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THE 1963 BERLIN PHILHARMONIE – A BREAKTHROUGH ARCHITECTURAL VISION

„I'm convinced that we need (...) an approach that would lead to an interpretation of the far-reaching changes that are happening right in front of us by the means of expression available to modern architecture.¹

Walter Gropius

The Berlin Philharmonie building opened in October of 1963 and designed by Hans Scharoun has become one of the symbols of both the city and European musical life. Its character and story are inextricably linked with the history of post-war Berlin. Construction was begun thanks to the determination and unstinting efforts of a citizens initiative – the Friends of the Berliner Philharmonie (*Gesellschaft der Freunde der Berliner Philharmonie*). The competition for a new home for the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (*Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester*) was won by Hans Scharoun whose design was brave and innovative, tailored to a young republic and democratic society. The path to turn the design into reality, however, was anything but easy. Several years were taken up with political maneuvering, debate on issues such as the optimal location, financing and the suitability of the design which brought into question the traditions of concert halls including the old Philharmonie which was destroyed during bombing raids in January 1944.

A little over a year after the beginning of construction the Berlin Wall appeared next to it. Thus, instead of being in the heart of the city, as had been planned, with easy access for residents of the Eastern sector, the Philharmonie found itself on the outskirts of West Berlin in the close vicinity of a symbol of the division of the city and the world. The beginnings were not a cause of optimism either as funds for decorating the façade as envisioned in the design were lacking. The acoustics, especially as evaluated by musicians, left much to be desired and Berliners called the building “Karajan’s circus”, an allusion to the form of the roof of the Philharmonie and the name of the principal conductor of the orchestra.

¹ W. Gropius, *Pełnia architektury*, Kraków 2014, p. 105.

After the acoustics were adjusted, the Berlin Philharmonie became one of the most highly esteemed concert halls in the world. In 1987, the Chamber Music Hall (*Kammermusiksaal*)² was completed. Both buildings with gold-colored façades are now sometimes described “the crown of the city around Potsdamer Platz”³ and are inscribed forever in the landscape of the city, along with the *Haus Potsdamer Straße* of the Berlin State Library (*Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*) across the street and designed by the same architect.



The Berlin Philharmonie and Chamber Music Hall © Schirmer / Berliner Philharmoniker

The Berlin Philharmonie has become the prototype for most concert halls built since the latter half of the 1960's. It can be said that it “revolutionized the rules, in force since the second half of the 19th century, shaping large concert (symphonic) buildings.”⁴ The question arises of what the breakthrough nature of the architectural vision brought to life in Berlin is. To answer that question requires the consideration of such diverse contextual factors as the social and political situation of Berlin in the 1950's and 60's, earlier concert hall traditions, the history of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, the specifics of the career of its legendary principal

² The main concert hall of the Berlin Philharmonie has 2440 seats and the Chamber Music Hall has 1180.

³ A. Kleinert, *Berliner Philharmoniker. Von Karajan bis Rattle*, Berlin 2005, p. 3.

⁴ J. Jabłońska, *Nowatorstwo centralnej sali tarasowej filharmonii w Berlinie*, „Architectus” 1/2008, p. 81.

conductor Herbert von Karajan, controversies and obstacles in bringing the project to realization, the challenges regarding the acoustics related to the central position of the orchestra podium as well as the increase in importance of the visual aspect in evaluating musical performances. All of these influenced the formation and ultimate reshaping of the concert hall that has found many imitators all over the world.

THE FIRST BERLIN PHILHARMONIC BUILDING

The first headquarters of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra was an adapted roller skating rink on to Bernburger Strasse in the neighborhood of Kreuzberg. When the skating fad passed out of fashion, the owners rented the building to Hermann Wolff, an impresario who began a subscription series of concerts in the 1882-1883 season. The final form of the interior was supplied 1888 by Franz Schwechten, who had designed, among other buildings, the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (*Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche*) in Berlin as well as the Imperial Castle (*Zamek Cesarski*) in Poznań.



The destroyed Philharmonic building on Bernburger Strasse, 1944

© Archiv Berliner Philharmoniker

The entrance to the philharmonic building was in a courtyard. In the hall, which was rectangular in shape and held about 2500 concert goers (including 900 in standing room) balls, meetings and receptions were also held. Wolfgang Stresemann⁵, the longtime General Director of the orchestra (1959-1978, 1984-1986) recalled that the interior was richly decorated and while it radiated dignity, for him it lacked charm. It brought forth associations of “bourgeois prosperity” and created the impression of a “lavish multi-function space” to which the music sounding within “provided nobility.”⁶ A more blunt appraisal was given by the music critic Friedrich Herzfeld, who was the head of the philharmonic press office in the years 1940-1943:

“It was exceptionally awful. The hall could never overcome its original function as a roller skating rink. Of course it was refurbished many times. The transverse hall was elongated. But it always maintained the cheap excess of its founding time. It was decorated with plaster stucco – as tasteless as anything. (...) It would be difficult to find something more uncomfortable than those hard wooden chairs. The slightest movement would bring forth a creaking racket.”⁷

During the Third Reich in addition to concerts and other functions, state occasions marking the birthday of Adolf Hitler took place in which Joseph Goebbels delivered speeches in front of the orchestra. The building was destroyed during the all night bombing from January 29 to 30 in 1944 and it was never rebuilt. In 1950 a short film was made on the site of the ruins in which the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sergiu Celibidache⁸, played the *Egmont* overture by Ludwig van Beethoven. The film was shown on the news program *Tagesschau*. Today the only reminder of the former location is a memorial plaque in the sidewalk.

THE REICHSORCHESTER AND THE FIRST YEARS AFTER THE WAR

The orchestra currently known as the Berlin Philharmonic (*Berliner Philharmoniker*)⁹ was established in 1882 on the initiative of disgruntled musicians playing under Benjamin Bilse¹⁰, who wanted to make decisions concerning

⁵ Wolfgang Stresemann (1904-1998) – attorney, author, conductor, composer. Intendent of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, 1959-1978, 1984-1986.

⁶ W. Stresemann, *Philharmonie und Philharmoniker*, Berlin 1977, p. 8.

⁷ E. Wisniewski, *Die Berliner Philharmonie und ihr Kammernusiksaal. Der Konzertsaal als Zentralraum*, Berlin 1993, p. 68.

