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The American opera singer and the German opera system

Martin, William Robert, D.M.A.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1993

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300 N. Zeeb Rd.
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THE AMERICAN OPERA SINGER AND THE
GERMAN OPERA SYSTEM

by

William R. Martin

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance

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1993

Approved by



Dissertation Advisor

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Every year a large number of American singers undertake an audition trip to Germany at great expense in pursuit of careers as opera singers. Unfortunately, many of these singers arrive uninformed and poorly prepared for the audition process. The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the criteria used by German theatrical agents and administrators in German opera houses in evaluating and hiring American singers. The study augments the existing body of knowledge by providing information gathered exclusively from: (1) theater personnel involved with engaging singers, i.e., *Intendanten* (General Managers), *Generalmusikdirektoren (GMD)* (Head Musical Directors), and *Oberspielleiter* (Head Stage Directors); and (2) several of the main theatrical agents whose decisions have a major impact on the audition and placement process. Specific information and recommendations on auditioning procedures and preparation pertaining to German theaters is provided. It is hoped that such information will assist the American singer in understanding the German opera system, especially with regard to beginning one's career through auditions.

Information which serves as the background for this study was gathered through personal interviews and a written survey. Twenty-two interviews were conducted in

theaters as large as the *Nationaltheater Mannheim* and as small as the *Stadttheater Pforzheim*, as well as with several of the major operatic agents. A written survey was distributed to each of the fifty-one theaters producing opera in the former West Germany and also to seventeen of the German theatrical agencies known to handle placements in opera. A space for written comments followed each question in both agent and theater surveys. Many respondents offered additional information either to clarify or expand upon their responses.

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

American singers who aspire to careers in opera have a number of options for beginning their professional training. In the United States, a singer has access to a variety of public and private institutions (i.e., universities, colleges, and conservatories) which offer thorough and comprehensive musical training. In addition, a great number of American private voice teachers, musical coaches, and stage directors augment the institutions of higher learning. Many public institutions in Germany such as *Hochschulen für Musik* (music colleges), conservatories, and institutes for music provide additional options for American singers beginning their musical training. The larger opera houses also offer apprentice programs for qualified singers.

Once several years of basic musical training are completed, however, it is often difficult for a singer to begin building repertory and gaining experience. For a talented American singer, a position in a German opera house has been and remains an excellent alternative to options available in the United States. Such a position not only provides a base for launching a career and

building repertory but also provides the added security of social benefits including health insurance and paid vacation--attributes which are difficult for a singer to obtain in the United States.

Because of the value placed upon the arts in general by the German citizenry, a system of subsidization has been established which supports approximately ninety theaters producing opera. These theaters employ over 2,400 solo singers (1521 male and 990 female) and over 3,600 singers in opera choruses.¹

There are some obvious obstacles and challenges to beginning a career in Germany, since Americans are far removed from the European musical scene. Unfortunately, few published sources exist that prepare a singer for auditioning in Germany (the bibliography lists those currently available). If the singer is fortunate, he may know other singers, voice teachers, musical coaches, or stage directors, who might be able to offer information and guidance about the German opera system. Another option for American singers would be one of the several training programs especially designed for auditioning in the German-speaking countries of Europe (information on these organizations is provided in Chapter VI).

¹Statistics are contained in the 1993 Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch and reflect the 1992-1993 season.

The level of competition for the positions available in German theaters makes it imperative that the training and preparation of American singers interested in performing opera in Germany be extensive and of high quality. The information provided in published sources varies greatly in scope and usefulness and consists mainly of anecdotal accounts often based on limited experience. A need exists for accurate information obtained directly from individuals in positions to hire and make casting decisions within the German opera system.

The purpose of this study is to augment the existing body of knowledge by providing information gathered exclusively from the following sources: (1) theater personnel involved with engaging singers, i.e., *Intendanten* (General Managers), *Generalmusikdirektoren* (GMD) (Head Musical Directors), and *Oberspielleiter* (Head Stage Directors); and (2) several of the main theatrical agents whose decisions have a major impact on the audition and placement process. Specific information and recommendations on auditioning procedures and preparation as it pertains to German theaters will also be provided. It is hoped that such information will assist the American singer in understanding the German opera system,

especially as it applies to beginning one's career through auditions.²

Information which serves as the background for this study was gathered through personal interviews and a written survey. More than twenty interviews were conducted in theaters as large as the *Nationaltheater Mannheim* and as small as the *Stadttheater Pforzheim*, as well as with several of the major operatic agents. Interviews varied in length from fifteen minutes to more than two hours. In order to ensure that the subjects responded openly and honestly to interview questions, a guarantee of anonymity was given. The footnotes will, therefore, not cite specific individuals, but indicate whether the subject was an agent or an *Intendant*.

A written survey was distributed to each of the fifty-one theaters producing opera in the former West Germany. The theaters that received the survey are listed in Appendix A. (The surveys were not sent to theaters in the former East Germany because, until the Reunification, these theaters had limited experience with American singers.³) Each person responsible for music theater,

²Those who are interested in the day-to-day operation of an opera house and have a reading knowledge of German are referred to Arnold Werner-Jensen's *Oper Intern*.

³Intendant interviews.

i.e., *Intendant, GMD, Oberspielleiter*, was sent a separate copy. The survey contained eighty-two questions. The return rate of the one hundred twelve exemplars mailed was 49 percent.⁴ A sample of the written survey sent to theater personnel is contained in Appendix B.

Of the German theatrical agencies, only the seventeen who were known to handle placements in opera were sent the written survey.⁵ A list of the agents who received the survey is found in Appendix C. Some of the agent survey questions duplicated those sent to theater personnel; however, many of the fifty-nine agent survey questions were designed exclusively for agents. A sample of the survey sent to agents is included in Appendix D. The return rate on the agent surveys was 41 percent.⁶ A space for written comments followed each question in both agent and theater surveys. Many respondents offered

⁴The information which serves as the basis of this study was also provided by certain theater personnel who consented to an interview but who did not return the written survey. Including information gathered from these sources, the return rate would be 54 percent.

⁵Many theatrical agencies handle only concert engagements, or television and film.

⁶Information was also provided by certain theatrical agents who consented to an interview but who did not return the written survey. Including information gathered from these sources, the return rate would be 53 percent.

additional information either to clarify or expand upon their responses.

In many situations in this document that apply equally to male and female singers, the masculine gender has been used solely to facilitate ease in reading.

CHAPTER II
AGENTS FOR CHANGE IN THE SYSTEM

World War II

By September of 1944, the Second World War had brought the entire German theater system to a halt. In May of the following year, most theaters in Germany lay in ruins. An important cultural institution with a long and impressive tradition had been brought to a standstill. The void would be short-lived. The speed with which theaters were restored and the number of performances given in the early postwar years attested to the continued importance of theater in Germany.¹

During the years of influence and domination by the National Socialists, theaters throughout Germany were rigidly controlled. Censorship was common and certain works were forbidden. Banned were pieces, especially modern works, deemed *Art fremd* by the Nazis, works of art which were foreign to a prescribed German culture or way of life.²

¹Intendant interview.

²Ibid.

With the downfall of the Nazi regime came a rebirth, an exciting time in the history of German theater. The German people, although experiencing the deprivation of war, consoled and comforted themselves with the arts. The people yearned to attend theater, to hear music again, and to experience the works of composers banned for over a decade. Theaters began appearing in such provisional sites as schools and gymnasiums. The productions were, of necessity, on a small scale and often concertant.³

The period between 1945 and 1955 was one of activity and growth marked by rebuilding and attempts to bring theater to life. Efforts were concentrated on replacing only those theaters which existed prior to the war.⁴ The reentry of foreign singers, including Americans, coincided with this rebuilding effort. Emigration, imprisonment, and death had resulted in a shortage of German singers,

³Ibid. Results of the written survey indicated that 53 percent of all respondents (theater personnel and agents) believed a greater need or awareness of the importance of art existed following World War II than previously. In the written surveys, several respondents used the term *Nachholbedarf* (need for retrieving, recovering) to describe the atmosphere following the war. A significant number of respondents (30 percent) did not answer this question, perhaps indicating that they might have felt unqualified to answer because of their age.

⁴*Intendant* interview.

particularly in the male voice categories.⁵ American singers were engaged in larger numbers than in any period prior to the war.⁶

The German theater system is for the Germans but has always been populated by a number of foreigners.⁷ The language demands alone, when opera is not performed in the vernacular, make opera easier to cast with an international roster of singers. Another reason that foreign singers, especially Americans, continued to infiltrate the German theater system was a lack of qualified, native pedagogues. The war created an atmosphere inhospitable to artistic activity. The schools and teachers were disrupted, and the postwar young German singers were consequently deprived of a solid, comprehensive musical education. Many teachers and active performers, not only singers, but instrumentalists and

⁵*Intendant* interview. The survey results confirm that 49 percent of respondents believed the war caused shortages in certain voice categories. One agent remarked that he did not believe there were immediate shortages caused by the war. What he did know was that a shortage existed in the rising generation of singers, particularly in the male voice categories, following the war.

⁶Survey results indicate that 47 percent of the respondents felt that more American singers were hired after the war than before. Additional comments stated that the increase did not begin immediately following the war, but in the '60s.

⁷*Intendant* interview.

conductors as well, either emigrated, or died as a result of the war.⁸

Many of the better-trained musicians working in Germany today are non-German.⁹ The United States continues to provide a large percentage of foreign talent to the German theater system, perhaps, in part, by virtue of the fact that it was the largest benefactor of the talented musicians who emigrated to America. Many major positions in orchestras and universities were held by European immigrants in the '60s and '70s. As an *Intendant* observed, "What the German theater system lost, the American universities and orchestras gained."¹⁰

The standards and overall quality of instruction within the German music schools, the *Hochschulen für Musik* (literally high schools, but in this context, conservatories for music), have been improving steadily, especially in the past fifteen years. In addition, numerous musical competitions and societies have been established throughout the country, encouraging the pursuit of musical education and excellence.¹¹ In spite

⁸*Intendant* interview.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Intendant* interview.

¹¹*Ibid.*

of these activities and efforts, a greater need still exists for professionally competent performing artists than the German music school system can provide.¹² Ironically, the United States has a similar situation, only, in reverse: a wealth of talented artists, well-trained, but without sufficient performance opportunities.

The Cold War and Reunification

The war of isolation, the Cold War, isolated East Germany from the West. Antiquated technical equipment and old-fashioned approaches to the staging of opera and drama resulted in artistic stagnation in the East German theater system. Western ideas and approaches to theater and to opera did not permeate the countries behind the Iron Curtain.¹³ Little opportunity existed for singers from the East to become engaged in theaters in the former West, and vice versa. As a result of this enforced isolation, guest singers for the theaters in former East Germany came "preferably" from other Eastern Bloc countries.¹⁴

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴A significant 81 percent of survey respondents indicated that the Cold War limited American singers' access to the former East German theaters. An additional comment indicated that the East German government had restrictions against foreign singers in place.

East German singers, unaware of the vocal standards practiced in Western lands, remained static, unchallenged in their art. The overall level of vocal and artistic quality in the former East German theaters has been, for decades, significantly lower than in houses of an equivalent size in the former West. In the East, singers who had been singing in the same house, in the same *Fach* (voice category) for twenty years, could not be fired. This system caused the ensembles to become disproportionately overweighed with older singers. It was difficult for the younger East German singers to break into the system and garner experience.¹⁵

The *Tag der Wiedervereinigung* (Day of Reunification), now a German national holiday, commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the former East and West Germanies. The slogan "*Wir sind ein Volk*" ("We are one people") echoed throughout the land following the Reunification. Inherent in this statement was the promise of unity, brotherhood, and renewed patriotism. The future, however, soon presented other sobering political, social, and cultural realities. Germany is facing the difficult task of integrating countrymen who have lived under radically different political, economic, and social

¹⁵Agent interview.

systems and conditions. Equality and total integration of the former East and West may not be fully realized for decades. Impatience and social unrest have already triggered acts of violence.

Current Climate and Opportunities for Soloists

"Germany produces more opera on a given night than all the rest of the world combined."¹⁶ As a result of Reunification, the German opera system inherited an additional forty-two theaters from the former East Germany.¹⁷ The initial expectation of additional theaters creating more job opportunities may be misleading. The enormous financial burden of rebuilding the infrastructure in the former East could adversely affect cultural programs throughout the entire country in the foreseeable future. "It's generally recognized that there's going to have to be a lot of closure, particularly in the East, if the system is to survive at all."¹⁸ There are simply too many theaters in relation to the population and the tax base. Theaters are already

¹⁶Anne Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), Opera News 57 (June 1993): 10.

¹⁷Information and statistics taken from the 1993 *Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch*.

¹⁸Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 12.

restructuring, reducing, or eliminating certain performance areas (i.e., opera, ballet) altogether. Estimates are ranging from between two and eight years before the restructuring process in the former East German theaters is complete.

East Germany's theaters have had to make major changes in structure and staff, trying to conform to the artistic standards and generous pay scales of the West. Despite massive transfusions of money from the federal government, these houses are still financially anemic. The situation isn't likely to improve when the government withdraws its temporary emergency funding . . . and the theaters return to their own insolvent states.¹⁹

Only 4 percent of the respondents to the written survey answered that the artistic rosters and repertoires of theaters were expanding, while 54 percent indicated that the situation was remaining constant. A significant 29 percent felt that the rosters and repertoires were declining.²⁰

¹⁹Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 10-11.

²⁰Interestingly, all agents indicated that rosters and repertoires were declining. This begs some interesting questions: Are agents more pessimistic than theater management in their personal views? How would this affect the information and advice they might give beginning singers? If agents believe theaters are hiring fewer singers, might they be more cautious in the singers they send to theaters for auditions?

One way that the theaters in the former East believe they can ensure their survival is by drastically improving their quality as quickly as possible.

