerland and Sweden (Garberding 2022; Rosengren 2022), the East German state was now invisible in Western concert halls (see e.g., Pestel 2019: 88; Wenkel 2014: 246). The audience at the performance given by the Staatskapelle Berlin in London’s Royal Festival Hall on 17 November 1967 might, for example, have left under the assumption that there was only a single Germany from the biography

of the orchestra in the programme. Describing the ensemble as “Europe’s oldest orchestra,” which had been “re-formed in 1945,” the programme studiously avoided any reference to the division of Germany or to the Staatskapelle’s geographical location in the East. Instead, the audience could read that the orchestra has for many years “formed the nucleus of the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra” (in the Federal Republic), that its principal conductor Otmar Suitner was *Viennese*, and that the East German Kurt Masur, who was brought in to substitute for Suitner at the last moment, was “a leading *German* conductor” (BArch DR 1/18591: a; italics mine).

This new state of affairs brought home the extent to which orchestra tours were a purely political exercise for the East German government during the Hallstein era (they later valued them as a significant source of revenue; see Yaeger 2014). Powerless to intervene in NATO policies, East German officials unleashed their frustrations on the foreign concert agents who represented the GDR’s musical interests abroad. Characteristic were the remarks made by a Leipzig official about the Paris-based Maurice Werner who arranged for the Gewandhausorchester to tour France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland in 1967. Werner, the official complained, “was not interested in the trip producing a political result in favour of the GDR. Making art, not politics was his maxim” (BArch DR 1/18580). These agents were often sympathetic to the GDR; Adolf Borsdorf, whose London agency brought both the Staatskapelle Berlin and the Bachorchester zu Leipzig to the United Kingdom in the autumn of 1967, represented ensembles from across the Soviet Bloc and was notably denigrated by the West German foreign office as a “militant communist” (PA AA, B 95/1165). Nevertheless, their capacity to organize tours by East German orchestras was contingent on their complying with the political strictures of their own governments.

East German officials were well aware of the difficult situation in which agents were placed. Borsdorf shared with them a letter he had received from the UK foreign office ahead of the Bachorchester tour requesting his assurance that the musicians comply with the political conditions of their TTDs and visas and be “announced and listed as coming from ‘Germany’” (PA AA, MfAA, M1 C 12270). This knowledge did not stop the East German government from criticizing Borsdorf’s failure to maximize political outcomes, or from threatening to cancel a tour by the Staatskapelle Dresden that was due to take place early in 1968 should Borsdorf not do more to promote the East German state. In this instance, the secretary of the UK Musicians’ Union Harry Francis—a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain with close contacts in the GDR—intervened. He published an article in the party newspaper, the *Morning Star*, declaring that the “stupid” refusal of the UK government to acknowledge the GDR would result in East Germany’s “great orchestras” touring elsewhere (Francis 1967). Yet, he also made clear to the East German ministry of culture that “it

would be quite wrong to insist on this demand in the case of the Staatskapelle Dresden,” given that Borsdorf, at the GDR’s instigation, had already booked the venues and incurred significant costs (BArch DR 1/18591: b).

The Politics of the Apolitical: Encouraging Defections

In stripping East German orchestra tours of flags and anthems, the West German government enacted not so much a denationalization of concerts as a reassignment of national ownership. International concerts by East German ensembles were no less politicized in the absence of GDR insignia; their projection of a single, seemingly neutral Germany buttressed the FRG’s claim to exclusive representation of the German nation. Revealing, for example, is the account from the West German consul general for Osaka-Kobe, Günther Schlegelberger, about the welcome confusion that the ban on flags and anthems at the 1961 Osaka Festival had generated as to the provenance of the Gewandhausorchester. Schlegelberger wrote of being congratulated by fellow diplomats on the arrival of his “compatriots,” and surmised of the orchestra’s performance of the overture to Richard Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at the festival’s opening event that:

Few listeners were probably aware that a son of the city of Leipzig was being honoured. Most of them, however, obviously felt the representativeness that the *Meistersinger* is traditionally perceived to hold for German music, indeed in a certain sense for Germany as a whole (PA AA, B 95/876: e).⁸