⁸ Sergiu Celibidache (1912-1996) – Romanian conductor, he led the Berlin Philharmonic in the years 1945-1952.

⁹ Until 2001 the orchestra performed under the name of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra while recording under the name Berlin Philharmonic. Since 2002 only the second name is used.

¹⁰ Benjamin Bilse (1816-1902) – German kapellmeister, composer and musical entrepreneur. In 1842 he founded the orchestra which from 1867 performed in Berlin, changing repertoire on a daily basis. He was known for the outstanding way he selected musicians, the solidity and authoritarian way he led them. In 1882, a group of musicians under his direction rebelled and formed their own orchestra.

their future for themselves. Until the 1920's the group operated on a for profit basis as a limited liability company. This brought with it the necessity of an intense concert activity both in Germany and abroad, of having a rich repertoire that would reach the broadest possible audience as well as undertaking promotional endeavors and making use of technological innovations such as recordings and film. Along with the crisis at the beginning of the 1930's the orchestra's existence was threatened and it became necessary to pursue funding from the city and the state. This, however, decreased year by year and in 1933 the orchestra which was already seriously indebted saw its grant from the city decreased by half. At that time funding was taken over by the state, a process which was personally pursued by Joseph Goebbels.¹¹ He was aware of the potential of the "Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra" brand, which was identified with the "German sound". That is why he strove to incorporate it as quickly as possible into the propaganda machinery of the Third Reich. He acquired an excellent orchestra¹², well known both in Germany and abroad. The musical director of the time, Wilhelm Furtwängler¹³, was a devotee and outstanding interpreter of the repertoire that would soon become standard in the Third Reich, including the works of Ludwig van Beethoven, Anton Bruckner and Richard Wagner. From the beginning of 1934 the orchestra found itself under the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*). Following years of teetering on the edge of bankruptcy the members of the orchestra viewed this development with relief. Until the end of the war they enjoyed a number of privileges; they were paid handsomely (wages increased several fold) and they were exempt from military duty. As one member at the time expressed it, they lived "under a musical bell-jar."¹⁴

As an Orchestra of the Reich (*Reichsorchester*), the Philharmonie represented German culture abroad and during the war it performed in occupied countries. In Germany it provided the musical setting for the most important state occasions such as the Nuremberg Rallies and the Olympic Games in 1936. It performed each year on the occasion of the birth of Adolf Hitler and also in programs offered by organizations such as the Winter Relief of the German People (*Winterhilfswerk*

After performing for a few months they took on the name Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The direct cause of the split with Bilsse was the unfavorable contract which he proposed for a trip to Warsaw. The growing artistic ambitions of the musicians also played an important role.

¹¹ See H. Haffner, *Die Berliner Philharmoniker. Eine Biografie*, Mainz 2007, pp. 98-99.

¹² The orchestra attained a very high level under the direction of Hans von Bülow (1887-1892) and Arthur Nikisch (1915-1922). Its international fame grew under the direction of Wilhelm Furtwängler (1922-1945).

¹³ Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954) – one of the most outstanding conductors of the 20th century, he led the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra during the years 1922-45 and in 1952-54.

¹⁴ The quote, by the violinist Johannes Bastiaan, who joined the orchestra in 1934, comes from the film *Das Reichsorchester* (directed by Enrique Sánchez Lansch, 2007). The film attempts to show how one of the most famous orchestras in the world functioned within the state machinery of the Third Reich.

des Deutschen Volkes), *Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude)* and the *Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend)*. For over ten years the orchestra tried to balance the need to fulfill the objectives of state cultural policy with attempts at maintaining artistic autonomy.¹⁵



Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in the Philharmonie on Bernburger Strasse, ca. 1940 © Wilhelm Furtwängler / Archiv Berliner Philharmoniker

At the end of WWII, the break in operations of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra lasted just 39 days – the last wartime concert took place on April 16, 1945 and the first post-war concert was on May 26 of the same year. The end of the war found the orchestra with no permanent headquarters and without the conductor who had been the symbol of its international success. Warned that he was threat-

¹⁵ The mechanisms of the political entanglement of the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras during the Third Reich are reconstructed by Fritz Trümpi in the monograph *Politisierter Orchester: Die Wiener Philharmoniker und das Berliner Philharmonische Orchester im Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna 2011).

ened with arrest, Wilhelm Furtwängler fled to Switzerland several months before the end of the war. After the war ended, he was forbidden from performing in Germany or Austria until the prohibition was removed after his denazification in 1947. Members of the Nazi party were excluded from the orchestra, although they were relatively few in number, just eight out of 107 musicians at the beginning of the 1940's.¹⁶

Leo Borchard¹⁷ became temporary artistic director, chosen by the orchestra members and confirmed by the city authorities on June 2, 1945. He only held the post very briefly as he was shot on August 23 near the entrance to the American sector after police curfew. Until the return of Wilhelm Furtwängler the directorship was taken by the already mentioned young Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache.

Immediately after the war¹⁸, one of the best orchestras in the world wandered from one temporary headquarters to another in different parts of the city – Neukölln, Mariendorf, Tegel and Dahlem. They played in churches, movie theaters, school auditoriums and even in the headquarters of a hockey club. They rehearsed in places such as the hall of the Jesus Christ Church (*Jesus-Christus-Kirche*) in Dahlem, recorded in the church and the orchestra office was on the second floor. Most concerts took place in the Titania Palace (*Titania-Palast*) in Steglitz, in a movie theater whose acoustics Furtwängler complained about and which Celibidache described as catastrophic. Starting in the 1954-55 season the orchestra played in the newly built hall of the School of Music (*Hochschule für Musik*) on Hardenbergstraße. The modern interior was still a provisional solution for Berliners – its acoustics worked well with the modern repertoire but did not show off the value of symphonic music of the 19th century which was their stock in trade. It was in this hall that a new chapter began in the history of the orchestra, namely the “Herbert von Karajan era”. This conductor was born in Salzburg and due to the number of prestigious positions he held and his huge influence was called the “music director of Europe”¹⁹. In 1955 he became the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra with a lifetime contract.

¹⁶ Compare H. Haffner, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁷ Leo Borchard (1899-1945) a conductor of German ancestry born in Moscow. He worked in Königsberg and Berlin.

¹⁸ The post-war years in the history of the orchestra, cf. G. Forck (ed.), *50 Jahre Berliner Philharmonie. Eine Zeitreise*, Berlin 2013, pp. 26-30.