To defend themselves against the threat of closure, Eastern opera companies are trying to prove that their houses are making an essential artistic contribution to society, harnessing the euphoria of their newfound freedom to draw in new international artists, new productions, new works, new energy.²¹

Since Reunification, the rules and regulations which had previously governed the theaters in the former West German states are now applicable to all theaters in Germany. Under current law, only a singer who has been at the same theater for a minimum of fifteen seasons is *unkundbar* (a permanent employee). This means, especially for the theaters in the former East, that the singers who do not meet this stipulation are now in a position to be fired under the law. Many former East German singers who assumed they had positions for life are suddenly being let go.²²

For American singers looking for their first contract in a German theater, the vacancies which currently exist in the former East German theaters are enticing. Of the respondents who answered the question "Has the

²¹Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 11.

²²Agent interview.

Reunification resulted in additional job opportunities for beginning soloists?," 56 percent responded affirmatively. The 25 percent who answered negatively provided additional comments saying the additional opportunities for soloists were not just for Western foreigners. Reunification also meant that singers from the Eastern Bloc countries could now compete for vacancies.²³ Americans will encounter competition from singers of many nationalities for these new job opportunities. In addition to German singers competing for positions in their own theaters, singers from the other former Eastern Bloc countries (i.e., Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Commonwealth of Independent States) are now appearing. Asian singers are frequently among those vying for positions, as are singers from Scandinavia. The European Community Countries (ECC) and non-ECC nations are also represented at the auditions. American singers were among the first singers to appear at the doors of these East German theaters and are continuing to concentrate their attention and efforts on these job opportunities.

²³Another comment stated that if many of the theaters in the former East close, then Reunification cannot be viewed as increasing opportunities for beginners because a significant number of unemployed singers will have been placed on the job market.

Approximately five hundred male and two hundred female soloists are employed in the former East German theaters.²⁴ A comparably larger number of vacancies currently exist in these theaters than in the theaters in the former West German states. Almost half of the respondents (48 percent) indicated it would be easier for a beginner to find an engagement in a former East German theater, while only 15 percent felt it would be easier in a theater in the West. The remaining 37 percent indicated that quality was the important determinant in theaters in both the former East and West. Other factors, such as the number of vacancies, salary range of the singer, and language ability, prevented some respondents from choosing either East or West as the most propitious for launching a career.

The theaters in the former West employ approximately one thousand male and eight hundred female soloists.²⁵ It is becoming increasingly difficult for the American singer to find engagements in these theaters.²⁶ Fewer

²⁴Statistics gathered from the 1993 *Deutsches Bühnen Jahrbuch*.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶The written survey indicates that 75 percent of respondents believe the percentage of American singers engaged in German theaters has been on the increase since World War II. One respondent indicated that there was a significant increase in the number of Americans engaged

vacancies exist each year, because singers are not moving from house to house as much as they have in the past, thus keeping ensembles intact.

Opportunities in Opera Choruses

Opportunities for singers in opera choruses are numerous and provide one an alternative means of getting a start in the German theater system. For the singer who is aware that his chances of initially being hired as a soloist are limited, choral experience might then be recommended. There are many more positions available for choral singers than for soloists. A qualified singer in any of the rarer voice categories, (i.e., alto, tenor, bass) can be assured in most years of finding a position in an opera chorus which provides greater remuneration than that afforded the beginning soloist.²⁷

Singing in a chorus permits the singer the opportunity to learn the theater system and the German

between 1950 - 1970, but since 1970 the number has remained constant.

²⁷Agent interview. For example, fifty to sixty vacancies currently exist for tenors in German opera choruses.

language.²⁸ A short stint in an opera chorus does not necessarily reduce the possibility of singing solo roles; in fact, it is important to note that in many houses singers from the chorus are given supporting roles.

Some houses, especially large houses, do have age limits and language requirements for choral singers, but these qualifications are not inflexible.²⁹ The *Bühnen-, Fernseh-, und Filmvermittlung* (ZBF) (the stage, television, and film agency) has offices throughout Germany and will advise a young singer regarding opera chorus vacancies.³⁰ The responsibility for keeping one's voice fresh and technically sound for an eventual solo audition rests with the individual singer.³¹ It must be noted that singing in a German opera chorus may make it

²⁸Language facility is often a prerequisite for employment in an opera chorus.

²⁹An agent stated that a singer over the desirable age may still be hired, depending on the quality of one's voice and the theater's need.

³⁰Although only 50 percent of the agents surveyed indicated that ZBF alone handles opera chorus vacancies, the supplementary written comments verify that this is the case. No private agencies specialize in placing singers in opera choruses. ZBF itself answered that choral singers are engaged through personal promotion and initiative.

³¹Agent interview.

more difficult to obtain a position as a soloist. Certain agents and theater personnel view choral experience negatively and are reluctant to grant auditions for soloist positions.³² An agent suggested that a voice teacher's approach to teaching singing should be based on the idea that the student will be trained as a fine singer, since whether one becomes a soloist or a choral singer, is impossible to predict.³³

³²Agent interview.

³³Ibid.

CHAPTER III
THE ROLE OF OPERA IN THE COMMUNITY

Opera and Culture

Opera has a long tradition in Europe. In Germany this tradition was firmly established through a large number of local opera houses.

The exceptionally generous scale of public patronage of the arts in Germany derives from a tradition dating back to the 18th Century and earlier, when each royal court, dukedom or free city would maintain its own opera house, theater and museums.¹

In order to understand why so many opera houses came into existence, it is necessary to focus on the political history and geography of Germany two hundred years ago.

In the eighteenth century, Germany was a federation of many small and independent kingdoms, realms and dukedoms, a *Kleinstädte Bund* (federation of small cities). The land was technically under the rule of the king or the emperor, but in actuality, the business affairs at the local level were handled by powerful and influential princes, dukes, and bishops. For the German nobility, France was an

¹John Ardagh, Germany and the Germans: An Anatomy of Society Today (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 265.

important theatrical influence. Because Louis XIV had his own theater in Paris, every German prince and duke felt compelled to have his personal theater, if only for pride and prestige. When Germany became a single nation, each city wanted to retain its respective theater. Theaters thus established became the modern equivalent of the *Landestheater*, *Staatstheater*, and *Stadttheater*. The *Königliche Hoftheater* Stuttgart became, for example, the *Staatstheater* Stuttgart.²

Theater and the arts are seen as a primary, not secondary, component in the lives of the German citizenry. The number of theaters in Germany today is a testament to the German belief that theater and art have been, and remain, indispensable elements in the life and consciousness of the people.³ Peter Jonas, *Intendant* of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, says,

In Germany, the debates about the function of and need for art took place early in this century,

²*Intendant* interview.

³The survey indicates that only 17 percent of the respondents felt that the importance of opera had increased in the German community. Half of the respondents indicated that the level of importance had remained the same, while 23 percent felt it had decreased. The responses to whether young people were showing the same interest in opera as previous generations were about equal: 44 percent indicated that they were and 40 percent felt that they were not.

when democracy was being implemented. This doesn't mean there aren't financial pressures--it's just that the importance of the arts has already been established, while in England or the United States it's still being debated.⁴

In the United States, by contrast, the arts have always been considered entertainment, enjoyable and enriching, but not something integral to daily life. More Germans attend live theatrical performances than attend professional sporting events.⁵

Theater has also played a moral role in the life of Germans and has been considered an undeniable element in the nation's intellectual life. John Ardagh writes, "Culture (theater) is not just entertainment but a means of permanent education, both moral and spiritual."⁶ And according to Udo Zimmermann, the *Intendant* in Leipzig, "It's important to understand that art is not just a

⁴Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 11.

⁵*Intendant* interviews.

Of theater personnel, 48 percent indicated that attendance and the number of subscriptions to their theaters had increased. An additional 29 percent indicated that the figures had remained constant.

⁶Ardagh, 268.

metaphor for Utopia, it's an actual life aid. It protects our inner world. It's a part of our culture, a part of human life."⁷ Other factors contribute to the importance of theater: pride and prestige, a sense of duty, tradition, and an essential respect, if not veneration, for culture.⁸

Another important aspect of German society is a predilection for "going out." For Germans wanting to leave the house or apartment for an evening of diversion, the theater is an important destination. Human contact is an increasingly important element in the media age, where the temptation to sit at home and watch television, put on a record, CD, or a video, leads to isolation. Germans today can choose between staying at home and hearing Tosca via a recording or a video, or experiencing the opera live in their local theater. Theater has the advantage, however, of providing a forum, where people can meet, converse, and experience interpersonal contact.⁹

⁷Anne Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part II), Opera News 57 (August 1993): 25.

⁸*Intendant* interviews.

⁹*Ibid.*

Funding

Opera is in trouble. The country's huge state-supported theater system is threatened by the financial burden that reunification and its consequences have placed upon federal and state governments. It's also threatened from within, undermined by inflated budgets, excessive costs, the salaries of too many employees.¹⁰

The *Wirtschaftswunder* (German Economic Miracle) is now history. The economy has slowed down and Germany is experiencing a recession which is affecting all of Europe and the world. A recession means less tax money flowing into public coffers, thus restricting subsidies for cultural institutions and other state supported activities. Although Germany is the undisputed economic power in Europe, the financial demands and responsibilities of Reunification have had repercussions in all areas receiving public assistance, including social and cultural programs. As Anne Midgette has noted, "It's not as if culture were being singled out: cutbacks are also affecting such 'essential' areas as social security, government housing and defense, to name a few."¹¹

Along with social programs and research institutions, cultural institutions including theaters comprise the

¹⁰Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part II), 20.

¹¹Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 10.

third main area of public support. The desire to preserve a strong cultural identity is indispensable and undeniable in Germany. The Federal President of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, has remarked that one should not speak of subsidization, but of money paid for cultural services, just as money is paid for social services.¹²

Subsidization, tax money, exists to insure that a certain cultural continuance and strength are maintained.¹³

Klaus Schultz, *Intendant* at the *Nationaltheater* Mannheim, remarks that, "The government should not be released from its obligations. It's like renovating the Cologne Cathedral--you have to preserve your traditions so they'll still be around one hundred years from now."¹⁴

Subsidization is intended to guarantee the freedom of art. With the assurance that financial obligations will be met, theaters can produce "difficult" art, modern works, or even commission a new opera. Subsidization is, in fact, only considered justified when a theater fulfills its cultural mandate. In addition to works from the

¹²Paraphrase of a quotation from Richard von Weizsäcker obtained in an interview with an *Oberspielleiter*.

¹³*Intendant* interview.

¹⁴Klaus Schultz, quoted in Anne Midgette "Reunification Blues" Part I, *Opera News* (June 1993): 12.

standard repertory, a theater is expected to produce works that make demands on the public, to be progressive by challenging the public. It is considered fraudulent to accept public subsidization if a theater produces only popular works. Why should a theater need additional tax money when it is consistently selling out with popular works such as La Bohème, The Magic Flute, or The Merry Widow?¹⁵

While theaters in the former East are undergoing revitalization and restructuring, the former West German theaters are financing this process through budget reforms and reductions in program.¹⁶ Generous cost of living increases, often given annually, are also making it more difficult for the governments, cities, and communities to finance their extensive social and cultural programs. German lawmakers have now passed legislation, the *Landesfinanzausgleich* (land finance adjustment), that will take effect in 1995 requiring a larger percentage of tax money to be directed to the rebuilding of the former East. The state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) will, for

¹⁵Interviews with *Intendanten* and *Oberspielleiter*.

¹⁶*Intendant* interview.

In answering the question whether financial support had increased, decreased, or remained constant, 33 percent of respondents indicated it had remained constant (29 percent indicated an increase and 25 percent a decrease).

example, receive between five and eight billion Marks less each year beginning in 1995. All cities and communities within NRW will, in turn, receive less money.¹⁷

An uncertain and threatening financial future has resulted in rethinking and restructuring. The former opera house in Oberhausen stopped presenting opera altogether and now offers only spoken drama. The entire musical staff was suddenly unemployed. In Lübeck and in Kiel, where formerly opera and drama were presented, there is a plan being considered that would make Kiel exclusively an opera house and Lübeck a theater for drama.¹⁸

In difficult financial times, German theaters are forced to justify their existence. How can, for example, a budget of fifty-three million Marks be allotted if funds are then lacking for the city's kindergarten programs or hospitals? Money saving measures are necessary, and demands for fiscal accountability in the arts are being made in all German cities. Theaters, as well as all other recipients of public funding, are being required to reduce programs.¹⁹

¹⁷*Intendant* interview.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

Elected officials supportive of the arts can have a positive effect on budget decisions. However, the dense concentration of theaters, coupled with a recession causes politicians, even those normally supportive, to question the role of the arts in the community. One questions whether it is possible to disband one's own theater ensemble and purchase a certain number of performances per year from other theaters, or touring companies, retaining the quality of cultural life in the community. Such discussions are more prevalent in cities where the state contributes less money to the maintenance of theaters (NRW, for example), and where the city and surrounding communities must provide the majority of funding.²⁰

The *Pflichtleistungen* (mandatory social services) such as hospitals, schools, and social services, are guaranteed under the German social system and, therefore, are not areas where the budget may be cut easily. The *Freiwillige Leistungen* (voluntary services), which include the cultural institutions, include areas where cost reduction measures can and will be carried out.

The theater system supports thousands of employees, all of them--artists and administrators alike--civic officials with comfortable union contracts, full medical coverage and four- to six-weeks paid vacations. Between 75 and 90 percent of

²⁰Interviews with *Intendanten*.

the budget of these German houses is derived from government subsidies.²¹

It is acknowledged by professionals in the field that in times of financial hardship, theaters are among the first institutions to experience budget reductions.²² Written survey results indicated that 73 percent of all respondents felt the current financial situation in German opera houses was unstable. An additional 10 percent indicated that the degree of economic stability varied from state to state and from city to city. It is clear from the additional comments received that the present financial problems of Germany will likely lead to future crises within the budgets of theaters.

As the fixed operating costs of running a theater rise, the portion of the budget left over for artistic costs shrinks steadily, to the point where administrators fear that they won't have enough money actually to stage opera. These artistic costs include the . . . salaries of . . . artists.²³

The largest single item in a theater's budget is personnel--the costs for singers, actors and dancers, and

²¹Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 10.

