



On the Kurfürstendamm, West Berlin's finest boulevard, gleaming showcases display the fruits of German genius—Leica cameras, Aristo watches, Asbach brandy, Telefunken radios, DGG records. In one of these showcases are busts of Goethe and Schiller, flanking a larger, more expensive bust. This one stands higher than the other two, like an Olympic gold-medalist. The inscription on the base reads ELVIS.

A dubious portent. Yet high culture continues to thrive in Berlin, especially in the realm of music. Life in the partitioned city is a tenuous proposition, and great music is life-sustaining. Each September the Berliner Festwochen opens the concert and opera season with a dazzling array of musical offerings. This year, on one representative weekend, Fischer-Dieskau and Nilsson could be heard in the Deutsche Oper's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Leinsdorf was leading the Radio-Symphonie in the Beethoven Ninth. The Melos Quartet was playing Mozart and Brahms. The cellist Wolfgang Boettcher was playing Bach. And the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra was playing Verdi, Copland, Debussy, and Schumann.

The HRO was in Berlin for a musical counterpart of the Henley Regatta—an international competition for youth orchestras staged by the Herbert von Karajan Foundation. The event does not draw capacity audiences, but it does attest to the astounding proficiency of today's student orchestras, as well as to the German fondness for ranking and ordering anything that can possibly be ordered and ranked. For a week and a half this year, eleven juries sat in judgment on ten orchestras from Europe, Russia, Japan, and the United States. The winning symphonic and chamber groups were to play in a final concert at Philharmonic Hall, and to end the evening, a composite orchestra would perform the overture to *La Forza del Destino* under the great von Karajan himself.

An invitation to the von Karajan competition is a cachet for any youth orchestra, but the selection process is something of a mystery. Last February, when the HRO was invited to Berlin, no one was more surprised

than James Yannatos, the orchestra's conductor. Nevertheless, he jumped at the chance to take the HRO abroad for the first time in its 170-year history. The orchestra, which calls itself this country's oldest continuing musical organization, had toured major American cities, as well as Canada and Mexico, but plans to go further afield had never worked out.

For a time it appeared that Berlin might provide a fulcrum for an extended European tour. The French government seemed eager to subsidize a Paris concert. The State Department would pay some of the cost of getting to Prague and Budapest. London was an obvious stop for the return leg. But without a stake from the Harvard administration—which was not forthcoming—fund-raising began to seem a formidable obstacle. Although the Von Karajan Foundation would pay for housing, food, and transportation in West Berlin, air fares for 85 musicians and their bulky instruments would exceed \$45,000. Moreover, the dates of the competition meant that orchestra members would miss the start of the fall term at Harvard, a prospect displeasing to administrators in University Hall.

In the end, the HRO reduced its trajectory to Berlin and London. The Pierian Foundation, its parent organization, was able to cover costs by borrowing from and against its endowment. And James Yannatos, by sheer persistence, persuaded University Hall to grant his charges a ten-day dispensation from classes.

Yannatos is a scrapper. He is also a warm and sensitive man who does not mask his feelings. When he is piqued or hurt, you know it. Like another local conductor, Seiji Ozawa, he is slight and wiry, though Yannatos is more graceful on the podium. An amalgam, he has Oriental features, a Greek surname (accented on the middle syllable), and traces of the Bronx in his speech. A Yale with a doctorate from Iowa, he has conducted the HRO for fifteen years; he also composes and teaches a course in orchestration-conducting.

Yannatos is the central character in the account that follows. (Herbert von Karajan has a walk-on part, but is offstage at his most dramatic moment.) I play a bit part,

Down but not out in Berlin and London: A musical journal

Two weeks with one of the world's most underrated orchestras.

by John T. Bethell

Left: The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra in the orangery of the Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin, following a reception for contestants in this year's von Karajan competition. Inset: Taking a back seat to some bulky instruments, Nyia and James Yannatos relax on a flight from Berlin to London. Dozing across the aisle from conductor Yannatos are oboist Jack Klebanow (center) and bassoonists Mary Ellen Hoke and David Sogg.

