



World Police Bands: Globalization through Music

Dr. Mark U. Reimer
Department of Music
Christopher Newport University
Newport News, VA 23606
reimer@cnu.edu

Police bands from around the world participate in the annual World Police Band Concert. Now in its twelfth year, this event made its world debut in 1996 in Tokyo and featured police bands from Britain, France, Spain, South Korea, Australia, and Japan. Since that time, concerts have been held in Paris, Madrid, Seoul, Berlin, New York, and Los Angeles. The concerts are organized by the Japanese Mainichi Newspaper, with assistance from commercial and transport companies, airlines, and hotels. The goal of this event is to develop a solid relationship among police communities around the world. As stated by Mr. Masato Kitamura, President of the Mainichi Newspaper and Chairman of the World Police Band Concerts Committee, "This committee wishes this event will contribute to promoting safety and peace in the world as well as the mutual understanding between citizens and the police department of each country through the music exchange by the World Police Band Concert."¹ The focus of this paper is not on this particular concert or on the career opportunities for these musicians but, rather, on the spirit and purpose of these ensembles. With a look at one band in particular--the Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg of Germany--the paper brings to light the activities and values of this police band that shares the common goal of global communities, a goal to strengthen the relationship between civic government and the community.

The most accomplished string majors strive to someday perform with the world's finest orchestras just as musicians gifted with the most impressive voices work diligently in the hope of someday performing on the world's most prestigious opera stages. But what are the options for outstanding wind musicians and percussionists who may not have the

¹<http://sc.info.gov.hk/gb/www.police.gov.hk/offbeat/835/eng/n01.htm>.



desire or the opportunity to perform in an orchestra? In the United States, professional performance opportunities for these musicians are limited to symphony orchestras, opera orchestras, musicals, theme parks, cruise ships, military bands, circus bands, and freelance opportunities that serve the recording and entertainment industries. Germany, as well as the United States, affords all of these performance opportunities with the exception of one that is not found in the United States—the professional police band. These bands provide the ceremonial atmosphere and splendor of official police functions, but they serve also as a source of free public entertainment and an opportunity for the finest wind and percussion players to make a living doing what they do best—performing.

The first civic wind musicians in Germany date to the late thirteenth century and were a true status symbol for any city that could afford its own wind band. These performers, or “Stadtpeifer,” had many responsibilities, including sounding the hours of the day, performing midday and Sunday concerts, accompanying the choirs, and playing for public proclamations. The musicians served also as watchmen, sounding musical alarms from their towers at the sign of fire, robbery, and invasion. In thirteenth-century Frankfurt, for example, there were 140 such towers from which music was played and heard. “Abblasen,” or “playing from above,” echoed through the streets and alleys, sometimes in the form of a chorale, or “aubade,” to inform the citizens that it was time to go to sleep. And music was used also to alert the more adventuresome townsfolk that the sun would soon be up and, therefore, that they had precious little time to return to their proper beds before the fast-approaching dawn.² In the sixteenth century, when most professional civic bands in Europe were in decline, the German civic bands were still going strong. In the seventeenth century, “Hautboisten,” an ensemble comprised of various sized oboes and bassoons, were common among wealthy German residences, cities, and the military. This ensemble had its roots in Les Grands Hautbois formed in the court of France whose king, Louis XIVth, incorporated music into nearly every aspect of daily life. In Germany, music for winds and voices was actually preferred over that composed for strings.³ By the nineteenth

²David Whitwell, *A Concise History of the Wind Band*. Northridge, CA: Winds, 1985, p. 23.

³Ibid. p. 117.



century, civic wind bands remained in the wealthy courts and the military, and amateur wind ensembles took on a military facade and flourished as a means of public pride and entertainment. After the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, community bands and amateur singing societies, or “Liedertafeln,” became very popular and very nationalistic.⁴ But even as the professional bands gradually gave way to volunteer organizations, the association of the professional band with government never really changed.