²²The majority of respondents (46 percent) indicated that cultural institutions (opera houses) would not be given preference in budget cutting decisions, while 40 percent indicated they would.

²³Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part II), 23.

other large groups, such as the orchestra, the chorus, and administrative personnel.²⁴ The orchestra, the chorus, the technical staff, and administrative personnel, all have strong contracts (and unions) which provide protection and make it difficult to control salaries or to reduce the work force.²⁵ Once employees in Germany have served an initial, probationary period, they have, under the social system, secure positions for life. Because of contractual stipulations, it is legally impossible for a theater to uniformly reduce its work force.²⁶ In the theater budget, only three areas exist where money can be saved: (1) personnel costs of employees with renewable contracts (the artistic personnel); (2) costumes and sets; and (3) publicity.²⁷

The predicament for the theaters is that they are being forced to save money in the one area on which quality is most dependent--the artistic personnel. This is the main reason why theaters are having a difficult time reducing budgets. Contracts for soloists generally

²⁴For example, the Landestheater Detmold has a budget of 25 million Marks. Of this amount, 19 million Marks alone are personnel costs, or 76 percent of the total budget (information obtained in an *Intendant* interview).

²⁵*Intendant* interview.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

run for one or two years and may be renewed (see Chapter VII for a discussion of contracts). A theater can save money by not renewing the contract of a singer and then leaving the position vacant (occurring more often), or by engaging a new singer at a lower salary.²⁸ *Intendanten* say that other financial solutions must be found that would permit across the board budget reductions, not just those aimed at the contractually vulnerable singers, actors, and dancers, whose quality is a conspicuous barometer of the reputation of the theater.²⁹

The Role of the Intendant

The overall artistic quality of any given theater ultimately rests with the *Intendant*, the General Manager of the theater. He is responsible for the efficient daily operation of the theater and is expected to display financial acumen in all areas. It is the *Intendant's* responsibility to insure that all subsidization is spent on the artistic product. He can make allocations from his budget as he chooses. He is completely independent, administratively and artistically. An *Intendant* is chosen and hired based upon the kind of theater he pledges to

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹*Intendant* interviews.

bring to the community. The *Intendant* chooses the season's repertory (in consultation with others) based upon his personal tastes, aims and goals, but always with an eye to the attitudes, values, and opinions of his public.³⁰

The *Intendant* has contact with the community, either directly or through selected representatives such as *Dramaturgen* (advisers), and *Werbung* (publicity department). Open discussions are held with theater groups and in schools in order to ascertain if the repertory and production values are acceptable to the public. The majority of respondents (64 percent) indicated that the views of the public were an important consideration in the selection of repertory and in production values.

Although theaters are not totally dependent upon ticket sales, they must take into consideration public taste, to a certain extent, in making artistic decisions. Attendance figures and subscriptions are watched closely.³¹ Growth in these areas indicates that the theater is filling a need in the community and that the

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

theater's quality is acceptable, thus justifying the subsidization.

The *Intendant* must ensure, however, that three important criteria are met in order to guarantee the subsidy: (1) that he does not exceed his budget; (2) that the theater provides a certain number of performances each season;³² and (3) that the theater sells a certain number of tickets and thereby contributes to its own budget.³³

³²The *Einspielergebnis* (number of performances) varies from theater to theater.

³³The amount of money which must be raised through the sale of tickets is predetermined in agreement with the *Rechtsträger* (theater owners). If the theater fails to raise its share of revenue through the sale of tickets, then the subsidization will be increased to meet expenditures. Revenue through ticket sales is important and a direct measure of the overall success and quality of an *Intendant's* artistic program and can be a factor in his contract renewal.

CHAPTER IV
RATING SYSTEMS FOR GERMAN OPERA THEATERS

Types of Theaters

Germany is comprised of sixteen *Bundesländer* (subdivisions analogous to the states in the United States), eleven in the former West and five in the former East (Although they are called *Länder* [lands], state will be used to avoid confusion with the use of "land" in the word *Landestheater*). The publicly supported theaters include the *Staatstheater*, the *Stadttheater*, the *Nationaltheater*, and the *Landestheater*. The subsidization of the various types of theaters takes a myriad of forms.

German cultural funding is supplied primarily at the state and city level, rather than the federal. There is, in fact, no German Ministry of Culture; such federal cultural funding as exists is administered by the Ministry of the Interior. But there is a cultural ministry in each of the sixteen states, and the states prefer to retain their autonomy in cultural matters. The more affluent a state, the better off its theaters.¹

Although drawing from the same basic sources, the funding varies from city to city and from state to

¹Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 11.

state. The political scene and the economic conditions within the various cities and states influence the funding structure.²

The *Staatstheater* (state theater) is financed by both the state and the city. The state, however, usually provides the majority of funds. The proportions and amounts contributed by the state as opposed to the city vary depending upon the theater and state. A *Staatstheater* will, as a rule, have a larger budget than the other subsidized theaters within the respective states because it is larger than a city theater and receives comparably greater funding from the state. The state theater is expected to serve both state and city. It will serve the region at large via performances known as *Abstecher*.³

The *Stadttheater* (city theater) also receives its funding from both city and state, with the city providing the majority of the funding. Again, the proportions and amounts vary depending on the state in which a theater is located.⁴

²*Intendant* interviews.

³An *Abstecher* is a performance taken "on the road" to another city within the state.

⁴For example, in the state of Baden-Württemberg, the city theaters receive a greater proportion of their money from the state than from their respective cities. This

A *Nationaltheater* (national theater), again like the state and city theaters, receives its support from both city and state. The federal government is not a major contributor to national theaters, nor is the budget of a national theater necessarily larger than a state theater.⁵

The last type of theater to be discussed is the *Landestheater* (land theater), which has a more complicated funding structure because it receives support from a wider variety of sources. A land theater is generally found in a small city unable to support a theater on its own. The majority of the budget needs are met by the city and a *Trägerverein*, an association of neighboring cities and communities, which pledge to contribute a significant portion to the theater's budget.⁶ It is possible that the city and the *Trägerverein* will be unable to meet the

contrasts with the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the state provides less funding than other states, forcing the cities to assume a greater share.

⁵The national theater in Mannheim had a budget of 72 million *Marks* in 1992, while the state theater in Stuttgart had a budget of 118 million *Marks* in the same year (information obtained from the program book to the 1993 *Theatertage* [Theater days] in Baden-Württemberg).

⁶For example, Detmold is home to a land theater. The *Trägerverein* which helps finance the theater is comprised of twenty-six members.

budget needs of the land theater. In this case, the state is expected to contribute any additional funds required.⁷

In order to qualify as a land theater, a theater must present over half of its performances in locations outside its home theater.⁸ Many of the performance locations will be a considerable distance from the home theater. Singers engaged in a land theater must expect many *Abstecher* performances requiring extra time, energy, and endurance. The singer may return home at midnight or later and be expected to rehearse early the next day.⁹

Theater Classifications

In addition to the differences in financial structure, theaters are classified on the basis of the size and pay scale of the orchestra. This classification is in the form of a lettering system, A, B, C, and D. The house classifications "A" include a minimum of 99 orchestral musicians; "B" a minimum of 66 musicians; "C" a

⁷Intendant interview.

Technically, a state is not required to provide support for a *Landestheater*. However, because these theaters serve so many small cities and communities, the states are, in a sense, morally obligated to contribute to their budgets.

⁸Intendant interview.

⁹The singer is guaranteed a minimum *Ruhezeit* (rest period) of ten hours.

minimum of 56 musicians; and "D" a minimum of 49 musicians.¹⁰ The *Rechtsträger*, the employer (state, city, sometimes including a *Trägerverein*), decides how many orchestral musicians it can afford.¹¹ The larger the operation, the greater the subsidy required. It should be noted that house classifications can change, a situation not uncommon with the unstable financial conditions present in many theaters today.

Within each classification there can be great differences in size and quality. The "A" classification is the most variable. For example, the city theater in Wuppertal and the international *Deutsche Oper* Berlin are both classified as "A" houses. House size is not always an indicator of house quality. Depending on the artistic leadership, the artistic level in a smaller house may be as high or higher than that found in a larger house. A relationship does exist, however, between money and quality of production values, and chances are greater of experiencing a higher level of quality in an "A" house than in a "C" house.¹²

¹⁰Arnold Werner-Jensen, *Oper Intern*. (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1981) 83.

¹¹Attached to the size of the orchestra is also the size of the chorus.

¹²Interview with an *Oberspielleiter*.

Cities are constantly in competition with each other, to see which of them can lure the most distinguished talent and which in the eyes of the critics have the finest opera, ballet or theatre companies.¹³

Distinctions and Implications

Significant differences exist among the approximately ninety opera houses in Germany. The implications of these differences for the young singer can be considerable. As might be expected, the small and medium-sized houses hire more beginning singers than the larger houses. In the vast majority of cases, it will be in the smaller houses that an American singer's career will begin.

The differences in size and in the budgets among large and small houses have a direct influence upon a theater's repertory. Bigger theaters with comparatively larger budgets perform a larger repertory. Small houses are compelled to do more with less. With fewer operas in the repertory, the pieces will generally be lighter in nature (i.e., Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, as well as operetta and musicals). The smaller houses do not generally perform the larger, more dramatic operas of Verdi and Puccini, or any of the works of Richard Strauss

¹³Ardagh, 266.

and Wagner, leaving them to the larger houses with more experienced singers and bigger budgets.¹⁴

In order to fulfill casting requirements and ensure a high level of quality, larger houses engage not only a greater number of singers in each *Fach*, but also singers who are specialists in their respective *Fächer* (plural of *Fach*).¹⁵ The musical staff in a large house is often especially competent and knowledgeable about voices. The possibility that a young singer in such a theater will be overworked or given the wrong roles is significantly reduced. Larger houses put a premium on the beauty, power and technical security of the voice.¹⁶ Such houses are in a position to look for singers with a unique timbre--a

¹⁴Information from various interviews.

¹⁵In larger theaters where established "star" singers are engaged, the *Fach* System is unimportant, according to 74 percent of respondents.

¹⁶The acoustics of a theater have an impact on the kind of voice a house will engage. All houses require sufficient carrying power--yet what is sufficient for one might not be so for another. Larger houses not only have more seats, but they also have a larger orchestra and require bigger voices. Smaller houses require a voice capable of filling a theater of reduced size. By way of comparison, the Landestheater Thüringen in Rudolstadt has 274 seats, while the opera house in Leipzig has 1606 seats.

timbre which they believe might have the potential for an international career.¹⁷

Unlike larger houses, the smaller and middle-sized theaters do not possess budgets necessary to hire several singers for each *Fach*. Smaller houses realize that they will not be able to hold their talented singers for long, so they attempt to retain them by offering choice repertory roles.¹⁸ The personnel in smaller theaters may also be in a position to offer a beginning singer the opportunity to experiment with repertory. The young singer must exercise caution and good judgment; roles which are either too heavy or too high or low may prove detrimental to healthy vocal development. No singer should feel compelled to sing each and every role offered.

The importance of fluency in German cannot be overestimated. Performances in large theaters are most often sung in the original language. Good *Aussprache* (diction)

¹⁷*Intendant* interviews. The beginning singer should not interpret this to mean that he cannot receive his first engagement in a larger house. Of the written survey respondents who answered the question, "Is it true that larger houses seldom engage beginners?", only 49 percent agreed with the statement. Among the 51 percent who answered negatively or with "other," the comments indicated that the possibility existed, but that the singer should not expect to receive large roles or be in the first cast.

¹⁸*GMD* interview.

is mandatory for all works sung in German. Stage directions during rehearsals are generally transmitted in German, regardless of theater size or the language in which the work is being performed.

The probability that stage directors and conductors will speak languages other than German increases in a larger house. In the smaller theaters, the singer will encounter German almost exclusively. The smaller theaters have a tradition of performing all works in the vernacular.¹⁹ These houses also perform many more works which contain dialogue, such as Singspiels, operettas, and American musicals.²⁰ Some theaters actually include a contract stipulation that a beginning singer demonstrate language proficiency by the time his contract begins.²¹

The beginning singer who receives the offer to sing in a large theater should be aware of certain realities. He will most likely sing only small roles unless he has exceptional or unique vocal gifts. If cast in a large role, the beginning singer will likely sing in the second or third cast. He may only "cover" a role, that is take

¹⁹Agent interview.

²⁰American musicals are extremely popular in German theaters.

²¹Agent interview.

over the role in case of an emergency or sudden indisposition of a colleague. If he is in the second or third cast, he can expect to receive limited rehearsal time, both musically and dramatically. Nevertheless, he will be expected to know the staging and be musically secure.²² For the young singer, these conditions may not be the best way to gain experience or build a significant repertory in the system.

Larger houses are dependent upon the smaller houses to provide them with a continuing source of experienced and proven talent.²³ Klaus Schultz remarks that, "By training young artists, small and mid-sized houses look after the next generation and ensure the continuation of tradition."²⁴ Beginning American singers are best advised to begin their careers with engagements in middle and smaller-sized theaters, where one has the opportunity to learn the theater system, develop vocally, discover the proper *Fach*, establish a basic repertory, and refine language skills. An *Intendant* from a large theater offered the following hypothetical timetable for building a singer's career.

²²*Intendant* interviews.

²³Agent interview.

²⁴Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part II), 22.

- Years #1 and #2 -- Begin by singing small roles in a smaller house;
- Years #3 and #4 -- Move from singing smaller roles to doubling (second cast) on larger roles;
- Years #4 and #5 -- Sing only major roles (first cast), build repertory;
- Year #6 -- Think of moving to a larger house.²⁵

A singer's career can never be totally structured. Each singer must find his own path to success, remaining receptive to opportunities as they arise. This may involve staying at one theater for several years, or it may involve moving from one theater to another in a variety of engagements. Each singer must develop at a pace which is compatible with vocal efficiency and health. In any event, he must be judicious and protect his instrument during the precarious early years. With a few years of experience at a small or middle-sized theater, the beginning American singer will be better prepared to advance to a larger theater.

²⁵*Intendant* interview.