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While bassoonists Hoke and Sogg played at Heathrow, trumpeters Norman Birge and Allen Stern took a rest. At right: Cellist John Golden, violinist Ellen Snyder.

the result of an impulsive decision to accompany the HRO to Europe. I wanted to write about Harvard's long reach, enjoy the music, and see how 85 gifted young people would get on with one another, with their conductor, and with youth groups from different countries. And then there was the chance to see Berlin. Goethe thought that in order to understand the workings of the world, one ought to select an *Eckchen*, or little corner of it, for contemplation. Why not Berlin? My wife, Helen, came with me, and as middle-aged orchestra groupies, we took these notes.

LOGAN AIRPORT, SEPTEMBER 13. Our takeoff, scheduled for 9 p.m., will be delayed. Well-wishers from the Pierian Foundation have sent us off with speeches, followed by cider, chips, and cheese. Now some of us are foraging for something stronger. In the overflow crowd outside the bar we meet Robert Riggs, a graduate student in music who helped arrange the tour. Riggs, who plays first violin, introduces Sam and Debby Bruskin, two of the half-dozen nonstudents in the orchestra. Sam, a lawyer and principal viola, is HRO's oldest living resident, having joined in 1969. "Jimmy Yannatos is such a great conductor, it makes it hard to break away," says Debby, a first violinist. I ask Riggs what shape the orchestra is in. "We've had seventeen rehearsals since September first," he says. "The Boston Symphony doesn't rehearse that much. I think we're sounding very good."

ABOARD BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT 270, EN ROUTE TO LONDON. We sit with Nyia and Jimmy Yannatos in the center of the 747. It's Arnold Schoenberg's birthday, and I ask Yannatos, whose forte is "contemporary classics," why he hasn't programmed Schoenberg for the competition. Yannatos expatiates his program. Verdi's overture to *La Forza del Destino* is required of all symphonic orchestras. Each group must also play a composer from its own country. Yannatos picked Copland, whose *Appalachian Spring* is one of the few American works with a place in the international orchestral repertoire. Yannatos wanted a French work, and he chose *La Mer*, written in 1905 but with scoring and rhythms that still hold surprises for contemporary ears. Finally, he programmed a German work, Schumann's "Rhenish" symphony. "I've fallen in love with that symphony," he says. "Perhaps because it's so sonful."

We were two hours late taking off, a pleasantly noisy group as we boarded. "We're all hyper," said Josh Gilinsky, a trumpeter. In attire, we were a medley of warm-up jackets, Irish knit sweaters, overalls, suits. Dan Pecaut, a trombonist, came aboard in white tie and tails. "Over there is the *Animal House* bunch," warned Robert Riggs. "They've seen the film several times, and may pull some of the gags." Now, when we all should be sleeping, the airline is screening a disco movie. *Thank God It's Friday*. Its flashing strobe lights can ream through closed eyelids.

HEATHROW AIRPORT, LONDON. Six rows of seats must come out of our British Airways Trident to make room for two bass viols, a bass drum, and a box of percussion equipment, all too big for the cargo area. This operation extends our layover by two hours. Most of us flake out in the lounge, but David Sogg and Mary Ellen Hoke unpack their bassoons and begin playing Bach. It sounds fine until two British Airways information ladies ask them to put away their "flutes."

When at last we get to the boarding lounge, Jack Burgess (first violin) is missed. He turns up under a couch.

EN ROUTE TO BERLIN. Below us, hidden by clouds, is East Germany. Some of us hadn't realized that West Berlin is an island in the middle of it—or that a lethal wall now seals the East German border from the Baltic to Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Hughes, the steward, pours thick black tea. "If you drink this," he says, "you'll play like Yehudi Menuhin."

JUGENDGÄSTEHAUS AM ZOO, WEST BERLIN. The soldier at Tegel Airport had a submachine gun slung at his back, and we rode here in a double-decker bus. We are abroad.

