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Musikland Deutschland? Eine Verteidigung

Musik in der Gesellschaft

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Summary

Germany, a country of music? Defending the role of music in society

A bird's-eye view of a fabulously wealthy country: There is hardly another country in the world with so much music and so many orchestras and opera houses. But these resources are threatened. The "cultural consensus" that these are valuable assets that deserve public funding is crumbling. With forecasts pessimistic about the future of classical music, the author explores the causes of our current situation and discusses new, more well-considered ways of dealing with music in society. He presents an analysis of the situation, with a clear-eyed view of the many blind spots shared even by those active in the world of classical music, and cautions against assuming that simply making music available might solve the problem. Finally, he offers seven policy propositions that focus on the question of what music means: Why do we need it? What is it good for? And what are we in danger of losing?

The ideas in this book are intended to encourage discussion and debate, and to pave the way for an ongoing discussion of this policy-relevant question: What does music, and in particular classical music, mean to society? What is it good for? What are people's attitudes toward it? What decisions are being made, and by whom? Who is responsible?

Germany's rich musical environment is threatened. There is increasing unease among those who – for whatever reason – believe that music is important. The remarks that follow are intended to encourage the reader to consider why music is not simply a matter of personal enjoyment, but a component of society, a source of energy whose importance is perhaps not yet fully recognized. The goal, in a difficult

situation, is to offer new ideas rather than a specific recipe for action, but these ideas are of practical relevance. Those who are concerned about music in our society should welcome change. And if we want change, we need to have a clear idea of where it might begin. First, however, it is important to ask a more fundamental question: Why is change important? What should we try to achieve, and why?

Defending the role of music in society. It is clear from the subtitle that the author regards it as a distinct possibility that we could let our country's rich musical resources slip away, and he is convinced that this would be a tragic mistake. He seeks to explain why. Since the future of music depends largely on fundamental decisions about cultural and social policy, society needs to discuss the legitimate role of music, and arguments are essential for that discussion. Good arguments require thought. According to the author, a great deal of – sometimes desperate – action takes place in the world of music, but these issues are given too little real consideration. Yet it is precisely when financing is tight that serious thought is needed. Over the long term, this approach may be more effective than high-profile projects, which are so popular because of the immediate visibility they offer, and because of the importance widely attached to media attention.

Part I of the text outlines the current situation: What resources do we currently have? What do we have to lose, and where? In what way is Germany's role as a country of music endangered? Part II looks at efforts to promote music, focusing particularly on the reasons behind those efforts. If we agree that a debate is currently underway regarding the legitimacy of public funding for classical music, a debate that is becoming ever louder, but unfortunately not more sophisticated (note the unhelpful discussion of the polemic diagnosis of a "cultural heart attack": Haselbach et al. 2012), then surely we should ask whether the arguments that are currently being put forth are actually valid. Again: Why should we care?

Part III asks where we might begin to address the issue of classical music as a concern for society. There is no avoiding this question if we believe that cultivating music (inevitably an expensive proposition) is a public responsibility that should be supported by all taxpayers, and not just by music lovers. Indeed, we shouldn't want to avoid this discussion, given the importance of music's effects on society and its role in triggering creativity. It offers much that could be used to make our complicated world a bit more livable.

The text concludes with seven propositions concerning where we might best direct our efforts to achieve change, followed by seven items on a proposed agenda.

This is a short book about a big topic. It is intended as a road map to help guide us through a confusing landscape and show where we might devote further thought and action. Luckily, road maps can be revised as more information is acquired. Arguing about the action to take is only proper, but first we need to agree on the direction in which we want to go.

Music can't save the world. It is not a cure-all. But if we stop dismissing it as something that belongs in a museum, it can promote growth – not in economic terms, but in terms of human capital. Music is a resource that we should not lose sight of. We can continue to treat classical music as a niche product, isolating it more and more under the heading of “high culture.” If we do so, it will be difficult to argue that all taxpayers should pay for something that only a minority of people enjoy.

Or we can think about music in a different way: First, we can recognize its social potential, and second, we can take advantage of that potential by putting in place pragmatic programs at every level of society. Listening to music with full concentration teaches us how »utopia,« the projection of ideals, and the concrete work and struggles of everyday life relate to one another.

Germany's musical resources, as rich – and as threatened – as they are, are worth defending. Let's get started.