CHAPTER V
THE *FACH* SYSTEM

Background and Definitions

Understanding the *Fach* System, a system for defining voice categories, is of particular importance for the young singer planning to audition in Germany. The *Fach* System is not only a method by which hiring and casting decisions are made, but also a system which typifies the German penchant for order. An oft quoted German saying is "*Ordnung muss sein*" ("Order must be"). Order is necessary in simplifying matters in everyday life and in the operations of a music theater. The *Fach* System continues to exist, despite strong controversy, because it addresses the matter of classifying voices, thereby simplifying the casting of operas.¹ Of the agents responding to the written survey, 83 percent indicated that the *Fach* System plays a role in helping them form opinions about singers. The remaining 17 percent agreed the *Fach* System is important, but with limitations. Of theater respondents,

¹The survey results indicate that 55 percent of respondents feel the *Fach* system is more important in small rather than large houses, while the other 45 percent disagreed or did not answer.

79 percent indicated they use the *Fach* System in their casting and hiring decisions.

The standard reference source for the *Fächer* is the *Handbuch der Oper* (Handbook of Opera) written by Rudolf Kloiber, in which a detailed description of the *Fächer* can be found.² Kloiber states clearly that the listing of *Fach* roles is based on the current casting practices in German theaters. In this regard, the Kloiber book represents German taste and biases in casting.³ Subjects interviewed indicated that Kloiber's book alone was not sufficient in making casting decisions, but was used in conjunction with the experience of the musical staff in decisions regarding repertory and *Fach*. Other sources for learning about the German *Fach* System include a booklet entitled *Towards a Career in Europe* written by Richard Owens, and Anthony Legge's book, *The Art of Auditioning: A Handbook for Singers, Accompanists and Coaches*.

²Kloiber defines and describes the various *Fächer* and designates a *Fach* classification for each character in approximately 270 operas. Works are arranged according to composer and range from the Baroque period to the present day.

³The casting preferences in other lands, or what might be acceptable on an international level, are not addressed. Kloiber is recognized only in the German-speaking lands, i.e., Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Countries such as Italy and France do not acknowledge Kloiber. This book is the only source recognized by the German legal system for settling casting disputes.

Implications of the Fach System

The Fach System serves two distinct constituencies: (1) the singer and (2) the theater. By offering a singer a contract in a *Fach*, the theater guarantees the singer not only a position, but also the opportunity to sing at least two roles per season in his designated *Fach*. In contrast to other professions, where a contract guarantees the employee remuneration and vacation time, a contract for a singer guarantees the right to work. For theaters, the *Fach* System is a means of orientation. It helps in the casting of the season's repertory, capitalizing on the unique talents and abilities of the singers employed.

The *Fach* System protects the singer by insuring that the theaters, especially smaller ones, will not demand that a singer accept and sing roles outside of the contractually designated *Fach*. Within a single *Fach*, it is unlikely that the same singer will be able to perform all roles with equal success. Roles vary in nature and in their demands even within a given *Fach*. Herein lies part of the problem of the system: it does not allow for individual differences in technique, personality, and timbre of each singer. A *Fach* contract protects the singer from being required to sing roles outside of the

Fach, but generally does not provide opportunities for exploiting one's talent in a neighboring *Fach*.

A certain flexibility or movement within a *Fach* is a recognized aspect of the system. Changing *Fach* is possible but should be undertaken with caution. Nothing is more ruinous for the singer than moving too quickly into a heavier, more dramatic *Fach*.⁴ Unfortunately, this has happened too often. Prudent theater management should monitor a singer's development, properly assess a singer's talent, and provide counsel should a *Fach* change be necessary.

Disagreements between the singer and the theater over *Fach* and repertory may occur. Many theaters consult the singer in advance about prospective role assignments. *Fach* limitations in repertory may be overridden through a mutual agreement between the singer and the *Intendant*. Contracts often contain extra clauses which specify that the choice of repertory must correspond to the singer's abilities and must be discussed and agreed upon in advance.⁵

⁴*Intendant* interview.

⁵An example of such a clause would be: "(Voice type) mit Partien nach Individualitat und nach Absprache" ("Voice type' with roles suited to the individual and after consultation"), or "(Voice type) mit Partien nach Eignung" ("Voice type' with rolls based on ability").

The differing sizes of the German opera houses have a direct impact on the interpretation of the *Fach* System for American singers. The *Fächer* and their implications may vary somewhat from house to house based on the timbre and, to a lesser extent, the size of the voice. Of all respondents to the survey, 53 percent indicated that a singer need not have a large voice, while an additional 21 percent commented that the voice must have carrying power and be well-produced. American singers are accustomed to performing in larger theaters than those often encountered in Germany; therefore, the size of the voice is not as great a determinant of *Fach* and repertory for the American singer as is the color and range of the voice. Germans place great importance on vocal timbre and color and this can affect the interpretation of *Fach*. It is entirely possible that the beginning American singer will sing repertory one *Fach* heavier in a German theater than what was sung in the United States.⁶

Certain singers have a wider range of vocal capabilities than others and are able to adjust their singing to fit different compositional styles. Some

⁶A tenor who sings Mozart, Donizetti, etc. in the United States, but who possesses a slightly darker timbre and has a little power in his voice, may find himself singing Puccini and Verdi on German stages.

singers possess a wider palette of vocal colors and may have the technical capacity to sing *fioratura*. The personalities and physiques of some singers enable them to portray a wider variety of characters, ranging from the lyric to the dramatic. Such a singer is recognized as singing between the *Fächer* and is known as a *Zwischenfach* (between the *Fach*). Not exclusively of one *Fach*, the singer possesses attributes of two neighboring categories. In most middle and smaller theaters, a true *Zwischenfach* has an advantage because of his versatility in being cast.⁷

Sixty-five percent of theater personnel surveyed and 83 percent of the agents felt a singer should present himself in one *Fach* rather than as a *Zwischenfach* singer. (Only 21 percent of theater personnel recommended auditioning with arias from more than one *Fach*. Theaters look first for singers who are competent in a particular *Fach*. In most cases, theaters have a tentative schedule of operas and, therefore, audition singers, not only for *Fach*, but also for specific roles.⁸ The singer should

⁷Larger theaters often have the roster of artists they need, all essentially specialists; therefore they are not as concerned about the diversity and flexibility of a singer.

⁸Of all respondents who answered the written survey, 87 percent said most contracts were written for either one or more *Fächer*. However, of that number, 60 percent

not attempt to be versatile by singing in two *Fächer* poorly as opposed to singing in one *Fach* well. The ability to introduce additional vocal possibilities once the singer is engaged will be welcomed and encouraged, but it is not recommended as part of the audition preparation.

Visual considerations are an element of the *Fach* System and, consequently, a determinant in hiring and casting decisions.⁹ In most cases, a singer's physique must match the *Fach* in which he presents himself.¹⁰ Exceptions are occasionally made for singers of extraordinary ability.¹¹ In an age when television and

indicated that most contracts were for a single *Fach*.

⁹Information gathered from theater personnel and agents.

The survey indicates that 53 percent of all respondents consider the appearance of the singer important. An additional 39 percent indicated it was of moderate importance.

¹⁰Tradition, again, plays a role in this. For example, a soubrette is often short and blond, a lyric mezzo--thin and tall, with dark hair, a comic tenor--perhaps short and portly.

¹¹It is still possible to find a job if a singer is heavy or unusually short or tall, because for certain *Fächer* (i.e., the character or comic *Fächer*) such an appearance is acceptable. In smaller and medium-sized theaters, only one singer is usually engaged per *Fach*; the singer with an inappropriate appearance must offer flexibility and casting options. Comments indicated that being overweight was a greater problem than being too tall or short. One agent commented "...women can be shorter and men can be taller..." If a singer has a problematic physique, the need for temperament, charisma, and personality is increased.

film strongly affect the public, it is expected that singers be visually believable in their roles (productions at the international level excepted). The trend in German theaters known as *Regietheater* makes the visual component of *Musiktheater* (music theater) stronger than it has ever been. Anne Midgette discusses the concept of *Regietheater*,

Regietheater grew out of the work of Walter Felsenstein, who founded Berlin's *Komische Oper* in 1947. Rejecting cliché, reluctant even to differentiate opera from other forms of theater, he sought to develop the drama in theatrical rather than musical terms. 'The music has to grow out of the dramatic situation,' he said. 'Singing should be an intensified, indispensable form of expression, rather than something on the side.' He also emphasized fidelity to the work's original conception and text. His approach placed heavy demands on the acting ability of his ensemble. The result, at its best, was a kind of dramatic effectiveness and unity seldom previously seen on the opera stage.¹²

Some conductors have complained that the *Regisseur* (stage director) has become too influential and powerful in the world of opera, leading to a heightened emphasis on drama to the detriment of the music. Musical considerations are often relegated to a subordinate role, especially in operetta. Comments Klaus Schultz, "In Germany, directors have their own energy which sometimes

¹²Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part II), 24.

threatens to push the music into the background."¹³ With this emphasis has come a greater reliance on singers who visually fit the director's concept and who can act.

Practical Applications

In larger houses, especially on international stages, the *Fach* System can be experienced in its purest form. At this level, the singers know their abilities, their strengths and weaknesses, and they are specialists in their *Fächer*. The directors of these theaters are also specialists, bringing years of training and experience to their casting decisions. They engage a singer for a particular *Fach* and a specific role(s). Once engaged at a large house, little opportunity exists for a singer to experiment with other roles, either in or outside of his designated *Fach*. The singer may have the opportunity to venture into another *Fach*, but only with the cooperation and approval of the house management.¹⁴

In smaller and middle-sized theaters, the *Fach* System is not as easy to recognize or define. The smaller the house, the smaller the vocal ensemble and, ultimately, the less consideration will be given to the *Fächer* and their

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Intendant interview.

corresponding roles. The *Fach* System is often verbally acknowledged, but in practice, not strictly observed. With fewer singers in each *Fach*, it is probable that some overlapping in the *Fächer* will occur. The singer may well be asked to sing diverse roles which may lie on the edge of, or even beyond, his designated *Fach*.¹⁵ A singer who is clearly in a specific *Fach* may be overlooked in favor of another singer whose vocal flexibility appears to offer more diverse casting possibilities.¹⁶

A singer may experience vocal problems if he is asked to sing out of his *Fach*. If wisely used, however, experimentation into neighboring *Fächer* can help a singer discover his proper repertory and *Fach*. Sometimes a theater may see possibilities for a singer that he or she never considered.¹⁷ In this regard, a young singer should retain a certain amount of openness and flexibility, combined with a solid vocal technique. In smaller houses, much more depends on the singer himself--his training, honesty, and self-awareness.

¹⁵An *Oberspielleiter* stated that in smaller houses, it will often not be possible to separate the German and Italian *Fächer*. The same singer will be expected to sing both.

¹⁶*Intendant* interview.

¹⁷*GMD* interview.

In determining a Fach designation, the American attribute of "doing it all" may mitigate against success when dealing with the implications of the *Fach* System. Audition arias alone should not be used as the sole criterion for establishing the repertory and *Fach* of a beginning singer. Age and the level of vocal training should also be considerations. The arias selected for auditioning should be selected only from operas in which the singer could sustain the entire role with orchestral accompaniment.¹⁸

It is helpful to the American seeking a position in a German theater if those responsible for his musical training are aware of the *Fach* System. With the aid of his voice teacher or coach, the singer is advised to accurately assess his vocal strengths and weaknesses. Agents and theater personnel can also be of assistance in establishing the *Fach* of a singer by providing constructive criticism and advice. Knowing what advice and criticism to accept is important for the young singer, because in the final analysis, he alone is responsible for his vocal health and the development of his career.

¹⁸Confirmed through various *Intendant* interviews.

CHAPTER VI
THE GENERAL AUDITION

In Germany, the prime audition season runs from mid-September through early December. This is the period when most of the vacancies for the following year's season are announced and when theater directors make decisions regarding contract renewal of their current singers.

October 31st is the official deadline for the notification of a theater's intent not to renew the contract of a singer. In such a case, an invitation for a voluntary meeting with the *Intendant* must be sent to the singer by October 15th.¹ The singer has until October 31st to inform the theater of his intent to resign. Agents, if they are not already aware of a pending vacancy, begin learning of the newly created vacancies in early November.

Spring can also be a propitious time to audition. Final decisions about the repertory for the coming year are often made during this season. *Intendanten* may decide that, based on the proposed repertory, an additional singer or two is required. Changes in the theater's

¹Singers who have been employed in the German theater system for more than eight years receive notification of intent to dismiss approximately three months earlier.

roster of singers, including the hiring of a permanent ensemble member or a guest singer may be necessary. It is also possible that a singer already under contract may have received an offer from a larger house. Smaller theaters, having released singers from contracts, may be looking to fill vacancies for the following season. Dramatic voices are always in demand and are, therefore, exempted from the schedule applicable to other singers.

The majority of placements in German opera houses are handled through agents.² An agent audition in late November may not be as beneficial as one in early October. Because of the large number of singers seeking auditions, it will not be possible for all singers to be heard in September and October. Therefore, a written request for an audition should be made as early as possible (see Chapter VII for a discussion of agents).

Curriculum vitae may be sent directly to theaters, but singers should realize that most auditions are arranged through agents. Since an agent must arrange for an accompanist, an audition space, and confirm the availability of his staff, it is necessary to allow

²A listing of the German theatrical agencies can be found in the publication Musical America: International Directory of the Performing Arts 1993, pp. 613-614 (listing of opera houses), pp. 629, 633-636 (listing of agents for opera).

approximately 2-3 months when requesting an audition. In most cases, an agent will grant an audition and send the singer a confirmation.

Preparing an Audition

A thorough understanding of the audition process is of great benefit in securing an engagement in a German theater. A solid audition program, one that is not only well sung but also properly selected, can make the difference in attracting an agent's interest and increase the possibilities of being hired. The emphasis placed on audition preparation by organizations such as the American Institute of Musical Studies (AIMS), the Zurich Opera Center, and the *Hochschulen für Musik* attests to this fact.³

³The American Institute for Musical Studies (AIMS) is a summer program held in Graz, Austria. For information contact AIMS, 3500 Maple Ave., Suite 120, LB 22, Dallas, Texas 75219-3901. Telephone: (214) 528-9234.