Our hostel is on the top story of a five-sided building—a five-floor walk-up, unless you wait for the creaky little *Aufzug*. No frills, and no hot water in the shower today. The thirty-odd women in our group are in one wing of the hostel, and the men in another, six or eight to a room. We share the place with the Kammerorchester des Konservatoriums Ostrava, fifteen Czech chamber players. They speak no English.

We meet our guide and factotum, Ralf Döhring, and are given cards good for unlimited travel on U-Bahn and bus lines. General rejoicing. We learn that there are only three other symphonic orchestras to compete with, from Austria, Japan, and San Jose, California. "We'll wipe 'em out," someone growls.

KONZERTSAAL DER HOCHSCHULE DER KÜNSTE, September 15. This is the arena—a hall seating 1,500 or so, acoustically bright.

"Guess who we met in the subway," Ilana Stroke said at luncheon today.

"Herbert von Karajan."

"No. The Japanese orchestra. They weren't very friendly."

Takatoshi Ito, who sits near Ilana in

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**Answer to September-October puzzle,
"Vienna the First"**

The first four tricks are won by the ♠ A, ♥ K, ♥ A, and ♦ A, in that order. This ♦ A play is vital to win the hand the sure way.

North			
♠ 4			
♥ A 8 7 5 4			
♦ A Q 10 5 4			
♣ A 4			
West		East	
♠ K Q 10 7 4 2		♠ J 8 3	
♥ —		♥ 3 2	
♦ 2		♦ K J 8 7 3	
♣ 10 8 7 5 3 2		♣ K Q J	
South			
♠ A 9 6			
♥ K Q J 10 9 6			
♦ 9 6			
♣ 9 6			

Re-enter South with a trump and lead the ♦ 9. If West plays low, North ducks. Now if East wins, the diamonds split 4-2 or 3-3 and a long-suit diamond trick can be established for South's sorely needed club discard. (North has the ♣ A and two spade ruffs for entries.) If at trick six West plays the ♦ J, North covers with the ♦ Q (which wins or else sets up the 10). If West plays the ♦ K, he establishes the ♦ Q. If West shows out on the ♦ 9 lead, North ducks; East wins but ♦ Q-10 remain in North to be led through East's marked ♦ K. The solution depends upon locating the lie of diamonds—by cashing the ace, then by leading the ♦ 9 through West.

**Answer to September-October puzzle,
"The Baseball League"**

*Homer County Baseball League
Final Standings*

	W-L	Pct.
Ulysses Rovers	14-4	.777
Penelope Settlers	15-5	.750
Achilles Heroes	9-10	.474
Hector Warriors	7-12	.368
Cassandra Travellers	7-13	.350
Priam Pioneers	6-14	.300

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

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the second violins, said they probably weren't unfriendly, just a little shy.

But tonight, when Waseda University gave the opening concert, there was nothing shy about the playing. The orchestra itself was massive—almost 150 players, including seven percussionists and a bunch of reserves—and impressively disciplined. They gave the Verdi a flashy, brittle reading. Then they played works by two contemporary Japanese composers, and Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Their volume levels threatened to take the roof off the hall. I thought the emphasis on avant-garde was overkill. The concert was long on technique, but short on feeling.

During the Stravinsky, Chris Palmer—HRO manager and violinist—was bumped from his seat. The man who took it was Herbert von Karajan.

Yannatos rehearsed the orchestra this afternoon, "to pick up a few pieces we lost between Cambridge and Berlin." We perform tomorrow at four. Two years ago, Boston University took second place in this competition. Only one other American orchestra—from Oakland, California—ever entered before.

JUGENDGÄSTEHAUS AM ZOO, September 16. Our room is small, the walls are thin, and we're surrounded by Czech violinists. At 7:30 a.m., one of them has his fiddle out and is playing, without warm-up, a passage from the Dvořák violin concerto. Then he tackles Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagète*, the obligatory work for chamber groups. When you come here by train, you don't suffer from jet lag.