¹⁹ Herbert von Karajan (1908-1989) – one of the most outstanding conductors of the 20th century. At the time he took over the position as director of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra he was already the artistic director of three important Austrian musical institutions: The Vienna State Opera (*Wiener Staatsoper*), the Wiener Singverein choir and the Salzburg Festival (*Salzburger Festspiele*). He often performed with the Vienna Philharmonic and regularly appeared at La Scala, recorded with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and led the Lucerne Festival Orchestra in Switzerland.

THE CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND THE ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION

The lack of a permanent headquarters did not contribute to the stable development of the orchestra and the formation of a homogenous sound. Herbert von Karajan remembered that before the appearance of the new philharmonic concert, tours were necessary from the point of view of the form of the orchestra; the musicians then had the chance to hear themselves in halls with good acoustics as well as have rehearsals and concerts at the same place.

Wilhelm Furtwängler, who returned to work with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra after his denazification, had already been dreaming of building a new concert hall. The first concert together after the war took place on May 25, 1947. He found an ally in the person of Erik Reger, a writer and journalist and one of the founders of the newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* (The Daily Mirror). It was in this newspaper on September 25, 1949 that a call was made for the formation of an association called Friends of the Berliner Philharmonie. The first sentence read: "The Berlin Philharmonic as a cultural institution with a wonderful tradition and international significance is not of interest to only Berlin but is rather a matter of deep significance to all of Germany".²⁰ The idea of the prospective society was "to unite Germany's gratitude for the achievements of the orchestra together with the will to restore Berlin to its former position as a focus of the musical life of Europe."²¹ The plan was supported by the highest authorities and among those who joined the honorary presidium of the new society were the President of the Federal Republic of Germany Theodor Heuss, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the Mayor of Berlin Ernst Reuter. The call was signed by personalities from the worlds of culture, science and the economy. The society was formed in October and in March of 1950 a collection was begun to fund the construction of a new philharmonic building. In the years following, lotteries, public collections of money and concerts with well-known artists were all held. The goal was to collect one million marks, at which point the project could also receive public funds. This benchmark was surpassed in the middle of 1955 with the collection of one and a half million marks.

From the very beginning the society did not wish to rebuild the old concert hall on Bernburger Strasse. Among other reasons, its location was in the middle of ruins and on the border between sectors. The first proposal concerning the location appeared at the beginning of 1952 and was not questioned for a considerable period of time. The site was a partially destroyed building of the former Gymnasium on Bundesallee. Discussions concerned whether the building should be expanded, modified or rebuilt. The Berlin Senate on January 30, 1956 decided on the last of these options. The building of a 2,000 seat concert hall was planned with the estimated cost

²⁰ G. Eberle, *Herzenssache für ganz Deutschland*, <http://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/philharmonie/freunde/> (accessed March, 12, 2015).

²¹ G. Forck, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

of seven million marks. In order to bring the project to fruition, on August 14, 1956 the limited liability company Concert House of the Berlin Philharmonic (*Konzert-haus der Berliner Philharmoniker GmbH*) was established and the money so far collected by the society was transferred to it. A competition was soon announced “for the construction of a new concert hall and ancillary rooms for the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra”. For the first time in the history of architecture, the design of a concert hall had to fulfill not only construction guidelines related in this case to the location behind the façade of a Gymnasium from the 19th century *Gründerzeit* but also precisely formulated acoustic demands, specifically a two-second reverberation in a space large enough for two thousand seats. Along with the design it was necessary to provide a 1:50 scale model of the interior.

Twelve architects were invited to enter the competition, ten projects were received and assigned numbers. The jury consisted of seven architectural and construction experts and six laypeople. The decision was made on December 16 after two days of meetings and 16 hours of discussion. The final vote was 9:4 in favor of entry number 002200. It turned out that the designer was Hans Scharoun, an outstanding representative of organic architecture²² and the creator of a housing estate in Siemensstadt in Berlin. The jury appreciated the original nature and the ideological bent of his proposal: “the only (...) design that proposes placing the orchestra in the middle of the audience, emerging from the idea of bonds between performers and audience. All seats are directed visually and audially toward the orchestra.”²³

Hans Bernhard Scharoun (1893-1972) was born in Bremen and grew up in Bremerhaven. His fascination with maritime themes is evident in many of his designs including that of the Berlin Philharmonic. He studied architecture in Berlin and after WWI took part in a project to rebuild the cities of East Prussia. He belonged to the Glass Chain group (*Die Gläserne Kette*), the architects association the Ring (*Der Ring*) and to the German Association of Craftsmen (*Der Deutsche Werkbund*). In the years 1925-32 he was a professor of the State Academy of Art and Applied Arts (*Staatliche Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe*) in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland). Beginning in 1932, he worked as an independent architect in Berlin. During WWII he received no commissions for public buildings and only designed a few apartment buildings. At this time his vision was put on paper – his private archiv given to the Academy of Arts (*Akademie der Künste*) in Berlin shortly before his death includes twelve thousand drawings. It was not until after the war, when he was

²² Organic architecture, a philosophy of architecture whose theoretical foundations in Germany were formulated by Hugo Häring (1882-1958). In this school, design is to be found from the function of the building and not from a priori aesthetic considerations. The first stage is comprised of researching the human needs the building is destined to meet and the second stage is giving shape to a design that is adequate to the results of the research. The building is perceived as a human “organ” performing a particular function. It is also to harmonically blend with its environment.. Cf. V. M. Lampugnani (ed.), *Hatje-Lexikon der Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1998, pp. 154-155, 276-277.

²³ E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

over 50 years old, that he was able to completely focus on his work and teaching. In May of 1945 he was appointed by the Soviets to the position of councilman on the State Board for Building and Housing (*Stadtrat für Bau- und Wohnungsfragen*) and he was given responsibility for preparing a plan for rebuilding the destroyed city. The “Collective Plan” (*Kollektivplan*)²⁴ was presented in the summer of 1946 at the exhibition *Berlin plant. Erster Bericht* (Berlin plans. First report). In October, after the division of the city and new elections to the city council, Scharoun lost this position. He later was appointed to the Chair of Urban Planning at Berlin’s Technical University (*Lehrstuhl für Städtebau an der Technischen Universität Berlin*) in the years 1946-1958. He was also the Director of the Institute for Construction (*Institut für Bauwesen*) in the (East) German Academy of Sciences at Berlin (*Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*) as well as the President of the Academy of Arts in the years 1955-1968²⁵.