The West German government asserted ownership not only of East Germany’s orchestras, but also of the individual players who constituted these institutions. Under the terms of the sole claim to representation, the FRG granted automatic citizenship and relocation funds to GDR citizens seeking to cross the border permanently (Mayer 1990: 130–1). Advertising this right during East German concert tours worked both to signal the illegitimacy of the GDR, and as a mode of sabotage. Cultural diplomacy for Soviet-Bloc governments was, as Didier Francfort observes, a “diplomacy of risk” (Francfort 2013: 73). The benefits of foreign tours had to be weighed against the opportunities that they created for defections; Pestel estimates, for example, that throughout the 1980s East German ensembles suffered losses of over fifty artistic and technical staff each year (Pestel 2021: 339). Only some of these defections were politically

8 This observation reflects a problem of East German diplomacy in Japan more broadly. Given the limited public awareness or interest in the division of Germany, East German cultural activities, as Volker Stanzel observes, did not promote the GDR state but rather “strengthened the perception of one homogeneous German culture” (Stanzel 2016: 239).

motivated. Musicians left the GDR for a host of other reasons, including the prospects of better artistic opportunities, of higher earnings, or of being united with lovers or loved ones.⁹

West German diplomats made it their business to facilitate this migration. Although they often boycotted concerts by East German ensembles, they engineered alternative opportunities to make contact with performers.¹⁰ Ahead of the Gewandhausorchester's arrival in Tokyo in 1961, the West German ambassador to Japan, Wilhelm Haas, enlisted the services of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* (German East Asiatic Society, OAG) to host a reception for the ensemble at which he himself intended to be present, and urged the OAG's members to make personal contact with the orchestra's players to encourage them to attend (PA AA, B 95/876: f). Haas's efforts came to nothing on this occasion. Erich Zielke—the head of the East German Artists' Agency and the official in charge of the Gewandhaus tour—recounted in the reports he filed of the tour that he received advance warning from the Czechoslovakian embassy of Haas's intentions, and thus declined the invitation from the OAG without consulting the orchestra.¹¹ Zielke also described his efforts to counter attempts by Haas to meet with Konwitschny; with help from the Soviet and Czechoslovakian embassies, he devised a packed plan of events that left the conductor with little free time for unscheduled meetings. Konwitschny still managed to evade officials on the final day of the tour, disappearing from the hotel in a car sent by the West German embassy. He returned, however, after a couple of hours and Zielke boarded the flight home with a full orchestra (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/84973: a and b). Haas, for his part, reported to the West German foreign office how, in a final bid to turn players, he sent an embassy official to the airport to observe if any “orchestra members were forced by external pressure to board the plane or prevented from escaping.” The only person seen struggling to board, however, was Konwitschny, who, having spent the day socializing—first at a lunch organized by Zielke and then, it would seem, at the West German embassy—needed to be assisted up the steps of the airplane (PA AA, B 95/876: f).

For the most part, West German diplomats had little to lose in encouraging defections. Their machinations only attracted public attention if they were successful, and even unsuccessful bids—such as Haas's in Japan—could sow seeds

9 All of these reasons and more are cited in the reports of members defecting while on tour with the Deutsche Staatsoper and Staatskapelle Berlin in the 1980s in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/18974.

10 See, for example, the account of a telephone call from the West German embassy to the conductor of the Bachorchester zu Leipzig Gerhard Bosse while in Buenos Aires in 1966 in BArch DR 1/18864.

11 This averted a potentially embarrassing political situation for the GDR, but led to a fractious encounter with the players. A post-concert meeting at which Zielke attempted to justify his action turned into a free-for-all extending into the early hours of the morning, with players complaining about the poor salary and pension conditions in East German orchestras, and one apparently asserting that musicians could hardly be blamed for wanting to go to West Germany (SAPMO-BArch DY 30/84973: b).

of discontent to be harvested later in other locations. When things went wrong, however, they exasperated the binaries of culture and politics that surrounded the reception of East German musical diplomacy. One such example was the botched attempt to prompt members of the Bachorchester zu Leipzig to defect while they were performing in Cyprus in August 1965.