KONZERTSAAL, same day. At 1:30, Yannatos holds a final rehearsal. He is tough at the start—some people came in late last night. "You're playing the notes," he says. "The hell with the notes, play the music." The toughness recedes, and Yannatos confides that he dreamed in German last night, dreamed that he was adopting Evan Loh, a first violinist. He begins to give directions in German, and has to be corrected at times. The group is loose now. "There's nothing more to rehearse," he says at 2:50. "You know it. Now you've got to play it, make it move. See you later. Enjoy yourselves."

The hall clears. Jack Klebanow, the principal oboist, sits down at the grand

piano. Jack Hill, a bassist, joins him. They jam.

JUGENDGÄSTEHAUS AM ZOO. The concert is over. Jimmy and Nyia Yannatos have the remains of a bottle of Mosel in their tiny room. Dom Perignon could not taste better. The orchestra has come up with a peak performance.

The Verdi was passionate and sharply etched. The Copland sang. *La Mer* had sea-spray in it. The Schumann soared. Outside the hall, all smiles, the Japanese were waiting to applaud us as we left.

"There are things we don't have," says Yannatos, sipping the Mosel, "but we do have a rubato, an easing. That concert was musical." He pours the last of the wine for Nyia, and they go to supper. When they enter the dining room, everyone claps and cheers.

"I'd like to adopt you all," says Yannatos. "You've done such beautiful music, and done it so beautifully. You have filled this moment with communion and community. The competitive aspect of these concerts is dwarfed by the occasion you have made. Whatever your field is, you are also a musician. That will make your life worth living—and a lot of the time, you're going to wonder." More cheers. Yannatos attacks the liverwurst. Donna Resue, a red-haired French hornist, touches his arm. "Doctor Yannatos," she says, "I don't think I've ever enjoyed making music as much as I did today."

PHILHARMONIC HALL, September 17. Eighty of us have signed up for a Sunday-morning concert by the Berlin Radio-Symphonic, which is playing the Beethoven Ninth. Philharmonic Hall, built in 1963, still looks futuristic, with seating that surrounds the orchestra. We sit behind the chorus, facing Leinsdorf, the conductor. The effects of hearing the Ninth in Berlin are indescribable.

THE DREI BÄREN CAFE, September 18. A dozen of us are crying in our beer. The symphonic competition is over, the jury has spoken, and we didn't win. That shouldn't hurt, but it does.

At the outset no one cared about winning or losing. The idea was to visit Berlin and play a good concert. We did. Then we started to calculate. Some of us wrote off the Japanese concert as bizarre. The Austrians knew their Schubert and Webern, but their playing had not been flawless. After problems

with pitch in the Verdi, the San Jose symphony went limp in the Schubert "Unfinished." And that left . . .

The Japanese, who were as startled as we were when the jury gave them the gold medal. The Austrians got the silver. Dr. Wolfgang Stresemann spoke for the jury. His remarks, which were mostly in English, were well meant, but faintly patronizing. The winners, he said, were so close they could hardly be separated. It was like the Olympic Games, in which a fraction of a second makes the difference. The Japanese concert had been stunning and innovative. Harvard-Radcliffe was as close to Austria as Austria was to the Japanese. A major orchestra might hesitate before attempting our program. "In spite of two cuts in *Appalachian Spring*," the jury had been deeply impressed, and we had done a beautiful job in *La Mer*. As for the Schumann, we had done well "to tell us in Berlin what beautiful music Schumann writes—and Berlin is not even a Schumann city."

I watch Yannatos toy with a Drei Bären sundae. He is wondering if he did us in by cutting the Copland, or having the *chut-pah* to play Schumann in a non-Schumann city. He is wondering what the jury wished to endorse in the Japanese concert. I study the other faces at our table. The kids are looking to Yannatos to get them through, but it's Jimmy who is hurting the most.