FROM DESIGN TO CONSTRUCTION – OBSTACLES AND CONTROVERSY

In January 1957 a member of the competition jury and a supporter of Hans Scharoun’s design attempted, in the pages of the daily *Die Welt* (The World), to alert the public to the absurdity of the situation in the competition. One of the negative votes was given with the premeditated goal of preventing the design from obtaining three quarters of the votes because in accordance with the rules of the competition this was a requirement for the winner of the competition to be given the commission to carry out the project.²⁶ “Art for Art’s sake” is what he called the competition in the article *Will the best not be built?* in which the jury awarded first prize but did not recommend that the architect of the winning design actually build it. In addition, this concerned “one of the greatest architects of international renown who helped form modern architecture”²⁷. He also wrote of

²⁴ His concept envisioned the demolition of surviving buildings and raising a linear “City of Work”. Residential areas would lie to the north and south and would be equipped with the necessary infrastructure such as eating establishments, health centers, hospitals, daycare, pre-schools, schools, movie theaters, bookstores. The city would be overlaid with a geometric fast transport network “with 64 cloverleaf intersections”. The city center, on the other hand, would become the “display window of Berlin”. The project was related to the Charter of Athens with separate areas for living, working and resting. See P. Kubiak *Odbudowa modernizmu - modernizm odbudowy. INTERBAU, urbanistyka i architektura Berlina lat 50. XX wieku*, „Artium Quaestiones”, No. XVI (2005), pp. 101-103.

²⁵ Cf. V. M. Lampugnani, *op. cit.*, s. 326-328; G. Forck (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 46-52.

²⁶ The jury protocols show that Johannes Rossig, who represented the Federal Ministry of Construction (*Bundesbauministerium*), “actually voted against awarding first prize to the design, ... because he felt bound by the second paragraph of the competition rules, but was in favor of awarding him first prize because he finds the ideas underlying the project to be outstanding”. From: E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

the “methodical attempt to make it impossible to do that which due to its quality should be done.”²⁸

In previous years Hans Scharoun had won two other design competitions, for the *Liederhalle* Concert Hall in Stuttgart and the State Theater (*Staatstheater*) in Kassel. In both cases, his designs were not realized and the commission was given to others. There were also real fears in Berlin that the same scenario could be repeated, all the more so since at first the design was regarded in specialist circles as impossible to build. It was thought that “such a building with no right angles could not be constructed at all.”²⁹

Edgar Wisniewski³⁰ claimed that in the years 1957-59 the matter appeared to be hopeless. He wrote of “battles that were strung out over years over forcing through and carrying out construction” as well as “the sad chapter of intrigues, arguments and prejudice” that were symptomatic of cases when “a brilliant idea (...) clashes with reigning architectural fashions.”³¹ He also remembered attempts to force through the traditional project which won third prize as well as the official “disappearance” of drawings made by Scharoun’s office – their lack was supposed to be proof of the architect’s incompetence.

Shortly after the announcement of the competition results, an extensive article appeared in the weekly “Der Spiegel” devoted to the philharmonic design which described the most important accusations made against it: “Discussions which have erupted in Berlin concern above all the placement of the orchestra in the center and an enormous sound reflector which is to be raised above the heads of the musicians.”³² Doubts were raised by the break with a proven arrangement for concert halls: “It has been accepted up to now that the orchestra should be placed together with soloists and choruses on a podium that is reminiscent of a stage in such a way that the softest sounding instruments and voices were closest to the audience.”³³ The innovative arrangement with the orchestra in the center was judged as being useful for 20th century music which “does not require any specific direction”³⁴, but inappropriate for symphonic music of the 19th century, which “is characterized by a linear direction from the orchestra to the listener.”³⁵ It was stressed that the “philharmonic is not

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ G. Forck, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

³⁰ Edgar Wisniewski (1930-2007) – architect, student and later colleague of Hans Scharoun, including work on the design of the Berlin Philharmonic. After Scharoun’s death, he continued to work to carry out his project: The State Library in Berlin and the State Institute for Musical Research (*Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung*) with its annexe, the Museum of Musical Instruments (*Musikinstrumenten-Museum*). He designed and built the Chamber Music Hall of the Berlin Philharmonic.

³¹ E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³² *Achteckige Philharmonie*, “Der Spiegel” 30.01.1957, p. 46.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

meant to be a concert hall only of the future but also of the past.”³⁶ Attention was also drawn to the intrusive exposure of the technical aspect of performing music as the reflectors over the stage were reminders of the fact that “the miracle of listening is a physical phenomenon directed by science.”³⁷

Disagreements, political games and delaying tactics related to the location, financing and controversial form of the design delayed construction for several years and the groundbreaking for the project was continually pushed back into an unspecified future. The day before the Carnival Monday on February 9, 1958 a caricature of three singing dolls dressed in frock coats with visibly missing teeth and holding boards reading “It will be here”, “It will be there” and “Maybe, maybe, maybe” appeared in the *Welt am Sonntag*.³⁸

The deciding factor which led to establishing the final location and the beginning of construction came from Herbert von Karajan. He highlighted what was, in his expert opinion, the most important value of the design “the total focusing of the audience’s attention on the music,”³⁹ which resulted from its central arrangement. The purpose of this was to assure the optimal results for the “typical style of musical interpretation of the (Berlin) Philharmonic Orchestra, whose principal features are long, broad decay and the particular breath at the beginning and end of the musical phrase.”⁴⁰ In May 1958, the intendent of the Philharmonie, Gerhart von Westerman, sent the conductor the minutes of the latest meeting of the Senate of Berlin with the comment that the matter is “so scandalous that there are no words for it.”⁴¹ Karajan who was regarded as a master of diplomatic blackmail effectively intervened. Edgar Wisniewski claimed that he threatened to leave Berlin if construction of the Philharmonie was not begun soon.