The Zurich Opera Center can be contacted by writing the Opernhaus Zurich, Falkenstr. 1, CH-8008 Zurich (Switzerland).

A listing of *Hochschulen*, institutes for music, and conservatories in Germany can be found in the publication The World of Learning, pp.640-641.

Repertory

Vocal Considerations

Next to the voice itself, the proper repertory is the most critical element in determining the success of an audition. It is not possible to discuss audition repertory without taking the *Fach* System into account. Differences of opinion exist among agents and theater directors regarding the degree to which the *Fach* System should influence the choice of the audition repertory.⁴

Among the varying opinions and viewpoints, two points of agreement were noted: (1) the audition repertory should correspond to the *Fach*, the age, and training of the singer; and (2) the singer should seek to present as broad a spectrum of possibilities within his *Fach* as possible. For instance, a lyric soprano offering Pamina might also include Mimi. However, singers should not select arias for the sole purpose of demonstrating breadth or flexibility within a given *Fach* if they are not technically secure in each aria chosen. American vocal teachers can exercise a positive influence at this stage

⁴A number of agents and theater directors are of the opinion that too much attention is placed on *Fach* and the *Fach* System in determining audition repertory. They suggest that a singer audition with the arias that sound (and feel) the best and that the *Fach* will establish itself with time and with the help of a teacher.

by using caution in advising a young singer about audition repertory. Many young singers without proper guidance will select literature beyond their capabilities.⁵ Singers are advised to avoid audition repertory which crosses over numerous *Fächer*.⁶ It is mandatory that American singers realize that the *Fach* System exists and select audition repertory accordingly.

The results of the written survey indicated that 74 percent of all respondents felt that the singer should have at least three or four audition arias prepared.⁷ A listing of standard audition arias can be found in Anthony Legge's book, The Art of Auditioning. In selecting the audition arias, the singer should consider several important points: (1) The arias chosen should not be too long. A singer can expect to receive a limited amount

⁵Of the theater personnel who responded to the survey, only 52 percent indicated that the repertoires of American singers generally coincided with the size and timbre of their voices--that American singers understood the *Fach* System. Additional comments stated that (1) American singers have a tendency to sing "over their *Fächer*" and (2) if they are singing the wrong *Fach*, they change quickly.

⁶A German agent stated that he has been contacted by American agents asking what *Fächer* were currently in demand. This resulted in a flood of singers in these particular *Fächer*, including many singers whose voices were not suited to these *Fächer*.

⁷An additional 14 percent indicated 5 or more and 7 percent felt only 1 or 2 were necessary.

time, generally no more than ten to fifteen minutes.⁸ This will usually allow the singer time for two arias. In most cases, the singer is permitted to select the first aria which should be the best, most secure aria in one's repertory. The auditioners may choose a second aria, or even a third.⁹ (2) The arias chosen for the audition repertory should vary in style and show the unique and different possibilities of the voice. Strophic arias and arias not presenting significant challenges should be avoided. Nearly half of the responses (49 percent) indicated that operetta arias are not necessary in the audition repertory.¹⁰ (3) Arias should be sung in the

⁸Nearly every audition, whether for an agent or for a house, will be limited by time; for example, an agent has only rented a hall for three hours, or the stage needs to be free in an hour to begin constructing the set for the evening's performance.

⁹After the first aria in the desired *Fach* has been sung, the singer may then inform his listeners that he has prepared an aria(s) from a neighboring *Fach*.

An agent stressed that if a singer were asked for a second aria, he must present this aria as strongly as the first. If it was obvious that the singer was fatigued after one or two arias, then it would be clear to the agent and to the theater that the singer would not be capable of handling the demands of a *Fest Engagement* (permanent engagement).

¹⁰Additional written comments indicated that in certain *Fächer*, i.e., *Spieltenor* (comic tenor), *Soubrette*, operetta arias were again "not necessary, but helpful." The majority of respondents (72 percent) indicated that all operetta arias should be sung in German.

original language--not in translation. (4) All arias should be sung in original keys. (5) The audition arias should be selected from a single *Fach*. Theaters will expect to hear arias which correspond to the *Fach* they need; that is the reason the singer was invited or sent to them. The results of the survey indicated that 21 percent of the respondents preferred all arias to be from a single *Fach*. An additional 70 percent said that arias may be included from a neighboring *Fach*.¹¹ If a singer believes he is a *Zwischenfach*, then he should offer an aria from the stronger *Fach* first. If the singer is offering dramatic repertory, the auditioners will consider age and training; however, it will be difficult to convince experienced listeners that a twenty-two-year-old baritone is ready to sing the entire role of Iago with orchestra. (6) A Mozart aria will be expected at nearly every audition, unless the Mozart operas are not a part of the singer's *Fach* (some dramatic *Fächer* do not encompass Mozart roles). (7) An aria or two in German was requested by 79 percent of all respondents. The singer's *Aussprache* and interpretation communicate to the auditioners the singer's ability with the German language.

¹¹Some additional written comments recommended that singers remain in a single *Fach*.

Language Ability

An *Intendant* commented that, in the '60s, an American singer needed to sing well, and it was assumed he would learn the language once engaged. The situation has changed drastically. The singer who is engaged speaking no German is becoming more and more the exception. A significant 71 percent of all respondents indicated that a singer's chances of being engaged would be reduced, if he spoke no German at the time of his audition.¹² Any singer seriously considering auditioning in Germany should, in addition to vocal and dramatic training, be studying the German language. With an abundance of well-trained singers from which to choose, language ability is becoming an increasingly important criterion in determining who will be hired. Although a knowledge of German is a prerequisite for all singers, the degree of its importance depends on the singer's *Fach*. If an American singer is in a lighter *Fach* where operetta and musicals are routine, the language ability must include

¹²All agents agreed that language deficiency diminished a singer's chances, stressing that language ability was more important for small and medium-sized houses.

not only proper grammar but a pronunciation which does not betray his foreign roots. For a singer in a dramatic *Fach*, language ability is not as crucial, but one will be expected to understand and converse. Opera, especially in smaller theaters, is performed in the vernacular; therefore, the singer must, at a minimum, display an impeccable *Aussprache* in his audition arias, thereby increasing one's chances of finding an engagement. One should avoid incorrect stresses and demonstrate through the expression a thorough comprehension of the text.

The dialogue during the audition will establish whether the singer has an ear and the facility for language.¹³ Musical and staging rehearsals will be conducted in German with members of the house staff. Fluency is not required, but the singer must be able to communicate with people in all areas of the theater and with colleagues on the stage.¹⁴

¹³The singer will be expected to converse with an agent, an *Intendant*, or other theater personnel beyond a few audition phrases.

¹⁴Although 88 percent of theaters responded that they would still engage a singer if he did not speak German, they qualified their answers based on the following: contract conditions, the *Fach* (the necessity of dialogue), and the singer's willingness to learn the language. Additionally, the singer had to possess an above average vocal talent and otherwise present a superior audition.

Many language institutes, schools, and private individuals are available in the United States to prepare the American singer to speak German.¹⁵ One agent suggested that a singer take an additional year specifically to work on language skills before coming to audition.¹⁶

Credentials

Resume

A resume (*Lebenslauf*), although a crucial element in finding employment in other fields, is not as critical for a performing artist. A good resume can support a singer by providing a quick overview of qualifications, experience and training. But what is most important is the audition itself, including voice, physique, musicianship, personality and language skills.

The resume should be chronological, short and concise, and easy to read. The three main areas of interest are: (1) what operatic roles (and concerts) the

¹⁵The Italian repertory is preferred over French in the majority of German theaters. The singer is advised to possess good Italian diction, since many German houses, even smaller ones, will perform the well-known Italian operas in the original language. French opera is seldom performed in the original language except at large theaters.

¹⁶Agent interview.

singer has performed; (2) where these performances were presented; and (3) the dates of the performances.

Continuity in a resume is important. Auditioners, be they agents or theater personnel, are looking for a continuous path of training and development. They are suspicious when gaps occur in the developmental process and may want to know why the singer was not studying or performing.

Because most auditions are held under extreme time limitations, it is imperative that singers not overload those hearing them with too much printed material. Other singers are literally waiting in the wings and usually the audition panel members have pressing appointments awaiting them immediately following the audition. They simply will not have time to seriously look at a multiple page resume. Singers should try and limit their resumes to one page if possible, with two or three pages as the maximum. The written survey results strongly indicate (94 percent) that a *Zwischenfach* singer should not provide separate resumes for each *Fach*.¹⁷ Information in the resume should be well-defined and easy to read by allowing enough space between sections and using bold face print where

¹⁷One *Intendant* indicated in a written comment on the survey that there are no *Zwischenfach* singers; a singer either expands his *Fach* or changes it.

necessary. Stress the important information and keep the resume concise. However, no matter how professionally executed, the resume is no substitute for talent and will not in itself play a significant role in the engagement of the singer.¹⁸

Age is a factor when theaters consider engaging a beginning singer.¹⁹ The average age for a beginning soloist is between twenty-five and twenty-eight years.²⁰ If the singer is thirty to thirty-two years old, it will be more difficult to find a position unless the singer is auditioning in a dramatic *Fach*. (It is expected that singers auditioning in the dramatic *Fächer* will be older. A twenty-four year old tenor with *Tannhäuser* listed in his audition repertory will have difficulty receiving an audition.) There is a general consensus among theater directors that a singer whose appearance corresponds to that of the characters in his *Fach* and sings well will not be rejected on the basis of age.

¹⁸Agent and theater personnel interviews.

¹⁹Age was often more important to agents than to *Intendanten*, *GMD*, and *Oberspielleiter*, the latter two bring more open and flexible on age.

²⁰Agent interviews.

The unofficial upper age limit for beginners is thirty-five.

Training

The importance of a singer's formal education is confirmed by the interviews and the written survey. Only a slight majority of respondents indicated that experience was more important than training. Many additional comments supported the necessity of a combination-- education was important, but experience was irreplaceable. One agent stated that "*Studium ohne Praxis ist verdächtig*" ("Study without practice [experience] is suspicious.") Study alone is not considered experience.²¹ A singer who aspires to be a performer is encouraged to look for performance opportunities outside the school or conservatory.

Klaus Schultz remarks that, "American training is more oriented toward actual practice and it's much harder. There's a preselection process that takes place before singers even enter the German system, because they've had to work so much harder in America. That doesn't exist in Germany." The (theatrical) agencies concur. An employee of the Germinal Hilbert agency in Munich says, "Young Germans write in and say 'I can sing five arias.' What can I do with that? The Americans write in and say 'I can sing fifteen roles.'"²²

²¹An *Intendant* stated that a singer should be out of school by twenty-five and that more than five or six years of schooling begins to look suspicious.

²²Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part II), 21.

The United States has a number of fine music schools, conservatories, and opera apprentice programs. Unfortunately, degrees and diplomas are of little value to a singer seeking his first engagement in Germany. They are not at all important to agents or to theater directors. Most German agents and theaters are unfamiliar with these institutions and programs and cannot judge their relative merits. One agent stated that the school or program is not important, because good singers are produced by institutions and programs of varying size and reputation.²³

Unless an instructor, voice teacher, conductor, or stage director, has an international name, the German theaters and agents will not recognize the value of the training. However, if a singer has worked with a world renowned artist or teacher, it may have an influence on the house or the agent, depending on the esteem they hold for that particular artist or teacher.²⁴

If the American soloist has studied in one of the many *Hochschulen für Musik*, or in an opera studio under

²³Agent interview.

²⁴Agent and *Intendant* interviews.

the auspices of a larger German opera house (Cologne, Munich, Hamburg, or Zurich [Switzerland], etc.), the singer will have an advantage. Theaters and agents in Germany are familiar with these institutions and have confidence in their experience in the profession, in their knowledge of the theater system, and of what will be expected of the singers who attend them. They also know that the singer has been exposed to the German language and, especially, to the specific vocabulary of the theater. The singer is advised to inquire about the reputations of the various *Hochschulen* and studio programs. Some institutions, as in the United States, have better reputations than others. This can make a difference, not only in the singer's training and development, but in an agent's willingness to grant the singer an audition.²⁵

American vocal competitions carry little weight on a resume. Theater personnel and especially agents have said that they are interested in formulating their own opinions about singers. They have indicated that competitions vary too much in quality and that results are too subjective to provide reliable information.

²⁵Agent interview.

Experience: What, Where, When

Is there a place in the German system for a technically secure singer with little stage experience? Of theater personnel surveyed, 88 percent indicated that they would consider engaging a singer with an excellent voice but limited stage experience. It is not necessary to "pad" one's background; most important are the complete roles studied, learned, and performed, preferably with orchestra. It is understood that the roles, in many cases, will have been sung in English. Roles from the standard repertory carry greater weight than those which are not. In the case of the more experienced singer, too many roles on a resume can be a disadvantage. Agents and houses may question whether the voice is still fresh.

Legitimate performing experience for a beginning soloist includes roles sung with small professional companies. Of special significance are return engagements which imply to agents and to houses that the singer is musical, a capable performer, and dependable. The results of the written survey indicated that 54 percent of all respondents (including agents) would recognize roles sung in university productions if the repertory sung corresponded to the singer's *Fach*. Studio productions and chamber operas are also acceptable. Singers who have been in an apprentice program or been engaged by a regional

opera company are viewed favorably. Recitals and concert appearances, on the other hand, vary too much in quality and are not equated with the types of experience listed above. The dates when the repertory was studied and sung is important--the more recent, the better.

Reviews and Recommendations

Reviews are of limited value to agents and to theater management. It is presumed that singers have numerous stellar reviews from which to choose and that they will send their best. The survey question of whether or not reviews were important was answered in the negative by 75 percent of respondents.²⁶ Only one subject mentioned reviews favorably. He said that the newspaper had to be well respected and the critic regarded as knowledgeable and reliable.