The Bachorchester—a chamber group devoted to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, which was established by the Gewandhausorchester's concertmaster Gerhard Bosse in 1963—was one of the GDR's busiest touring ensembles; it had arrived in Cyprus from the Athens Festival, where it had appeared alongside ensembles such as the Berliner Philharmoniker and the New York Ballet (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 12899: fol. 23–4). The orchestra's Cyprus visit, which comprised two concerts—one at the open-air Diana I cinema in Nicosia, and a second at the ancient Kourion Theatre in the Limassol district—came on the back of recent East German political gains in the country. Cyprus, like many states of the Non-Aligned Movement, played East and West Germany against each other to its own advantage. In 1964 it had exchanged trade missions with the GDR and signed a contract for the East German state airline Interflug to fly between Germany and Cyprus, when a promised agreement with the West German airline Lufthansa failed to materialize. Such developments were cause for concern for the West German government. Yet, as Thomas Kruse details, the influx of East German tourists on the new Interflug route yielded some propaganda wins, with a number of instances of East German citizens arriving at the FRG embassy in Nicosia seeking to emigrate (Kruse 2012: 61–4).

Inspired by this trend, one embassy official made a bold offer of asylum to the Bachorchester. While the musicians were asleep in their hotel in Nicosia on the night of the 26 August, he posted a letter under their bedroom doors, which read:

Dear Compatriots! I write this letter to make you aware that Cyprus is a free country. If you do not want to return to the Soviet Occupied Zone, you can visit the following places, which are ready to provide you with protection and help.

[Liebe Landsleute! Diesem Brief schreibe ich Ihnen, um Sie darauf aufmerksam zu machen, dass Zypern ein freies Land ist. Wenn Sie nicht in die Sowjetische Besatzungszone Deutschlands zurückkehren wollen, können Sie folgende Stellen aufsuchen, die bereit sind, Ihnen Schutz und Hilfe zu gewähren.]

There followed full contact details of the West German embassy staff, the addresses and telephone numbers of the French, UK, and US embassies, and the English nomenclature to be used with taxi drivers for all four (PA AA, B 26/325: fol. 141).

If any of the musicians were tempted by this offer, the unsubtlety of the overture precluded them from acting on it. When the East German officials accompanying the orchestra discovered the letter the next morning, a maelstrom ensued. They organized for the document to be translated into English and distributed copies several hours later at a press conference, which was attended by all of the major Cypriot newspapers (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 12899: fols. 15–17). Given that the orchestra had been invited to Cyprus by the Cyprus Organization for Theatrical Development (OTHAK), a body that brought together all of the country's theatres, that the Cypriot president Makarios had himself attended the concert in Nicosia, and that the visit had been heavily subsidized by the East German government to ensure that ticket prices could be kept low and thus widely accessible (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 12899: fols. 12–14), it was easy for East German officials to paint the action as an attack not only on the GDR and Cyprus, but also on art. Indeed, politics and art were clearly demarcated in the press conference. Countering the exposé of the letter was an address by Bosse that explicated the long history of the Gewandhausorchester, followed by a questions-and-answer session in which he focused purely on musical matters, including the ensemble's distinctive aesthetic and its approach to the performance of baroque music (PA AA, MfAA, M1 A 12899: fols. 18–22).

The fallout from the event in the FRG was pronounced. Widespread coverage in the Cypriot and East German newspapers led to concerns in the West German foreign office that the episode might damage relations with Cyprus, and to a public denial in *Der Spiegel* of the government's involvement in the affair (PA AA, B 26/325: fols. 134–5; "Abwerbung" 1965). Sharp criticism was also forthcoming from West German musicians and concert agents. The conductor Heinrich Kreuzberg, who had been a colleague of Bosse's at the conservatory in Weimar in the late 1940s before moving to the West, described to a local politician in Detmold both his own embarrassment and the "indignation" of his colleagues in the GDR that the West German embassy in Cyprus could have acted so "tactlessly, clumsily, and without instinct to provide the Zone officials with such cheap propaganda material for their agitation against the Federal Republic regarding 'dirty poaching'" (PA AA, B 26/325: fol. 158). The Frankfurt concert agent Hans Schlote declared to the foreign office that years of work in maintaining cultural relations with East German orchestras, including an upcoming tour to the Federal Republic that he was organizing by the Dresdner Philharmonie, had been needlessly placed at risk. The question coming from East Berlin, he reported, was "what will be slipped under their bedroom doors?" (PA AA, B 26/325: fol. 140). Dieter Dickers of the Düsseldorfer Konzertdirektion, meanwhile, argued that the embassy's action would not only make future negotiations with East German officials more difficult; crucially, it had also upset the members of the orchestra, who "felt that it would only jeopardize their performances abroad, and considered the endeavour entirely

