

Munich Philharmonic's first violinist sacked by city's SPD-Green council for being "too close to Russia"

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Lorenz Nasturica-Herschcowici, first violin with the Munich Philharmonic symphony orchestra for 30 years, was sacked last week following claims he was "too close to Russia."

Born in Romania, the musician's great talent was recognised in 1992 by the Philharmonic's principal conductor at that time, the world-renowned Sergiu Celibidache, and he was named the orchestra's concertmaster. In particular, Nasturica-Herschcowici supremely displayed the clarity and beauty of sound so characteristic of Celibidache's performances of works by composer Anton Bruckner.

Quite rightly, Nasturica-Herschcowici has been celebrated as the "devil's violinist" (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 5, 2010), in reference to the early 19th century Genoese violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini. An example can be found [here](#).

In May, Florian Roth (Green Party), a member of Munich's Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party city council, accused the Romanian violinist of being "part of [Russian president Vladimir] Putin's propaganda machinery," based on the fact that, in addition to his work for the Munich Philharmonic, Nasturica-Herschcowici had performed with the Mariinsky Orchestra conducted by Valery Gergiev.

Munich SPD cultural spokesperson Julia Schöpfung-Knor, a member of the Philharmonic Council, declared that although Nasturica-Herschcowici was legally entitled to play with the Russian-based orchestra, his collaboration should "be rejected for ethical reasons." Gergiev had already been dismissed as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic at the beginning of March.

This latest act of discrimination recalls the darkest period in German history. More than 80 years ago, not only were the careers of Jewish artists destroyed—the livelihoods of their friends or spouses were also ruined if they failed to denounce their friends and relatives. Now a Romanian with a Jewish name (Herschcowici) is being blamed for not

distancing himself from a Russian conductor.

The media in Germany is complicit in this campaign against the violinist, pouring more oil onto the fire of anti-Russian agitation. The concertmaster had commenced "a lucrative side job" by going on tour with Gergiev, declared Bayrische Rundfunk (BR). One is aware of Gergiev's "wealth and lavish fees," BR grumbled. "In the meantime," he allows himself to be "celebrated by Russian audiences."

As if an outstanding musician or conductor should not be celebrated by the audience able to listen to him or her!

The dismissals and cancellations of performances by Russian musicians since the beginning of the Ukraine war in Germany and other countries, including those of Gergiev, Nasturica-Herschcowici and famed singer Anna Netrebko among others, represent an arrogant blow to the right of the public to enjoy the artistic mastery of such personalities.

Gergiev's "offence" was certainly not his "lavish" fees, which are commonplace for prominent conductors and leading musicians, regardless of their political orientation or nationality. He was dismissed because he failed to bow down to an ultimatum by the SPD mayor of Munich, Dieter Reiter, that he unequivocally condemn Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

In the upper echelons of the German educated middle class in politics, cultural institutions and editorial offices, a wealthy layer has emerged completely oblivious to the lessons of history. Seventy-seven years after the end of the Nazi terror, they snoop around to find out artists' political convictions, as if Hitler's vicious purges of outstanding artists and their works—Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian—never took place.

However, opposition is also developing against the anti-Russian hysteria in the realm of culture. This year's Salzburg Easter Festival, led by artistic director Nikolaus Bachler, former director of the Bavarian State Opera, demonstratively presented Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 (*Leningrad*) performed by the Sächsische

Staatskapelle Dresden and conducted by the Russian Tugan Sokhiev. Bachler described the treatment of Gergiev and other Russian artists as a “witch-hunt.”

Bachler explained that at the moment there was “probably no work which is more appropriate.” The *Leningrad* symphony was important far beyond Ukraine, he said. “We are focused on this conflict taking place at the moment, but there is permanent war.” Previous wars in Afghanistan and Syria had evidently failed to arouse anyone, he said. Indeed, not a single American or German composer/conductor has been banned from musical life because their countries of origin waged brutal wars.

Sokhiev resigned from his post as chief conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre, as well as from his post as music director of the Orchestre National du Capitole in Toulouse, in March 2022. In his statement, Sokhiev stressed that he had been forced to make an “intolerable choice” between Russian and French musicians, whom he called his “musical family.”

Sokhiev is right: music knows no national borders. It lives and thrives from its international exchange, today more than ever. Sokhiev’s conducting of the *Leningrad* symphony in Salzburg was celebrated by the audience with standing ovations.

At the Salzburg Summer Festival, artistic director Markus Hinterhäuser defended the appearance of the young Greek-Russian conductor Teodor Currentzis who led a performance of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 13 *Babi Yar*. Hinterhäuser was subsequently crudely criticised in *Der Standard*, the house organ of Austrian Social Democracy published in Vienna.

The theme of Shostakovich’s *Babi Yar* is the mass murder in 1941 of more than 33,000 Jews by the German Wehrmacht and the SS, in a region close to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev. None of the *Wehrmacht* officers responsible ever stood trial—only some SS members were later convicted.

Currentzis condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and even organised a benefit concert in the Vienna Konzerthaus in aid of Ukraine. It was the Ukrainian ambassador who refused to accept the money because it had been raised by Russian musicians.

Despite these facts, the *Standard* lashed out at Currentzis’ performance in Salzburg. The “controversial” conductor and his orchestra had cultivated a “close relationship” with Putin. He and his MusicAeterna ensemble—orchestra and choir—were “financed by Putin’s house bank VTB,” the daily paper wrote. “A section of the world of classical music” would react with indignation, wrote this reactionary, self-proclaimed voice of classical music.

The MusicAeterna ensemble of Currentzis, who lives in Russia, is indeed required to raise finance for its tours with

the help of capitalist sponsors, for example Gazprom. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 by the Stalinist bureaucracy, public funding for what was a highly developed art and music scene was largely wiped out. Musicians and conductors were forced to look for financial backers.

This is no different to the situation in Germany, where independent orchestras and even festivals depend on financing from big companies and banks such as Audi, Deutsche Bank, Siemens and others. Compared to the monstrous crimes financed by German corporations in the 20th century and compared to their current involvement in billion-dollar swindles and arms deals, the corrupt activities of the Russian bank VTB are rather small change.

The unabashed hysteria directed against Russian artists, which has reached a new climax with the dismissal of Nasturica-Herschcovici in Munich, has nothing to do with solidarity with the suffering of the Ukrainian people due to the war. It has long been clear that the Russian invasion is being used by NATO, led by the US and Germany, as a means to instigate a war against Russia. The Ukrainian population—one of the first victims of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941—serves as cannon fodder.

The zealous promoters of an “ethically” clean culture—to the exclusion of Russian, and now Romanian, artists—are in fact participating in the ideological silencing of popular opposition to a war, which could lead to a nuclear exchange and the extinction of humanity.

Significantly, the banishment of everything Russian also has anti-Semitic undertones. Nasturica-Herschcowici’s name points to a Jewish background. After studying in his native Bucharest, he lived with his family in Israel, and many of his acclaimed performances were with Israeli orchestras. Online comments, which the Bayrische Rundfunk has since deleted, noted indignantly that Nasturica-Herschcowici’s successor should be apolitical and preferably not bear such a name.



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