Several subjects mentioned that recommendations would be of value, but only if the authors were known and

²⁶Of agents and theater management surveyed, 60 percent indicated that reviews should not be included in the resume.

respected.²⁷ Given the lack of familiarity of German theaters and agents with American voice teachers, coaches, conductors, or stage directors, recommendations have limited value.²⁸

The Photo

A photo should accompany the resume when it is presented to the agent or to someone at the house audition. American singers should be aware that the standard size of resume photos in Germany is smaller than those in America. The customary 8" X 10" American photo is considered too large. It is recommended that singers reduce the size of their resume photos to conform to the 5" X 7" size used in Germany.²⁹

Honesty in the photo is highly recommended. What disturbs the agents more than the nonstandard size is the "Hollywood look." They consistently remark that the

²⁷Survey results showed that only 15 percent of theater personnel considered recommendations important. A significant 54 percent indicated that a recommendation was of "limited importance" when a singer did not have agent representation. An additional 31 percent regarded recommendations as unimportant.

²⁸Only one *Intendant* interviewed mentioned that he had contact with an American university.

²⁹Only 21 percent of the theater respondents indicated it was necessary for American singers to provide the smaller resume photo. However, of the agent responses, 50 percent stated they preferred the smaller photos.

photos are so professional that they often do not resemble the singer in person. The purpose of the photo is to remind the agent or theater personnel of the singer--how he looked and, most importantly, how he sounded. When an agent has heard thirty or forty singers in one day, fifteen of whom were in the same *Fach*, an honest photo can help place the singer in the memory of an agent. Photos that show the singer in performance with costume and make up are to be avoided.

The House Audition

More important than a well-constructed and thought out resume, complete with reviews, recommendations, and a good photo, is what comes across in a singer's ten or fifteen minute audition. How the singer walks on the stage, the voice and temperament displayed at the audition and the language skills are the most important factors.³⁰

The number of vacancies and the number of recommended singers will determine how many auditions are held annually. Theater respondents to the written survey indicated that the number of auditions held in a theater varies from year to year. Almost half (41 percent) indicated that they hold between twenty-five and forty

³⁰GMD interview.

auditions per year, while 38 percent indicated that they hold less than twenty-five annually. In larger houses, the singers will have been screened more extensively and only those qualified will be invited to audition. In smaller houses and for agent auditions, a beginning singer is likely to encounter many singers, but the number cannot be predicted and will vary from audition to audition.

Personnel Responsible for

Engaging the Singer

The final decision to hire a singer is made by one individual, the *Intendant*. He is the one who will sign the contract and bear a significant amount of the responsibility for the success or failure of the engagement. The *GMD* is the second most important individual involved in the hiring process.³¹ The relationship between the *Intendant* and the *GMD*, not only personally, but also professionally, is a strong factor in decisions regarding hiring.³² Together, the *Intendant*

³¹In many houses, the *Oberspielleiter* and/or the *Operndirektor* are considered experts in the field of opera and often have a special influence in the selection of singers.

³²The contractual relationship between the *Intendant* and the *GMD* is established by the *Rechtsträger*. This relationship varies from theater to theater. In some theaters, the *Intendant* and the *GMD* are equal partners, or they have an agreement whereby neither individual alone overrides the veto of the other. A relationship may also exist where the *GMD* must only be 'consulted' about the singers. In other theaters, the *GMD* has a veto power over

and the GMD carry the responsibility for the engagement of a singer.

The personality and the expertise of the *Intendant* in the field of opera will, to a large extent, influence how much the *Intendant* relies on the opinions of his staff.³³ *Intendanten* who come from a drama background will generally rely more heavily on the musical staff in the selection of singers. A house audition is heard by a committee, or the *Intendant's* panel of consultants, all of whom will have the right to voice their opinions, but not necessarily to cast a vote.³⁴ A singer should not be

the decisions of the *Intendant*. It is possible that, in a theater where the *Intendant* comes from the *Schauspiel* tradition (spoken drama), the *GMD* will make the final decision on the singers, although the *Intendant* signs the contract. No purpose is served if a singer is engaged over the veto of either the *Intendant* or the *GMD*; therefore, in most cases, when the *Intendant* and the *GMD* are not in agreement, the singer will not be engaged.

³³*Intendant* interview.

³⁴Along with the *Intendant* and the *GMD*, those present may include *Kapellmeister* (conductors), the *Studienleiter* (the individual representing the musical coaches and who writes the daily rehearsal schedules), the *Dramaturgen* (individuals from the dramatic and, especially, musical advisory staffs), the *Regisseure* (stage directors) including the *Oberspielleiter* (head stage director), the *Chefdisponent des künstlerischen Betriebsburo*, the *KBB* (the director, or a representative, of the theater's office of operations), and perhaps a representative from the ensemble of soloists.

alarmed if he sees people conferring with one another during the audition. They are exchanging impressions, and this is a natural part of the audition process. Further deliberation will be held after the singer completes the audition and perhaps again when all the singers have been heard. One person is designated to record the comments of the committee. Later, this evaluation will be communicated to the agent or the singer.

Opinions differ on whether or not a singer should contact the theater directly for the results of the audition. One agent firmly stated that a singer should never call the theater directly. He said that this annoys the theater personnel and that they will not in many cases be truthful. One agent noted that "theaters are not honest with the singer, but are brutally frank with the agent who sent the singer."³⁵ More than one *Intendant* indicated that a singer can receive the comments on his audition by calling the *Chefdisponent* or the *Künstlerisches Betriebsbüro (KBB)* (Office of Artistic Operations).

³⁵Agent interview. This corroborates what a *GMD* said that *Intendants*, agents, and *GMD* tend to avoid their responsibility of informing singers with regard to serious technical problems which need to be remedied, or when they have little chance of finding an engagement.

Factors Determining Outcome

An *Intendant* stated that decisions on engaging a singer are based on the singer's presenting a strong audition which the entire committee can confirm. Beyond this basic level of talent, additional, more subjective factors enter into the decision.

A beautiful voice was more important to 30 percent of respondents, while 20 percent preferred musicality.³⁶ A considerable number of respondents, 35 percent, chose "other." Over half (53 percent) of those checking "other" indicated that both singing ability and musicianship were important. Supplementary written comments included by those pointing to other factors indicated that *Fach* and personality were important.

Vocal Considerations

Die Stimme (the voice) is mentioned consistently as the single most important prerequisite for securing an engagement. The timbre of the voice must please the listeners, which, in part, is a subjective consideration. A *GMD* said that each listener has an individual vocal concept, an aesthetic based on experience. The timbre

³⁶Comments by two *Intendants* seemed to be contradictory: one preferred a "beautiful voice, because it was easier to teach musicality," while the other maintained that "a beautiful voice would not be beautiful without musicality."

must correspond to this aesthetic and the voice must be suitable for the roles which the singer will be assigned in the *Spielplan* (season's repertory).³⁷

The voice must be technically secure. One measure of technical security repeatedly mentioned was the *Sitz* (literally seat, here placement) of the voice. *Sitz* was defined as a voice that was well-supported, had good ring, and which was clean. Another important consideration was how the voice was *geführt* (led or phrased). Did the singer attempt to sing stylistically, with phrasing and dynamics, or did the approach lack sensitivity, and style? A good *Fundament* (foundation or support) was acknowledged as a sign of a good technique.³⁸ Foundation meant that the voice was supported, providing continuity among registers. All registers of the voice were to be *ausgeglichen* (balanced)--the top of the voice was expected to be connected to the middle and lower registers with no audible gaps. The voice was expected to be flexible and capable of color changes; different characters require different vocal shadings. An *Intendant* said that a singer

³⁷GMD interview.

³⁸The role of Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*) was mentioned by an agent as a role requiring "ein gutes *Fundament*."

should have the courage to momentarily leave his normal timbre to color the voice for dramatic effect.³⁹

Assuming appropriate size and carrying power, quality was mentioned as being the most important consideration.⁴⁰ Theaters continually mentioned that they wanted voices that sounded fresh and that they believed were capable of developing into more beautiful and technically-secure instruments. As one *GMD* stated "*Entscheidend ist das Material*" ("what decides is the material [the raw vocal talent]"). He further mentioned that he would rather engage a singer who had a few technical flaws but whose voice was fresh and healthy, than a singer whose technique and instrument were more developed but whose voice was too *Fest* (stiff, inflexible) and who sounded vocally tired.⁴¹

Musicality

Musicality is an important factor which affects hiring decisions. Dynamics, phrasing, and a good legato are all aspects of what agents and house personnel

³⁹Translations of German terms have been made by the author based upon information gathered from a variety of interviews.

⁴⁰The size of the voice has been discussed in Chapter III under chapter heading Implications of the *Fach* System.

⁴¹*GMD* interview.

consider musicality. The relative importance of legato singing is dependent on the *Fach* of the singer. For instance, the "buffo" *Fächer* require text articulation, personality, and humor, more than a refined legato. A strong sense of rhythm, however, is an essential component of musicality in all voice categories. Highly prized is the singer who is easy to accompany.⁴² One conductor said he could sense in an audition which singers would have difficulty coordinating with the orchestra.⁴³

Appearance

The relative importance of voice and appearance may vary from house to house.⁴⁴ In houses where the conductors have more power, the voice is the most important consideration. In those houses where stage directors have more influence, visual considerations supersede vocal ones.

⁴²The written survey indicated that 65 percent of agents and theater directors consult with the pianist after the audition.

⁴³*GMD* interview.

⁴⁴An agent emphasized that appearance is only an advantage if the voice is right. A theater cannot cast a singer in a role who is vocally unable to manage it, just because he looks the part.

Singers seeking *Fest Engagements* may be required to fit visually with the existing ensemble members.⁴⁵ Some theaters are sensitive to these issues and prefer to hire singers they consider visually more appealing.⁴⁶ Other theaters are more open and flexible on this issue. All theaters do stress, however, that the visual component is important and is becoming more so. One *Intendant* stated that a singer whose appearance is deemed inappropriate for one reason or another must sing so impressively that the attention of the audience is focused on the musical rather than the visual.⁴⁷

Personality and Expression

A beautiful voice alone is, in most houses, no longer sufficient for obtaining an engagement. Interpretation and stage presence are also vitally important for a successful audition. German opera theater is known as *Musiktheater* and, as the name implies, the theatrical element, the drama, is an equally important component. The term *Regietheater* underscores the importance of the

⁴⁵A short tenor may find it difficult to be engaged in a house where the soprano is above-average in height.

⁴⁶It should be remembered that theaters also use their singers for concerts and for advertising appearances.

⁴⁷*Intendant* interview.

stage director. As an *Intendant* stated, "We are directors of opera who come more and more from the *Schauspiel* (spoken drama) tradition."⁴⁸

Theater directors cite Slavic singers as a group who tend to bring an abundance of pathos and emotion to their singing. This is understood as a manifestation of their national character and mentality. This "art of great pathos," as an *Oberspielleiter* called it, is considered too excessive for German opera.⁴⁹ American singers often are perceived to be on the other end of the spectrum. They are acknowledged as possessing superb techniques but are viewed as cold and too rational in their presentations. One *Intendant* compared many American singers to the character of Turandot in the first half of Puccini's opera by the same name. They appear to be concerned only about external elements such as appearance and the sound of their voices.⁵⁰

German theaters are, in the words of one *Intendant*, seeking "a different kind of artist . . . interpretive singers, who give honest performances with a combination

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Information from various interviews.

⁵⁰Ibid.

of pathos and intelligence."⁵¹ Singers must convey to them that they understand the opera, the dramatic situation from which the aria arises, and the character they are portraying.⁵² An *Oberspielleiter* asks himself the question: Is the singer interested in drama and music, or just in singing?⁵³ With so many beautiful voices on the market, theaters engage the singers who have the courage to emotionally invest in their characters and in the music--singers who communicate with honesty and intelligence.

Theaters reiterate that they are interested in personalities with charisma who know how to portray a character and sell it to an audience.⁵⁴ A *GMD* mentioned that the kind of atmosphere the singer creates when he

⁵¹Intendant interview.

⁵²One agent stated that singers who stand securely in the crook of the piano as "*Die Diener an der Kunst*" ("The servants of art") and produce only tone and text, however beautifully, will not capture interest or attention.

⁵³Interview with an *Oberspielleiter*.

⁵⁴An *Intendant* admitted that the question whether a singer can act cannot be determined at an audition. Acting ability would be an unknown at the time of the engagement and would only be discovered during the course of the engagement. One *Intendant* said that he made his assessment of a singer's acting ability at an audition based on the question: "Does he know what he's singing?" He went on to say that "if the singer knows and thinks about what he is singing, then he can present, act, and sell the role."

walks on stage is an indicator. Does he appear tired, or too relaxed? Does he exude confidence causing the *Intendant* and *GMD* to eagerly anticipate the audition? A singer's response to questions asked at the audition will help the theater directors formulate an opinion regarding the personality of the singer.⁵⁵

Singing With An Indisposition

When a singer is indisposed, the general consensus is that he should not audition. Most subjects interviewed indicated that announcing an indisposition at the audition created a negative impression and raised certain questions. One *Intendant* mentioned that his first thought in such situations is inevitably that the singer is not equal to the technical demands of the arias presented. A singer's initial impression is often the most enduring. By auditioning with an indisposition, the singer compromises that first impression.⁵⁶

Theater management can only judge the singer by what they hear at the audition. They formulate their impressions without taking into account whether an illness

⁵⁵Interview with an *Oberspielleiter*.

⁵⁶*Intendant* and other interviews.

affects the quality of the audition. It is possible that the theater will still hear positive qualities in the voice and be interested, but this is a risk for the singer. Even if management is interested, the singer will most likely be asked to reaudition.

The singer may feel compelled to audition in spite of a mild indisposition; it may not be possible to schedule another audition, or great expense may have been incurred in reaching the audition site. It still may be possible for the singer to deliver a strong audition. However he must exercise good judgment in deciding whether singing could cause permanent damage to the vocal folds. Competent physicians who specialize in the treatment of singers are available in nearly every city where an opera house is located.