At the beginning of 1959, the Senate of Berlin decided that the building would be built on Kemperplatz at the edge of the Tiergarten area. On the tenth anniversary of the founding the Friends, a contract was signed with Hans Scharoun and acoustician Lothar Cremer and on September 6, 1960 the Senate of Berlin approved the construction for the sum of thirteen and one half million marks. The real costs turned out to be seventeen and one half million marks. On September 19, 1960, Herbert von Karajan placed the cornerstone together with the following engraved dedication: “May this finished building be, in a united Germany, in a no longer capital far from the turmoil of daily politics, a place for all Berliners to meet.”⁴² A little less than a year later, the Berlin Wall stood next to it. It was only then that voices calling for the project to be modified for financial reasons were silenced. The new Philharmoni-

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

³⁸ See G. Forck, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁹ E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ G. Forck, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁴² G. Eberle, *op. cit.*

nie, located directly by the wall, obtained a political dimension and the function of a calling card for West Berlin.

On December 1, 1961, a topping out ceremony was held, on November 23, 1962 the members of the Friends visited the unfinished building, and on October 14, 1963 a test concert took place with Herbert von Karajan conducting Beethoven's 9th Symphony. One day later, it was played during the inaugural gala concert, whose date coincided with Konrad Adenauer leaving office as the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. The planning, preparation and construction of the Philharmonie lasted fourteen years, coinciding with the whole Adenauer era.

CONCERT HALL TRADITIONS AND HANS SCHAROUN'S BREAKTHROUGH

The performance of music was for many years connected with church liturgy and royal court functions. Public concerts and following that the establishment, outside of court circles, of permanent orchestras composed of professional musicians that played in specialized halls built for the production and consumption of music is an effect of the work of bourgeois musical societies which began to appear (first in England) from 1710. In Germany, the role of musical centers was first found in the business cities, such as: Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg and Leipzig. This was related to the strong position and significant role of the bourgeoisie. Originally, concerts were organized in restaurants in which "music was played for the audience ready to pay"⁴³ for entrance. The music was often accompanied by the clinking of cups and tableware – that was still the case in 1882 during concerts by the "former Bilsse group", which became the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.⁴⁴ The first hall designed especially for concerts was built in 1781 in Leipzig on the second floor of the Cloth Hall (*Gewandhaus*). Together with balconies and standing room there was room for 500 audience members. The orchestra was on a podium and seats for the audience were located in front and to the side of it "the separation of performers on one side and listeners on the other"⁴⁵ was one of the features of bourgeois concert life.

The first building intended for concerts (*Konzerthaus*), constructed in 1869, was the headquarters of the Musical Society (*Musikverein*) in Vienna. The Golden Hall (*Goldener Saal*) is known all over the world for its transmissions of the New Year's Concert by the Vienna Philharmonic. The *Musikverein* became the model for shoebox (*Schuhkarton*) shaped concert halls.⁴⁶ The same model was followed later

⁴³ R. Mörchen, *Konzerthäuser in Deutschland*, Bonn 2008, http://www.miz.org/static_de/themenportale/einfuehrungstexte_pdf/03_KonzerteMusiktheater/moerchen.pdf, s. 1 (accessed December 12, 2014).

⁴⁴ G. Forck, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ H-U. Glogau, *Der Konzertsaal*, New York 1989, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Shoebox – description of a rectangularly shaped concert hall reminiscent in its proportions to a shoebox. The model stems from the particularly good acoustics of such a construction for a hall of up to 1,600 seats.

in halls such as the *Concertgebouw* in Amsterdam, the *Stadtcasino* in Basel, the *Tonhalle* in Zurich and the Boston Symphony Hall. The architect, Teophil Hansen, designed the Golden Hall to have more than one function and it can be used, after removing the chairs, for other purposes – each year the Vienna Philharmonic Ball takes place there. At present almost all medium-sized and large German cities have their own multi-purpose halls and, in addition to concerts, other events, such as congress and banquets are organized there⁴⁷.

The traditional design of the concert hall, formed in the second half of the 19th century reflected the experiences and expectations of audiences at the time. To a greater degree than now, the musical experience was essentially a one time and solemn event and had connotations that were almost religious in nature. In shoebox halls, the view of the audience is directed to a raised podium for musicians and organs above them. Wolfgang Stresemann draws attention to the fact that the organization of this type of interior is similar to a church and suggests a clear hierarchy:

“From the heights of the podium the artist – once almost always the composer himself – announces a message of beauty, at his feet and yet clearly divided is the audience, who the performer, comparable to an apostle, can lead not only into a state of rapture but also a state of reverent concentration.”⁴⁸

The force of traditions, rooted in the 19th century, were also felt during the competition to design a new building for the Berlin Philharmonic – all the entries came from the same long accepted model of the concert hall. There was only one exception – the design made by Hans Scharoun. Edgar Wisniewski recalled that for this architect the “whole concept” was always of utmost importance and he understood this in terms of “new solutions for social, functional or urban tasks.”⁴⁹ In the case of the Philharmonie, the task was the creation of a concert hall that would optimize the performance and reception of music. Scharoun’s train of thought came from a simple observation:

“(…) it is undoubtedly no accident that whenever music is played spontaneously today people still form a circle, just as they have always done. It should be possible to transfer this entirely natural process, understandable to all from a psychological and musical perspective, to a concert hall – this was the decisive consideration.”⁵⁰

The architect called the idea “music in the middle”: “The orchestra with the conductor become the central point in the spatial and visual sense – it is true there is no mathematical center to the room but it is surrounded on all sides by rows of

⁴⁷ R. Mörchen, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁴⁸ W. Stresemann, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵⁰ Comment by Hans Scharoun on the competition design. From: E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

listeners.”⁵¹ The project came into being through the inside-out method – the idea of the interior of the concert hall translated itself into the shape and organization of the entire building. Adjoining the concert hall itself are rehearsal halls, dressing rooms and foyer for musicians, equipment rooms as well as cloakrooms and foyers for attendees.

In the text to the inauguration concert program Hans Scharoun summoned up associations of landscapes: the interior of the concert hall is like a valley “at whose bottom the orchestra is found surrounded by climbing vineyards”⁵² in the form of towering blocks of places for the audience. The ceiling, on the other hand, is a “picture of the sky”. The term *vineyard* entered general usage – it is generally used to describe the concert hall layout created by Scharoun and duplicated by other architects.

