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MUSIC

Michael Hurshell: 'Completely normal, wonderful music'

Music lost, its composers once banned: On tour in Israel, the New Jewish Chamber Philharmonic Dresden is bringing forgotten music to the light of day. Its founder and conductor Michael Hurshell tells DW why.



During the 12-year Nazi dictatorship, Jewish musicians and composers lost their jobs, were driven into exile or murdered in concentration camps. In the aftermath, many such composers and their works fell into obscurity. The New Jewish Chamber Philharmonic Dresden's agenda is to change that. Its repertory includes works by over two dozen forgotten or once-banned composers.

DW: Mr. Hurshell, how has your concert tour in Israel been?

Michael Hurshell: It's wonderful to be here. Nazi cultural policy led to this music being forgotten all over the world, even in Israel. It's very important for audiences to hear it again and to experience how wonderful and important it is.

What's special about this repertory?

The Nazis prohibited performances of a number of works. Seeking to murder the composers, they didn't want anyone to remember that this music once existed. Some composers died in the Holocaust. Others were forced to emigrate, their lives and careers destroyed. In consequence, much wonderful music has simply been forgotten, including works on our programs.

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Author Tania Kraemer / rf

Related Subjects [World War Two](#), [Nazis](#), [Holocaust](#)

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SPECIAL



Pop hits that conquered the globe

This analysis of the German pop scene's success abroad is unprecedented in scope.

VIDEO



RADAR

Each week our Arts.21 reporters scour Germany's cultural scene and present you with a selection of their best finds.

RADAR: Hanne Darboven

Nowadays, once-banned music is being revived on various stages throughout the world, works that haven't been heard for 30, 40 or 50 years. On tour, we're playing Miklos Rozsa's "Andante." We even gave its world premiere in Dresden in 2008.



In concert at the Jerusalem Music Centre

Where do you find lost or forgotten musical works?

Some things - including several compositions by Erich Wolfgang Korngold - are collecting dust in publishers' archives. Others I've discovered through networking. Friends in my home country, the US, have introduced me to composers' families. Some own scores that are not to be found anywhere else.

That's one source. Another is conductors in America who've at some point performed the repertory there. And of course I file through the archives of the publishing houses. Some of them don't know that these composers have a Jewish background. I'm amazed sometimes to discover how famous they once were, in the 1920's for instance. There are many broken threads in their life histories. You have to keep searching patiently.

How did the New Jewish Philharmonic come about?

In 2004 I led the Bratislava State Philharmonic at a concert in Saxony. To draw an audience, we were supposed to do something light, yet high-quality. So I opted for concert suites with film music from the 30s and 40s written by refugees from Europe. These composers are on our program today.

In the US, old films are always being shown on TV, and everybody knows the name Erich Wolfgang Korngold. With his renomee, he got his name onscreen, in big letters. None of the other composers had that status. But not even Korngold is all that well known in Germany, especially not in the states that comprise former East Germany. I thought: These composers studied in Leipzig, Berlin and Vienna - but why doesn't anyone know them here?

I felt a need to do something about it, thought it over for three years and then decided to found the Chamber Phillharmonic in cooperation with the New Synagogue in Dresden as our home base so that audiences would know that our concerts have a somewhat different content.

What do you hope to achieve with your work?

A couple of years ago I saw one of "our" pieces on the playbill of a different chamber orchestra in Dresden. I was very gratified, because that's precisely what I wish to achieve.

FILM



Hunger Games and the best fantasy films of the century

Hunger Games is back in cinemas this week with "Mockingjay - Part 2." The fantasy adventure series follows in the footsteps of a century of imaginative film backdrops. Here are our favorites.

BOOKS



Salman Rushdie: 'Continue to be Parisians'

Is the victory of evil inevitable? Talking to DW, British-Indian author Salman Rushdie explains how his new novel became contemporary by accident and why defending free speech is more important now than ever.

MUSIC



PopXport – The German Pop Magazine

Nicholas Müller left the band Jupiter Jones gripped by anxiety attacks. With the help of therapy, he's back on the scene with duo band Von Brücken. We also meet reggae star Patrice and the Wacken Metal Battle winners.

ARTS



The group frequently performs in synagogues

Every orchestra in Germany should come to perceive this music as completely normal and not just schedule it for concerts on historic anniversaries because someone has guilty

feelings and thinks it will look good politically. One should play it out of conviction.

That will certainly take a few years, and whether I live to see the day is an open question. But our musicians spread the word. When they play for other conductors and concert organizers, they might say: "Look, we could play this kind of piece too!"

DW RECOMMENDS

Dresden orchestra plays 'Degenerate Music' in Israel

A wide range of art and music, notably works by Jewish composers, was banned in Germany and occupied countries during the Nazi era. The New Jewish Chamber Philharmonic Dresden is taking some of it on tour to Israel. (11.11.2015)

Die Toten Hosen perform 'degenerate music'

Two years ago Die Toten Hosen teamed up with Dusseldorf's Robert Schumann School of Music to perform music that the Nazis had stigmatized as "degenerate." Now the concert recordings are being released as an album. (03.11.2015)

With symphonic music, punk band Die Toten Hosen honors works banned by Nazis

In a mixture of chaos and discipline, a new album by German punk rockers Die Toten Hosen showcases works once suppressed by the Nazis, so-called "degenerate music." (30.10.2015)

Conspiracies swirl in 1939 Nazi art burning

On the 75th anniversary of the alleged art burning, it's still unclear whether 5,000 works of 'degenerate art' fell victim to Nazi destruction in 1939. But a fake burning, say art historians, is highly unlikely. (20.03.2014)

Punk rock meets 12-tone music

Germany's most famous punk band 'Die Toten Hosen' joined forces with the symphony orchestra of Düsseldorf's Robert Schumann School of Music and Media to speak out against xenophobia and racism. (01.11.2013)

The Nazis' take on 'Degenerate Music'

An exhibition opened May 24, 1938, in Düsseldorf titled 'Degenerate Music' that aimed to galvanize public hatred of music deemed 'un-German' by the Nazis. A current exhibition now reviews what the original showcased. (24.05.2013)

Exhibition highlights works of German composers in Nazi era

Germany is marking the 200th birthday of composer Felix Mendelssohn, an important figure in the revival of the music of Bach, with a first ever exhibition focusing on how the Nazis treated the two artists. (18.05.2009)

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Why Hitler stole paintings - and hid in one

Hitler hated non-traditional art so much that he confiscated thousands of works. Artists were shamed, modern pieces burned or sold for cash. A Berlin exhibition examines what Hitler did to art and why it matters.

DIGITAL CULTURE



Anonymous hacktivists say they've taken down IS Twitter accounts

The international hacking network Anonymous has "declared war" on the "Islamic State" following Friday's fatal attacks in Paris. Now the movement reports that more than 5,500 Twitter accounts of ISIS are down.

LIFESTYLE



Strudel vs. steak: German bakers take South Texas

Urban cowboys in Texas are switching their staple of steak and beans for strudel. Sertan Sanderson finds out how a German couple managed to adapt both their recipes and their identities to the American sweet tooth.