JUGENDGÄSTEHAUS AM ZOO, same night. A sign inside the door says HRO: PLEASE WHISPER. THE CZECHS PLAY TOMORROW. A lot of us stay up late for postmortems, not always whispering.

HOTEL AM RING, LEIPZIG, September 21. It gets harder to keep track of everyone. Most of us went to give the Czechs a standing ovation at their concert. Sam and Debby Bruskin have been to half a dozen operas. Many people have gone to East Berlin, to see the Wall, visit museums, or buy sheet music, which is cheap there. We've gone to Leipzig for a night. The train trip gives us glimpses of functional steam locomotives, ponds full of geese, and East German troops on maneuvers with tanks. In Leipzig, one can take in *Die Blumen Mädchen*, a Chinese revolutionary opera. Posters everywhere salute the *Heldenkosmonauts*, Sigmund Jähn and Valery Bykovsky. There are flowers on Bach's tomb at the Thomaskirche, and luckily the organist is practicing when we visit.

JUGENDGÄSTEHAUS AM ZOO, September 25, our last night in Berlin. Back from Leipzig, we got the bad news first. Plans to sight-read with the Japanese had been quashed by their proud conductor. Only eighteen HRO members had been chosen for the composite orchestra that would play in the final concert. Maestro von Karajan, rehearsing the Berlin Philharmonic in Strauss's *Sinfonia Domestica*, had fallen from the podium and been hospitalized with a stroke. The Red Sox were out of first place. The weather was gloomsome, and everyone had a cold.

"If we had won, would there be fewer colds?" asked Yannatos, returning from a night at the opera (*Salome*, and he hated it). Someone showed him a Berliner Morgenpost article on the von Karajan competition. "What seems so remarkable," it read in part,

is that the 150 students from Tokyo entered against professionals. The Austrian Youth Symphony, winner of the silver medal, recruited music students, as did two American orchestras. . . . None of these orchestras could compare with the future medical students, engineers, chemists, and physicists from Japan.

This is calumny. There are no pros in the HRO, and fewer than ten percent of its members are music concentrators.

Yannatos has talked to competition officials about the selection process for the composite orchestra, and about the judging. He has pointed out that the "international jury" is all-European—seven Germans, an Austrian, a Pole, a Lithuanian, and an Englishman. The officials told him that one of the Germans holds American citizenship.

This isn't ending so well. A wallet disappeared last week, and tonight we had a row with the staff of the hostel, which may or may not include a Peeping Tom. Yet for every down there's an up.

Franz Hiebert, Donna Resue, and Nancy Lianza rehearse under Maestro Yannatos.



Yesterday, in a room lined with pinball machines, I heard Mozart's Haydn quartets being played by Nancy Park, Eugene Sun, Judy Kogan, and John Golden. Sublime. In the morning Iran in a fifteen-kilometer race through the Grüner Wald, and passed four-fifths of a unified German team at the finish. Euphoria. Last night we heard a noble *Fidelio*—the Beethoven magic again. And tonight, after the final concert, a bunch of us drank beer with a Japanese group that matched us fight song for fight song, and knew Sousa marches better than we did. When the *Bierstube* closed on us, they waited outside for Yannatos, ambushed him, and tossed him three times in the air.

ABOARD BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT 271 TO BOSTON, September 27. London was almost a bust. We barely had time to lug our bags into town, rehearse, and play a concert at the Royal College of Music. It went well, but was thinly attended. Afterward six of our players stayed up to go sightseeing. As Big Ben struck four, they were taken in hand by a friendly bobby. He gave them a tour on a Thames police boat and treated them to coffee and buns. For all of us, that kept London from being a bust.

SANDERS THEATRE, CAMBRIDGE, September 30. The tour ends here, with the HRO's first Cambridge concert of the year—"The Berlin Program." The performance, which is being taped, is on a par with the one in Berlin, and the audience is enthusiastic. Yannatos is recalled several times, bounding up to the podium like Baryshnikov. His resilience is showing, and later I tell him so. "When I can't make it up that step," laughs Yannatos, "that's when I quit conducting." □