The leitmotif of the project, the logo of the Philharmonie and the Orchestra are three interlocking pentagons.⁵³ They are meant to symbolize the unity of “space-music-man”. Scharoun wanted his concert hall to evoke in the audience the feeling of “direct participation as co-creators in the music that is happening.”⁵⁴ Therefore, he strove to create an impression of intimacy despite the large dimensions of the room. The pentagon motif is embedded in the plan of the interior of the hall in the form of architectural details, in the arrangement of the terraces of vineyards and in the acoustic reflectors over the stage, it is also found at the highest point of the hall.

Hans Scharoun had already assured himself of the contribution of the acoustician Lothar Cremer during the design stage of the project. Cremer was the then director of the Institute for Technical Acoustics (*Institut für Technische Akustik*) at Berlin Technical University. At first Cremer was skeptical concerning the central location of the orchestra and pointed out possible acoustic complications. He decided to take up the challenge out of scientific curiosity which was aroused by this new unexplored territory. The solutions implemented were pioneering in nature and success was built on the small distance of the audience from the orchestra, the lack of balconies, the ceiling in the form of a tent, the pleated walls, the reflective panels separating particular groups of listeners. The folding chairs are covered with cloth, including underneath, thanks to which the acoustic conditions do not differ significantly when there is no audience, which is important during rehearsals and recordings.

The sound reaches the listener from different directions, whether directly from the orchestra or also reflected from the irregular side surfaces and ceiling, which

⁵¹ E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ The pentagon symbolizes the enrichment of geometry by an irrational element – imagination, inspiration, mystery (Scharoun spoke of the “mystery of form”). It is a reference to the sign used by builders of cathedrals in the Middle Ages and implies a synthesis of form and imagination, of objective structure and human individuality, the logical mind and the irrational.

⁵⁴ E. Wisniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

evokes the impression of being surrounded by music.⁵⁵ The most important challenge turned out to be ensuring good audibility on the podium. In traditional concert halls, the back and side walls are adjacent to it but here it was to be surrounded by open space and the seats for the audience and the distance of the ceiling was twenty-two meters. In order to create a situation of acoustic comfort for the musicians ten reflective panels were placed at a height of twelve meters directly over the orchestra. Their shape is reminiscent of horizontally hung sails. In the previously mentioned convention of landscape terms they were called “clouds”.

Hans Scharoun encouraged listeners to wander around the new concert hall, to meander between the blocks intended for the audience and to experience changing views of the “landscape”. Without leaving the hall, a person sitting in the forward C block could cross over and greet those sitting in one of the side blocks or behind the orchestra. In traditional concert halls, the audience in the balconies has no contact with those on the floor and important persons present at the concert retreat to boxes. In the Berlin Philharmonie they occupy a place in block B together with other listeners.

Wolfgang Stresemann recalled that photographers who appeared at the gala opening to take pictures of the new hall were very shocked. It seemed that it looked different from each location, “it would require hours or days to capture all the aspects of the building’s architectural beauty” in order to “give justice to the almost unlimited architectural imagination that was reflected in details which are all but impossible to count.”⁵⁶

The trip planned by Scharoun begins at the entrance to the Philharmonie. The architect shaped the way to the concert hall in such a way as to increase the mood of expectation – to prepare the listener for a communion with art. The entrance to the building is found on the ground floor, where there is a spacious hall from which a system of stairs and galleries leads in many stages to the hall itself on the second floor. Scharoun evoked the mood of a luxury liner though the dominant white color is broken with vivid color accents, portholes, light stairs with white metal rails and galleries. As the organization of the interior does not resemble those of other concert halls, surprise is felt especially by those visiting the Berlin Philharmonie for the first time.

A testament to the first impression made by the hall is the letter that Hans Scharoun received from Max Frisch – not only an outstanding writer but also an architect who had spent several years in the trade and who had completed construction projects:

“In the foyer I was shocked and excited. We went up and down the stairs, fascinated by the changing views. Unfortunately people and their movements were missing from the space. After that

⁵⁵ This is related to the utilization of energy of side reflections. The thesis concerning them was formulated and published in research at Southampton University in 1966, after the opening of the Philharmonic.

⁵⁶ W. Stresemann, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

we walked and walked as if in a maze led not by a guide but by the spirit of this creation. The labyrinth – by which I mean no matter how much I looked around I could not understand it rationally. No more can a living landscape be rationalized. At the same time I felt led and not lost, (...) led in a tempting way by the thoughts of the architect. This was a great pleasure, a prelude that removes us from our daily shells and frees us (...).

Once in the hall we separated, sat down and were quiet, we were there. We avoided each other in order to not discuss anything. (...) The space was one of the greatest creations of our century, new, unequalled, comparable in its effects only with the most beautiful spaces that had at any time or any place been created by architecture.

You know this, but you must also know how thankful we are. How proud (which rarely happens) we are of architecture in this, our century.

We sat for a long time. We sat here and there. The sound of the orchestra which was rehearsing spared us the burden of speaking, it would have been nothing but superlatives. But why. One is simply there. One is there where music comes from, in music.

I miss this space –
With great admiration,
Your Max Frisch.⁵⁷



The Berlin Philharmonic © Schirmer / Berliner Philharmoniker

The tenth volume of the journal of the Academy Arts of Berlin devoted to Hans Scharoun in 1974 contains a list of one hundred and twenty-nine articles on the new Berlin Philharmonic in professional journals – probably no other post-war building

⁵⁷ Letter from Rome, dated April 20, 1964. From: G. Forek, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-130.

provoked so much reaction, criticism or as many editorials. The Philharmonie was not written about only by European experts – articles appeared from Bombay to Buenos Aires. Professional interest should not be surprising when the innovative and breakthrough nature of the project carried out in Berlin is visualized. Since that time very few concert halls have been built based on the model of the traditional “shoebox”. Many architects have followed the model of the Berlin Philharmonie but none have been able to repeat its originality and formal complexity. Among the more important halls following the vineyard model it is possible to mention the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House (Jørn Utzon, 1973) the new *Gewandhaus* in Leipzig (Rudolf Skoda, 1981), the Suntory Hall in Tokyo (Shoichi Sano, 1986) the *Parco della Musica* in Rome (Renzo Piano, 2002), Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (Frank Gehry, 2003), the *Musiikkitalo* in Helsinki (Marko Kivistö, 2011) or the *Elbphilharmonie* in Hamburg (Herzog & de Meuron, 2016). The central model was also followed by the new hall of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra (*Narodowa Orkiestra Symfoniczna Polskiego Radia*) in Katowice (Tomasz Konior, 2014).