Other Considerations

Auditions, both for agents and theaters, are generally held in the afternoons. Rest and relaxation are important in preparing a successful audition. The singer must strive to remain relaxed during the entire audition process in spite of the unfriendly and stressful atmosphere which often prevails. It is recommended that singers travel to the audition city the day before they are scheduled to sing, unless the audition is to be held

nearby, in order to become acquainted with the city and the route to the agent or theater. The singer should attempt to learn in advance something of the acoustics in the house or room where the audition will be held.⁵⁷

It is helpful to rehearse or, at the least, consult with the accompanist about the tempi of the audition arias before the audition.⁵⁸ In the event that an accompanist plays the audition aria at an uncomfortable tempo, an agent suggests that the singer interrupt the audition and correct the tempo. If done in a professional manner, stopping, correcting the problem, and restarting the aria does not create a negative impression, but rather reflects a certain poise and confidence.⁵⁹

Over half of all respondents (53 percent) stated that singers should not stage arias. An additional 33 percent indicated that moderate amount of movement would be permitted, especially if the singer was auditioning for operetta and/or for musicals. How much to move during an audition is a subjective area which is dependent on the

⁵⁷Agents can inform singers about the acoustics of the various theaters.

⁵⁸A singer may want to consider bringing his own accompanist to the audition. Of those surveyed, 84 percent indicated that they would have no objection. The 14 percent of respondents objecting were all smaller theaters.

⁵⁹Agent interview.

tastes of the listeners; however, excessive movement will be perceived as distracting by most listeners.⁶⁰

Some subjects indicated that the dialogue during the audition was extremely important, while others stated that it was of limited or no importance. The simple act of announcing one's name and first audition aria often creates an immediate impression. Is his speaking voice projecting over the footlights? Will the singing voice carry as well? *Intendants* will often hold a brief discussion with the singer before a contract offer is made to determine if the personality of the singer will blend into the existing ensemble of singers. How a singer expresses himself is almost as important as what he says.⁶¹

Theater administrators and agents acknowledge that nervousness and stress can have an affect on how the singer presents himself. They agree that the audition experience, as a whole, is often cold and impersonal; those hearing auditions would welcome a new, less stressful system for auditioning singers.⁶²

⁶⁰*Intendant* interviews.

Intendants recommended that singers not stage arias, but interpret them.

⁶¹*Intendant* interviews.

⁶²Various interviews.

Caution should be exercised if the singer desires to record his audition. Only 37 percent of the theaters indicated they would permit this. A significant number of respondents (47 percent) stated they could not allow this, citing potential legal problems.

Final Remarks

American singers are viewed as competent, professional, and well-prepared. They tend to audition in a polished manner presenting each aria with utmost ease and technical refinement. What is repeatedly mentioned as lacking in American singers is the inner expression, an emotional commitment to the music. This is vitally important to German agents and theaters.⁶³ A successful audition is not just one in which all notes, words, and rhythms are correct, but one in which the music is brought to life through personal expression and characterization. The singer must engage his listeners. With so many competent singers available, it is necessary for a singer to move beyond technical proficiency in order to compete successfully.

⁶³Information gathered through multiple interviews.

CHAPTER VII

AGENTS

Function in the System

"*Mann kann ohne Agenturen nicht leben als Intendant*" (An *Intendant* cannot live without agents).¹ This quote underscores the importance of agents as an indispensable part of the German theater system. Just over three-fourths of the responses from theater personnel (79 percent) indicated that most singers are referred to them through agents.

Agents describe their basic functions as follows: (1) *Vorauswahl* (preselection)--screening the hundreds of singers who come to audition each year; (2) *Vermittler* (Agent)--sending qualified singers to houses where vacancies exist; and (3) *Berater und Manage Büro* (adviser and managing office)--advising singers and managing their careers.

An agent saves the theater time by sending only those singers judged qualified. *Intendanten*, *GMD*, and *Oberspielleiter* repeatedly remark that they have neither the time to travel to other theaters and hear singers, nor

¹*Intendant* interview.

to sit in their own theaters each week and listen to numerous auditions.² Theaters rely on an agent's expertise, ears, knowledge, and experience.³ A good agent is familiar with most singers in the system, either from having heard them in audition or performance.⁴ The written survey indicated that 71 percent of theaters considered an agent's opinion of a singer "moderately important." An additional 17 percent considered an agent's opinion "important." One additional comment indicated that in a case where a position needed to be filled quickly, the importance of an agent's opinion increased. However, for building an ensemble, the opinions of agents were not as vital.

The second function of agents is analogous to that of an attorney who represents two parties, the *Arbeitgeber*

²Various interviews with theater personnel and agents.

³Of the total theater respondents, 60 percent indicated that the opinions of agents were an important consideration in granting auditions, while 83 percent of the agents surveyed indicated they could influence a theater to grant a singer an audition.

⁴One agent stated that he attempts to visit every theater twice per season to keep current on the active performers. Of the agents surveyed, 83 percent indicated they, or a representative, would attend a performance at the invitation of a singer.

(employer) and the *Arbeitnehmer* (employee). Agents know where the vacancies are in the system and also what singers may be qualified to fill them. *Intendanten* remark that, because agencies vary in their quality and judgments of voices, they will often turn to more than one agency when they are looking for a singer. Among theater directors surveyed, 52 percent indicated that certain agencies consistently send them better singers.

An agent's reputation and livelihood are dependent upon the quality of talent he sends to house auditions. When an agent consistently sends excellent singers to a theater, an exclusive relationship begins to develop. A theater begins to trust and rely on that agency to furnish it with the talent it requires. Consequently, some agencies have more influence in certain theaters than others. In the written survey 83 percent of agents indicated theaters work exclusively with certain agencies.⁵ A singer sent by the "right" agency may have a better chance of securing an engagement than a singer from another agency.

⁵Interestingly, only 45 percent of theaters responded that they work exclusively with certain agents.

The agent sets up the audition appointment directly with the house.⁶ He advises the house about the singer he has auditioned with comments on appearance, voice and potential roles.⁷ Every agent answered affirmatively to the survey question "Do you discuss the singer with the house either before or after the audition?" Agents responded that they communicate their impressions of the singers, and their opinions and beliefs regarding a given singer's qualifications for the vacancy in question.⁸

After the audition, some agents indicated that they will call the theater to inquire about the audition. They attempt to learn what impressions were made by the singer(s). However, not all agents follow up on the auditions. Some admitted that they have difficulty obtaining accurate information, particularly when large

⁶Agents have been known to send singers to theaters when their *Fächer* have not been needed simply to "present" them to the house. An *Intendant* stated that the so-called *Informatives Vorsingen* (information audition) is a rare occurrence. He said that houses are generally looking for something specific, even if it is for a work being considered years in the future. A singer should be aware of this when auditioning. Theaters hear too many singers to remember them all equally well. The singer runs the risk of being forgotten. A singer may want to call the theater (*KBB* or the *Chefdisponent*) before the audition to verify the *Fach* and roles in question.

⁷Agent interview.

⁸*Ibid.*

numbers of singers have auditioned. Agents consistently remarked, however, that an unfavorable report following a house audition would not affect them and that they would continue to secure other house auditions for the singer.⁹

In addition to screening singers and arranging auditions, agents are also advisers and career managers. One *Intendant* remarked that an agent is the first barometer of a singer's talent.¹⁰ Another agent stated that it was his job to (1) determine the direction of the voice (i.e., *Fach*, repertory, technique, etc.); (2) decide if the singer had the ability to find an engagement; and (3) determine if vacancies existed for the singer.¹¹

Agents maintain that the atmosphere in a house is important. Some houses are prone to exploit their singers, to overwork or neglect them, while others have a reputation for nurturing their young and inexperienced talent. One agent stated that, in the interest of the singer, an agency should be financially in a position that

⁹Agent interviews.

Agents mentioned that singers occasionally did not present the arias that had been agreed upon at the agent audition. If an agent sends a singer to a house audition and requests that he offer certain arias from his repertory, then the agent does so with good reason. The relationship to the agent is valuable and too important to jeopardize.

¹⁰Intendant interview.

¹¹Agent interview.

it does not need to place a singer in what may be the wrong house, merely to earn a commission.¹²

Some, certainly not all, agents confessed they feel a moral obligation to honestly inform a singer when a singer has no chance of securing an engagement. Most agents interviewed indicated that, although they consider it an unpleasant and uncomfortable task, they will advise singers to stop auditioning, change teachers if deemed advisable, and return at a later date. Other agents intentionally do not inform singers of their professional opinions, preferring the oft-used phrase "You will be hearing from us," or something similar. The hope is that when the singer does not hear anything after a few weeks, or months, he will realize the agency was not interested.¹³

A singer needs a good agent for the following reasons: (1) they are critical to finding an engagement in that they know where the vacancies are; (2) they can offer advice on repertory or the character of individual theaters, and they have contacts with other professionals

¹²Ibid.

¹³Agent interviews.

in the field;¹⁴ and (3) they can manage and build a singer's career, secure engagements and offer tips on travel, hotels, etc.¹⁵

Theater personnel have commented that agencies vary in their overall quality and profile. One agency admitted that it was not interested in managing the careers of beginning singers. The agency said that a lot of work was involved in starting a career and that it preferred to handle established artists who could command large fees. Another agency said that it was especially interested in guiding and developing the careers of younger, unestablished singers.¹⁶ An *Intendant* suggested that singers should discuss the various agents among themselves and determine which agencies are committed to

¹⁴Agent interviews.

German agents work with American agents and vice versa. Of the survey responses, 83 percent answered that they had contacts with American agencies in New York and that they periodically visited these agencies, as well as American schools and universities.

¹⁵Agent interviews.

German agents have access to theaters in other European countries. However, in order for a German agent to send a singer to a house in Austria or Switzerland, he must contact and work through an agent in the respective country. This same situation exists in reverse for a non-German agent trying to place a singer in a German house.

¹⁶Agent interviews.

building the careers of young singers.¹⁷ Theater personnel have frequently mentioned that a singer should not be afraid to sing for all the agencies until he finds one he feels will work for him.

Initial Contacts, Presentation,
and Working Relationships

Agents request that singers make their initial contacts in written form at least three months in advance. Of the agents who responded to the survey, 81 percent indicated that a written request for an audition could be in English.¹⁸ A short cover letter requesting an audition appointment is regarded as sufficient. It is asked that the singer include a brief resume, a repertory list, a current photo, and, if possible, a cassette tape. The tape, which must be professionally recorded, will give the agent an impression of the singer's voice.¹⁹

¹⁷*Intendant* interviews.

¹⁸One agent responded that he would prefer to receive an audition request in English rather than one in bad German. Although the American singer may request an audition appointment in English, he should realize that this does not create a positive impression with an agent and that the agent will expect that the singer speak German at the audition. All agents agreed that language deficiency diminished a singer's chances, stressing that language ability was more important for small and medium-sized houses.

¹⁹Agent interviews.

Agents recommend that appointments to audition be finalized before the singer arrives Germany.²⁰ Singers who call and expect an audition appointment in three days are considered at best naive if not unprofessional. Agents strongly urge singers not to call their office, unless they have been requested to do so. Two-thirds of agent responses, however, indicated that they desired the singer to call and confirm his audition appointment either on the day of the audition or earlier. Another two-thirds of agents surveyed indicated they issue to singers individual audition times, while the other third indicated auditions were held on a "first come, first served" basis.²¹

Appearance and attitude are factors described as affecting an agent's overall impression. It is recommended that singers avoid extremes in their audition apparel. Men are not required to wear a suit and tie, but neither should they appear in jeans and tennis shoes. They should find a comfortable but well-groomed look. Agents say that women tend to be better dressers than men. Women are advised to avoid pants, unless they are singing

²⁰German theaters are being flooded with American singers. In the written survey, 50 percent of the agents stated that they hear between 250-500 singers per year, 33 percent indicated between 500-1000, and another 17 percent between 100-250 singers annually.

²¹Agent interviews.

in the mezzo-soprano *Fach* where "trouser" roles are common. Singers who are overweight are advised to select apparel which is flattering to their appearance.²²

The singer must plan to remain in Germany long enough to allow the agents time to arrange auditions.²³ Agent recommendations regarding lengths of stay range from four weeks to three months. It is important that the singer provide a permanent address, where he can be notified with information on vacancies and upcoming auditions.²⁴

American singers are especially guilty of persistence in calling and inquiring about auditions. This is a source of irritation to agents and their staffs. They maintain that if they have indicated they will call the singer when a job opportunity presents itself, then that is what they will do. It is not necessary for singers to continually call their offices. This persistence can

²²Ibid.

²³Agents say that receiving an audition date from a theater is no problem. However, if both the *Intendant* and the *Generalmusikdirektor* (*GMD*) are not present, then they maintain that the audition is pointless--in most houses, both of these individuals must be present for a singer to be engaged.

²⁴Agent interviews.

Agents prefer notifying singers when they have something, rather than singers constantly calling their offices.

backfire and lead to the refusal of an agent to continue working for the singer.²⁵

The working relationship between a singer and an agent in the formative years of a singer's career is rarely exclusive. Agents complain that singers often want to move too quickly to bigger theaters thereby earning larger fees often before they are ready. In addition, singers are viewed by agents as casually switching allegiance the moment another agency seems to be doing more to advance their careers. Agents lament what they consider a lack of loyalty and trust. They cite the fact that most renowned singers are represented by a single agency. Although agents discourage singers from registering and working with multiple agencies, they understand that singers, at the beginning of their careers, will work with more than one agent. Singers must take the initiative and investigate all possibilities necessary to further their own careers.²⁶

Contracts

Before discussing specific types of contracts, it should be mentioned that all German agencies are permitted

²⁵Agent interviews.

²⁶Agent interviews.

to work throughout the entire country. The results of the written surveys indicate that some agents have more influence in certain areas of the country and in certain theaters than others.²⁷ Theaters are not required to use agents²⁸ and not every contract needs to be handled through an agent. Some engagements are handled exclusively between the singer and the theater, in which case no agent fee is required. If an agent has been involved in the engagement of the singer, then the singer is legally required to pay the agent his commission. One agency, the ZBF, which is the government-sponsored agency, does not require a commission. Other agencies normally receive a seven percent commission on contracts for permanent engagements. The theater pays one-half of this commission, making the singer's obligation three and one half percent of the monthly salary for the term of the contract.