pointless since they travelled through the Federal Republic every year anyway.” Forcing musicians to “demonstrate their loyalty to the GDR,” as had happened in Cyprus, would not, Dickers surmised, serve the reputation of the Federal Republic (PA AA, B 26/325: fols. 152–3).

The affair did not result in any cessation of East German orchestra tours to the FRG or elsewhere. It did, however, provide rich fodder within the GDR for narratives positing the state as the protector of the German cultural heritage. In 1967 the state film company DEFA released a short documentary titled *Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung* or *Most Respectfully Yours*—the words with which Richard Giessen, the embassy official in Cyprus, had signed off his letter to the Bachorchester’s members. Directed by Walter Heynowski and Peter Voigt, the film offers a simple binary of the GDR and FRG as pro and contra culture respectively. It features the Bachorchester on home ground, playing the third movement of Bach’s fourth Brandenburg Concerto to an empty Thomaskirche, the Leipzig church where the composer served as cantor from 1723 to 1750. As the musicians make their way through the piece, a montage of close-up images of individual words and phrases from the Cyprus letter begins to intrude until the letter can be read in its entirety. The focus then switches back to the players, whose unwavering commitment to the music suggests not only their imperiousness to such political manoeuvring, but also a depth of ownership of the German musical heritage that is shared neither by the letter writer nor the government he represents.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the reduction of musical diplomacy to politics by the two German governments benefitted neither side. The force of the East German government’s demands for national signifiers at orchestra concerts sometimes led to ridicule. A review by a Swiss critic of a concert by the Bachorchester in Basel, where NATO restrictions did not apply, was scathing of the emblazoning of the GDR’s nomenclature on programmes and placards. “I do not,” the critic declared, “count myself among the cold warriors. But such obtrusive, surreptitious advertising for a state that has to wall off its citizens so that they don’t run away from it must disgust even me as an apolitical concertgoer!” (“Unterkühlter Bach vor halbleerem Haus,” 1968). Retaliations by the West German government, meanwhile, raised more eyebrows than they did genuine support. Schlegelberger reported from the consulate in Osaka-Kobe in 1961 that his NATO colleagues had been “collaborative and friendly” in helping with his efforts to constrain the Gewandhausorchester’s activities at the Osaka Festival. Yet, he reflected that “the impression remained that my colleagues were basically following the whole thing with the kind of embarrassed regret with which

one has to watch arguments in a friend's family as a bystander without being interested in them oneself" (PA AA, B 95/876: e).

To study music in the history of international relations is to study power. The bestowal of musical gifts from country to country, the national anthems, military bands, and musical dinner entertainments that have become synonymous with diplomatic protocol, and the deployment by states in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of musical diplomacy to counter alternative ideological and political systems are all concerned with displays of strength and hegemony. At the same time, the acts of music making that comprise these displays can be multifaceted in their meaning and effect. This is particularly the case given the dependence of musical diplomacy on non-government actors—musicians and listeners—and the difficulties in controlling how music itself is interpreted and received. Emilija Pundziūtė-Gallois deems music to be a “flawed diplomacy” given its “ambivalence as a medium of communication” (Pundziūtė-Gallois 2018: 256). Arguably, however, this ambivalence is musical diplomacy's currency. It enables musicians to represent states regardless of whether they support their politics, and for governments and publics to welcome musical representations from states they deem hostile. When ambivalence gives way to clarity and political realism is foregrounded, things become more complicated and musical diplomacy less palatable for all concerned.

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