DEMOCRACY IN THE CONCERT HALL

During the opening of the Philharmonie and also during subsequent galas related to it, phrases were evoked concerning the functioning of society and democracy. The organization of the building and hall spurred such comparisons – there was no radical division between the musicians and the audience and no division between better and worse locations. The combination of the “terraced vineyards” or groups of places for listeners are an expression of striving for equality or the democratic nature of the space. Thanks to the stacking of blocks in the audience no seat is more than thirty three meters from the orchestra podium. Every attendee has direct visual and acoustic contact.

Hans Scharoun consistently avoided treating the audience as an undifferentiated mass. The concert hall is divided into groups with 128 places, each of which is equivalent to the total number of musicians in the Berlin Philharmonic. The traditional one-dimensional authoritative relationship between the musician-sender and listener-addressee is reformed into a multi-dimensional form of communication. As Sir Simon Rattle, the current music director, describes it: “There is an odd feeling on stage of being able to touch all the musicians and most of the audience. Of course this is just an illusion but it is accompanied by a true feeling of community.”⁵⁸

Scharoun’s striving for the democratization of the concert hall is also manifested in the possibility of choosing places with different values depending on the listener’s preferences in listening to music. From the side block by the podium it is possible to

⁵⁸ Quote from the film *Die Philharmonie Berlin – Ein Fünfeck mit Aura* by Alexander Lück 2013. <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/de/film/113>.

closely observe the orchestra as an organic whole, to observe the work of particular musicians or groups of instruments. The “terraced vineyards” located behind the orchestra give a view of the conductor – here the listener has a perspective similar to that of the musicians in the orchestra. Wisniewski mentions listening in emotional, contemplative or analytic ways depending on where in the hall one seats.



Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic surrounded by the audience. Season opening, August 28, 2015 © Monika Rittershaus

“Here democracy was the builder”⁵⁹, said Adolf Arndt, a senator for the arts and sciences, during the gala opening. He called the new Philharmonie a symbol of “that which is new in our situation, that which is free, which wants humanity to be at the center.”⁶⁰ He stressed that the organization of the space facilitates building a musical community which can be translated into a social community and the practice of the rules of an open society.

Wilfred Wang, an architect and social commentator, a member of the Berlin Academy of Arts, one of the co-authors of the monograph *Philharmonie Berlin 1956-1963*, focused attention on the specifics of the competition to build a new headquarters for the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The project was led by people who were able to appreciate the exceptional nature of Hans Scharoun’s design because

⁵⁹ G. Forck, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem.*

they wanted a new beginning for architecture and not a duplicate of existing models. This design corresponds with the rules of democracy and clearly turns away from the architecture of the monarchy or the recent dictatorship.⁶¹

Scharoun's design can be seen as a counter-project to Nazi architectural gigantism and the location of the new Philharmonie as a sign of renewal. In the 1930's, the area around Kemperplatz was included in the plans of Hitler and Speer – it was to be one of the axes on their project *Hauptstadt Germania*. Until 1964, the unfinished monumental House of Tourism (*Haus des Fremdenverkehrs*) stood nearby. Today it is part of the area taken by the Berlin State Library. The area close to Hans Scharoun's the Culture Forum (*Kulturforum*),⁶² was intended for a gigantic hall for one hundred and eighty thousand people that was going to be built as part of the *Hauptstadt Germania* – in 1938 Hitler commissioned Albert Speer to design a neo-classical building that would be two hundred and ninety meters tall.

Wilfried Wang emphasized that the project was supported by political forces shaping the young post-war democracy: “the apparent lightness overcomes the burden of the recent past and creates an example how it is possible to honor the newly acquired democracy with modern architecture.”⁶³ This was echoed by Wim Wenders in a part of his series *Cathedrals of Culture*, devoted to the Berlin Philharmonie. “The creation of such an open public space as a resonator of the young federal republic was possible only at this time in the 1960s during the Social Democratic government of mayor Willy Brandt.”⁶⁴

Even today at gala events the ideological dimension of Scharoun's building is evoked. On his speech at the concert commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Philharmonie which took place October 20, 2013, Klaus Wowereit, the then mayor of Berlin, described it as “a cultural symbol in the center of a united and open to the world metropolis” as well as “the most democratic concert hall in Germany” because “the music appears here within society.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ M. Nöther, *Urbild des modernen Konzertsals*, script of an radio broadcast by SWR, <http://www.swr.de/-/id=11788172/property=download/nid=10748564/pvmhyl/index.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2014).

⁶² In 1958 Hans Scharoun won second place in the urban competition *Hauptstadt Berlin* (Capital Berlin). He proposed creating a *Kulturforum* (Cultural Forum) as an area that would be a new cultural center for Berlin and be a supra-regional area of cultural activity. It was to be made up of the Berlin Philharmonie, its Chamber Music Hall, a Gallery of Modern Art, State Library, State Institute for Musical Research with its annexe, the Museum of Musical Instruments as well as a guest house for artists. Most of these buildings were built in the following decades and discussion on the continuing management of the area and ways of giving it a more unified and friendly atmosphere continue to the present day.

⁶³ W. Wang, *The Philharmonie or the Lightness of Democracy*, in: W. Wang, D. Sylvester (eds.), *Hans Scharoun: Philharmonie, Berlin 1956-1963*, Tübingen 2013, p. 21.

⁶⁴ *The Cathedrals of Culture. The Berlin Philharmonie*, screenplay and directed by Wim Wenders (2014), <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/en/film/227>.

⁶⁵ *Festkonzert: „50 Jahre Philharmonie – Raumklang“*. *Grußworte zur Festveranstaltung*. Digital Concert Hall, <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/de/concert/16914>.

THE PHILHARMONIC OF ALL BERLIN – THE GLOBAL PHILHARMONIC

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, together with the rebuilding and revitalization of Potsdamer Platz the vision of those behind the location of the Philharmonie came true. The residents of East Berlin arrived three days after the fall of the wall. On November 12, 1989 at 11.00 a concert by the orchestra was planned for citizens of the German Democratic Republic. After notices in the media, interested listeners showed up from different parts of the country. Many people spent the night in their cars in the philharmonic's parking lot in order to get in the long line for tickets at four in the morning since they could only be obtained by showing personal identification. A recording⁶⁶ shows the hall full to the rafters, intent musicians and a weeping public. The musicians who performed that day recalled that for them it was an exceptionally emotional concert.