When a singer is under management, all engagements must be made through the agent, including offers from outside Germany. Either a single agency handles the

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Of agents surveyed, 83 percent indicated that singers finding engagements in the former East were not required to use those agencies.

engagement in its entirety or, when a second agency is involved, the commission is divided.²⁹

Most singers are engaged with permanent contracts known as *Festverträge*. The length of a *Festvertrag*, also known as a *Jahresvertrag* (contract of years) or a *Normalvertragsolo* (*NVS*) (normal solo contract), may vary in duration. The singer is paid by the month and receives the same monthly salary, regardless of the number of roles or performances he sings during the month.

Beginning singers receive a special type of *Fest* contract known as an *Anfängervertrag* (beginner's contract). The usual length of this contract is two years, but it can be, under special circumstances, shorter. A beginner contract is not required to be a *Fachvertrag*, a contract specifying *Fach*. An *Intendant* is entirely within his rights to offer the beginning singer a contract that contains only the voice type, i.e., soprano, baritone, tenor, etc. It is presumed that the singer is young and, vocally, still developing. A *Fach* designation at this early stage is viewed by theaters as premature.³⁰ With the beginning of his third season, the singer has the right to request a *Fachvertrag*.

²⁹Agent interview.

³⁰Ibid.

A *Fest* contract means the singer is *Fest* (held, permanent) to one house for the duration of the contract. The number of assigned roles will vary depending on the season's repertory. In a *Festvertrag*, a singer can technically be asked to sing any roles belonging to the *Fach* designation in his contract. This is a disadvantage of a *Festvertrag*.

The repertory implications of the *Fach* System make it mandatory that a singer, especially a beginning singer, know what roles are included in his *Fach* before he signs his contract. Contracts in larger houses generally include specific roles. However, in smaller houses contracts with role assignments are the exception. Singers should avoid signing contracts which specify only voice type. A theater can then expect a singer to perform roles from the entire gamut of *Fächer* within his voice type. Such a situation is potentially dangerous to a singer's vocal health and development.³¹

Agents and theater directors recommend that singers attempt to secure *Fest* contracts which contain specific roles. If this is not possible (i.e., the theater is not sure of its repertory, or, for whatever reason, refuses to include specific roles in the contract), then the singer

³¹Ibid.

should ask that a supplementary clause be included in the contract, attached either to the voice type or the *Fach* designation. Such a clause might require that all role assignments be discussed and approved by the singer in advance. Another option would be to ask for a contract listing the roles which the singer would not be expected to sing.³²

Other musical activity, concerts and guesting in other theaters, is possible with a *Festvertrag*, but only when all requirements of the home theater have been satisfied. It is possible that sudden and unexpected changes in the home theater's scheduling may nullify extra performance opportunities for its *Fest* singers. This strong obligation to one theater is viewed as another disadvantage of a *Festvertrag*.

Because of the disadvantages of *Festverträge* already cited, singers (not usually beginners) often seek a different contract known as a *Stuckverträge* (contracts for a single role) or *Gastverträge* (guest contracts). The *Stuck-* or *Gastvertrag* is only for a single role in a single production. The length of the production, i.e., rehearsal period and performance dates, will be included in the contract. The singer is paid a per diem during the

³²Agent interviews.

rehearsal period and a negotiated fee for each performance. Unlike the *Festverträge*, the singer does not have the security of a guaranteed monthly income, nor does he receive other benefits of a *Festvertrag* such as vacation and Christmas bonuses. *Stuckverträge*, however, allow a singer to work on roles in different theaters in the proper *Fach*. One is able to build a repertory in a particular voice category, and success in individual roles will often lead to engagements in other theaters.

The financial plight of theaters has given rise to a new contract known as the *Teilspielzeitvertrag* (the partial-season contract). Such a contract is a way for theaters, who cannot afford *Gastverträge* to economize. It unfolds as follows: the theater offers the singer a *Teilspielzeitvertrag* for, perhaps, four or six months, which is paid monthly. Because the contract is not a normal *Festvertrag* and does not run for a full year, the theater saves money on unemployment insurance and on vacation benefits. The singer is essentially bound to the theater exactly as he would be with a normal *Festvertrag* and can theoretically be asked to do several roles. The short duration of the contract does not make moving one's domicile practical; thus the singer must provide for a second residence. One agent noted,

"*Teilspielzeitverträge* are advantageous for theaters, but to be avoided by singers."³³

When negotiating or renegotiating a contract, it is important that a singer ask that the *Gleitklausel* (the escalator, or cost of living clause) be included in the contract. Each year the union known as the *Öffentliche Dienst, Transport, und Verkehr (ÖTV)* (Public Service, Transportation, and Commerce), which represents all public employees, arbitrates a cost of living raise with the federal government which is, in most cases, automatically incorporated. However, if the singer has renegotiated a contract, the *Gleitklausel* must be requested in order to be included in the renegotiated contract; otherwise the cost of living increase will not be reflected over and above the new salary.³⁴

An *Arbeitserlaubnis* or a work permit and a valid *Aufenthaltserlaubnis* or residency permit, are both required for all foreigners to work in a German theater. These permits are obtained after the singer receives a contract offer. The only time a singer may work in a

³³Ibid.

³⁴If, for example, the singer's renegotiated contract does not include the *Gleitklausel* and the union bargains for a three percent cost of living increase, all public employees will receive a three percent salary increase and the singer's renegotiated contract will, in real terms, be three percent less.

theater without a valid *Arbeits-* and *Aufenthaltserlaubnis* is in an emergency situation, perhaps occasioned by the sudden indisposition of a singer requiring a guest to be hired on short notice. Even in this case, the proper permits must be applied for retroactively. All employment without proper governmental knowledge and permission is illegal and subject to prosecution.

Moving Up in the System

The decision to move up in the system or to stay at a theater is an individual one and not subject to any rules. Agents recommend that beginning singers remain in their first house at least two years through the duration of their *Anfängervertrag*. For singers wanting to move to a larger house, remaining as many as four or five years at a smaller house is not viewed negatively. On the contrary, this demonstrates to a larger house that the singer was not simply interested in moving, but took time to develop vocally and to accumulate repertory before undertaking a move. If, however, a singer remains six or more years in a small or middle-sized theater, it may work to a singer's disadvantage. Agents may question why the singer's career has not progressed to the next level. Some singers who conclude that they have reached their full vocal development and potential choose to remain where they are.

One agent advised singers to decide between the ages of thirty-five and forty what their potential is for upward mobility.³⁵

If a singer plans to move up in the system, it is important that he acquire the proper repertory. Appropriate repertory increases the chances for vocal development and health, thus increasing the marketability of the singer. One cannot overlook the value of establishing a constructive working relationship with an agent in facilitating the transition to a larger house.

Concluding Remarks

All agents indicated that a singer may reaudition if his audition was judged unsuccessful. Agents' estimates of how soon the singer should return and reaudition varied from fourteen days to one year. The factors which caused the audition to be unsuccessful determine the amount of elapsed time required before reauditioning. If the singer truly believed that the audition was not representative of his general level of singing, he might be permitted to return in a matter of weeks. However, if, in the opinion of the agent, the unsuccessful audition was attributable to a technique that needed improvement, then a longer

³⁵Agent interviews.

period will be required before reauditioning. Agents comment that it is not unusual for singers to reaudition several times before being judged ready to be sent to a theater.³⁶

Singers are often guilty of overestimating the power and influence of agents. The responsibility for building a successful career lies with the individual. When the singer can demonstrate that he has progressed, the agent will be there to assist in career advancement. An agent cannot, however, take a singer with a mediocre level of talent and build a major career.³⁷

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Impact of Reunification

One *GMD* predicted that the integration of countrymen separated for more than forty years would take as much as a generation to complete, considering the existence of basic communication problems. He further stated that those who lived under the socialist system as practiced in the former East Germany would never forget it; it would always be a part of their lives in spite of Reunification. In his opinion, it would be left to the younger generation to complete the healing process.

It is uncertain how many years will be needed for the theaters in the former East to achieve the same standard of quality as those in the West; estimates range from two to eight years. Many theaters may be forced to close. The population and the money generated from the tax base may not be sufficient to support such a large number of theaters. Other theaters may have to reduce their *Sparten* (number of performance areas).¹ Instead of forty-two

¹Many theaters in Germany are known as *Drei Sparten Theaters*. The three *Sparten* (performance areas) are the drama, ballet, and opera. Not all theaters are *Drei Sparten Theaters* (some houses only produce plays), but

Drei Sparten Theater, it is being predicted that only the larger cities in the former East will be able to afford opera. If only a limited number of theaters in the East are able to produce opera, then the job market for operatic soloists will not expand to the degree currently anticipated.²

With the fall of the communist system, singers in the former Eastern Bloc countries are now able to compete for vacancies in all theaters within Germany thereby increasing the competition. Many of these singers, however, lack the finances necessary to audition. Agents have remarked that the singers who audition from these lands often tend to have large, natural voices with a penetrating quality, revealing a tonal aesthetic that differs from the West. Agents believe, however, that these singers will quickly adapt and learn what is required to become more competitive throughout Germany.³

American singers are continuing to compete for these vacancies. Although it may presently be easier for an

theaters producing opera generally are.

²An *Oberspielleiter* stated that the theaters that survive in the former East will be those in areas that experience social and economic growth. The growth and prosperity of a region has a direct impact on the cultural community and ultimately on opera and the market for singers.

³Agent interview.

American singer to find his first engagement in a theater in the former East, the standards of quality are expected to improve rapidly and eventually equal those found in the theaters of the former West.

The American singer who is offered an engagement in a house in the former East should take into consideration a few important financial and social realities. Salary demands are a decisive factor in the hiring decisions of all houses, especially in the East. The pay scale in these theaters is lower than in the theaters of equivalent size in the former West with a few exceptions. "theaters in the East can afford to pay soloists only about 60 percent of what they still earn in the West."⁴ (Certain middle-sized houses, as well as the largest houses, the Staatsoper Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden already offer correspondingly equal pay.)⁵ The Federal government seeks to remedy this situation and equalize the pay scales between theaters in the former West and East as soon as is fiscally possible. It is expected that this will be accomplished by the end of the century pending the outcome of decisions on the restructuring of the theater system. The American singer must decide if he

⁴Midgette, "Reunification Blues" (Part I), 14.

⁵Agent interview.

is willing to work at a lower wage in productions of lesser quality until parity is reached.

Impact of Nationalism

The interviews and written survey verify that people involved in theater believe they possess an international perspective. They insist that foreign singers are judged by the same criteria as German singers. The large number of foreign singers in the system substantiates this.⁶ However, one *GMD* stated that

A new generation in theater management exists who, although not in the least nationalistic or racist, is naturally excited and happy to see a German singer at an audition who is even close to the quality of his American colleague. When this German singer, although perhaps not as good as the American, approaches the standard of the American, then the tendency is to engage the German rather than still another American.⁷

If a German singer has an advantage over a non-German speaking singer, it is increased in roles which contain dialogue. The "buffo" and lighter *Fächer* contain roles which have an abundance of text and/or dialogue. *Singspiels*, operettas and musicals are generally cast with

⁶Information on the number of foreign singers in the system can be obtained from the *Deutscher Bühnen Verein* or the *Bundesanstalt für Arbeit* in Nuremberg.

⁷*GMD* interview.

singers from these *Fächer*. In such cases, as one agent noted, an *Intendant* will always prefer to hire a German whenever possible, because of the accent-free singing and speaking of the native-born performer. There are American singers who can never achieve an authentic accent and that compromises the quality of the production.⁸

The ability of the young German singers in the last ten years has shown considerable improvement, an opinion expressed by practically every individual interviewed for this study. Many of the *Musikhochschulen* are receiving information from the theaters about the areas of their curricula that need improvement. Although American singers still display a superior level of training and experience at the beginner level, the competition from native Germans and German-speaking singers is increasing.

Impact of Training and Background

In spite of the improvement in native singers, a significant number of American singers continue to find engagements in German theaters. The written survey results indicate that 51 percent of theater personnel believe that American singers represent between 10-25 percent of all singers. An additional 21 percent

⁸Agent interview.

indicated between 25-50 percent. This rate of success can be attributed to a comparatively superior level of training, experience, and preparation.

Intendanten, Generalmusikdirektoren, agents, and Oberspielleiter concur that American singers bring a superior level of training and preparation to auditions and to engagements. An *Intendant*, who has experience with American music schools, described the training of American singers as "broad, deep, and more practical, highlighting the different aspects of the profession." He further mentioned that the facilities at many of the schools and conservatories were superior to those that exist in Germany. Other positive aspects cited by *Intendanten* included greater skill in the Italian language, greater fencing skills and better movement on the stage.

Experience was another factor cited as a significant advantage for Americans. One agent said that if two singers were compared, one German and the other American, both twenty-six years old, the American would be two years ahead of the German in repertory and experience.

Often the word "professional" was used when describing American singers. The attributes inherent in the word "professional" included the following: punctuality, discipline, preparation, the ability to

follow a conductor without detracting from the drama, and a strong sense of rhythm. Other qualities mentioned included openness and ambition. Americans have a reputation for being quick learners who enjoy performing and have good attitudes.⁹ As one *Intendant* stated, "they (American singers) see the traditional German opera system as a huge plus."¹⁰

It is interesting to note that among all of the positive qualities attributed by German agents and theater directors to American singers, only one agent mentioned the voice itself and how it compares with singers of other nationalities. This respondent commented that the overall vocal quality of American singers has declined in the last ten to fifteen years. He offered two possible theories for this: (1) More opportunities now exist for the good, young American singers at home, including regional theaters, touring companies, and apprentice programs; and (2) Many of the emigrated Jewish voice teachers who trained American singers in the Bel Canto technique had died.¹¹

⁹One *GMD* mentioned American singers as having a "false professionalism" in that they learn something quickly, solidly, and retain it, but it is then set, inflexible, and can't be easily changed.

¹⁰Agent and *Intendant* interviews.

¹¹Agent interview.