The concert for citizens of the German Democratic Republic after the fall of the Berlin Wall, November 12, 1989 (Daniel Barenboim and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra) © Reinhard Friedrich / Archiv Berliner Philharmoniker

“The concert after the wall fell was one of the most moving moments in my musical life. Never before had I experienced such an audience. They were people who had not heard the orchestra for decades, who knew it well from previous times. The Philharmonie was full to the rafters and

⁶⁶ *Das Konzert von 1989 für Bürger der DDR*, <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/de/concert/22093>.

at the end of the concert we were showered with flowers. There was so much emotion in the hall, it was incredible.”⁶⁷ Madeleine Carruzzo (first violin).

“THE concert, as what we call it at work, is and will remain one of the most moving events in my musical life (...) The emotional charge cannot be described. The air was so thick that it could be cut with a knife (...) I knew that I could not make eye contact with anyone in the audience. If I were to look at someone, I was sure, I would lose control.”⁶⁸ Fergus McWilliam (French horn).

“We played as if our lives depended on it. The concert was a kind of dialogue. We saw faces in the hall, I saw people from block A. They were crying the whole time. As an orchestra we had the feeling that we could give the public something that it very much needed – intimacy.”⁶⁹ Andreas Wittmann (oboe)



*Sir Simon Rattle, Digital Concert Hall, recorded concert
© Monika Rittershaus / Berlin Phil Media*

In 2008, the Berlin Philharmonie achieved global reach as the Digital Concert Hall now operates there. Transmissions of selected concerts, around forty per year, can be followed live with the internet from any corner of the world. The concerts feature excellent technical quality. Microphones are placed over the podium and seven remote cameras in the auditorium allow for filming the orchestra, soloists and

⁶⁷ *Der Fall der Berliner Mauer - Erinnerungen der Berliner Philharmoniker*, source: Digital Concert Hall, <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/de/concert/20290>.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ V. Blech, *Als das Publikum geweint hat*, „Die Welt kompakt“ 06.11.14, http://www.welt.de/print/welt_kompakt/berlin/article134040828/Als-das-Publikum-geweint-hat.html (accessed 2.04.2015).

the conductor at close range. A rich archive is also available online. It includes performances from the past several decades as well as films connected with the history and educational activities.

The Digital Concert Hall is another logical step on the road that Hans Scharoun opened with the support of one of the greatest spokesmen for and beneficiaries of recorded music, Herbert von Karajan. The conductor accompanied the establishment of the Philharmonie and was engaged to such an extent that he deserves mention as a co-author of the project's success. As early as the 1950's during a tour of Japan, he was fascinated by the possibilities of televised concerts in reaching audiences of millions. During each subsequent visit to that country, he followed the technological innovations. His hotel room was equipped with the newest equipment and he spent many hours testing it. One of his close colleagues and friends was Akio Morita, a co-founder of Sony.



Digital Concert Hall studio during the broadcast of a concert © Peter Adamik

Karajan's manner of working with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra corresponded with the needs of recording music. Among the aspects to which he paid particular attention were the aesthetics and richness of sound, with scrupulous attention paid to each instrumental part and the high quality of music making. The significance of his work habit increased together with the increased availability of recordings. While some technical imperfections may escape notice in live performances, their presence on recordings, which are meant to be listened to many times, was unacceptable. Al-

ready in 1960 critics stressed the perfection of the way the Berlin orchestra played: “Each note blossomed and all were connected to each other. The sound had no flaws. It was possible to hear things which normally can only be found in the written score.”⁷⁰ Karajan recorded on records, video tape and on compact disc the broadest repertoire in phonographic history, always utilizing the latest in available technology.



Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Film still from Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, 1968 © Unitel

Along with the spread of recordings, musical experiences have lost some of their unique nature and especially the hint of the sacred that was present in the bourgeois era. At one time music was a rare event. A special feeling was created due to contact with it in the concert hall. Today's listeners have records or files of the world recording industry's work at their fingertips. The possibility of evoking a piece of music or a passage from it at every moment and comparing different interpretations means that music is something common. Visual expectations conditioned by television or cinematic transmissions have also had an influence on the reception of music. Audiences are accustomed to seeing the expressive movements of the conductor, the fa-

⁷⁰ W. Schreiber, *Große Dirigenten*, München 2005, p. 191ff.

cial expression of singers, the blown-up cheeks of brass players and the finger work of violinists. Concert audiences also expect visual as well as acoustic stimulation.

Hans Scharoun with his vision of the Berlin Philharmonie created an interior in which the paradigm of the modern performance and reception of music is inscribed. Listeners are seated as close as possible to the musicians and they can watch as the interpretation of music unfolds. He also assured technical output which allowed the Philharmonie to assume the role of global internet concert hall in the digital age. The realization of such a technically advanced project was possible thanks to the way the building was conceived, which included six television studios. By looking to the future, Scharoun more than fulfilled the postulate of Walter Gropius used as the motto of this article, to interpret societal breakthroughs through architectural means. The Berlin Philharmonie understood as a translation of ideas into the language of architecture is a harmonious duet. Both the political changes in post-war and modern Germany as well as modern trends in the performance and reception of music are reflected in the building on Kemperplatz. Scharoun irrevocably changed the architecture of concert halls across the world. The central terraced configuration, which in the late 1950's and early 1960's was seen as an extravagance, impossible to turn into a reality and absurd in acoustic terms, is now the global standard for the construction of large concert halls.

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Keywords: Berlin Philharmonie, Hans Scharoun, Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, Berlin Wall, concert hall, Berlin

ABSTRACT

Whenever music is played spontaneously, people form a circle – this simple consideration lies at the basis of the idea behind Hans Scharoun's design of a central terraced concert hall, known as a vineyard. Established in 1963 the new home of Berlin Philharmonic is not only one of the best known concert halls in the world, the vineyard configuration has been continued and developed in many important concert hall designs since the 1960's. The article presents some of the specifics of the project and the various contexts that influenced its shape. Topics discussed include the earlier traditions of the concert hall and the democratic breakthrough effected by Hans Scharoun, the situation of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra during the Third Reich and shortly after the war, political and social conditions in Berlin in the 1950's and 1960's, controversies and obstacles to implementing the design, acoustic challenges associated with the central terraced configuration and the growing importance of the visual perception of music.