The Police Band of the German state of Baden-Württemberg had its official beginning in 1920, shortly after the end of the first world war, and was called, “Polizeimusik Stuttgart,” or “Police music of Stuttgart.” During the Third Reich, or Nazi period, between the years 1933 and 1945, the organization was reshaped but remained as a police band until 1940. Shortly after the end of the second world war, in the winter of 1945, the band was again functional and performing. In 1973, the band became part of the state’s police force—Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg--a change that made possible the purchase of new instruments.⁵ The band’s current number of 35 musicians are all professionally trained in music and perform at a high artistic level.

As is the case in any university music program, the performance of chamber music in the Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg is encouraged. Chamber ensembles extrapolated from the band include a brass quartet (two trumpets, tenor horn, baritone), a clarinet quartet (Eb, two Bb, bass), a saxophone quartet (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone), a woodwind quintet (flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon), and a brass quintet (two trumpets, horn, two trombones). Performance opportunities include concerts and what the Germans call, “Umrahmungen,” music before and after, or “bordering,” an event. The Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg often plays for the official openings of buildings and the swearing in ceremonies of civic officials. The repertoire of these ensembles consists of

⁴Ibid, p. 233.

⁵Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg, <http://www.pmk-bw.de/das-orchester/historie.php>



classical music, new compositions, jazz, and lighter music for entertainment, depending, of course, on the purpose of the performance.⁶

Police bands are not, however, unique to Germany. America experienced the creation of police bands around the same time as the founding of the Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg. The New York Police Department Band, for example, was founded in 1903 by 20 patrolmen who marched in parades and whose music bolstered the morale of the department. Written November 18th, 1917, in *The New York Times* in an article entitled, “New York’s Police Band,” the writer states, “It was approximately fifteen years ago that a handful of policemen, with the approval of Commissioner Murphy, then in command of the department, conceived the idea of a police band. They were spurred on by the success of the Letter Carriers’ Band and the Fire Department Band, and of police bands in other cities.”⁷ The band performed every year at the head of the Annual Police Parade, growing in quality and reputation. In 1925, it undertook a national concert tour, and it later performed at the first inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. By 1953, the band was up to 65 men and performed a total of 95 engagements, but it was disbanded in 1954 owing to the need of the department to augment its patrol force. Reinstated in 1992, the band now consists of 80 active uniform members of the department and performs annually in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and in special ticker tape parades, including those to celebrate sports victories. From within the band come smaller ensembles, similar to the Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg, including a steel drum ensemble, a jazz ensemble, and a percussion ensemble.⁸ On the opposite coast, established in 1914 with a membership that consisted of all sworn police officers, the Los Angeles Police Department Band is today comprised of 75 members who hail from professional orchestras and

⁶<http://www.pmk-bw.de/das-orchester/ensembles.php>

⁷“New York’s Police Band,” in *The New York Times*, November 18, 1917.

⁸NYPD Band History,” <http://www.policeband.org/history.html>



recording studios as well as talented amateurs. The performance venues include dedications of buildings, fire department and police academy graduations, inaugurations, fairs, and, of course, concerts.⁹ And from Mid-America, the Minneapolis Police Band was founded in 1914 by Major General George Leach, a former commanding general of a World War I Army division and mayor of Minneapolis, and by a musical instrument salesman, Arthur Bolte, who was hoping to increase sales by starting a city band. To help improve the image of the police department, Mayor Leach created the police band, and Mr. Bolte served as its first director. Comprised solely of police officers, the band's first performance was in November of 1918 at the Armistice Day Parade. By 1919, civilians were allowed to join the band, but women were not granted membership until 1969. The band today is comprised of active and retired police officers and civilians and includes a concert band, marching band, and swing band that perform 30 to 50 engagements throughout the year.¹⁰

Current police bands in countries other than America and Germany serve the same function as those mentioned above. The Paris Metropolitan Police Band, for example, was created in 1929 and performs for various events for the Paris Police Department and City Hall. The band gives concerts in schools, gardens, and parks around Paris.¹¹ Although much of the repertoire of police bands appears to be of a lighter, more popular nature, the Paris Metropolitan Police Band presented in 2006 at the World Police Band Concert in Hong Kong Debussy's "Festival," from *Nocturne*; "Valencia," the final movement from *Escales* by Ibert; Ravel's *Pavanne pour une infante defunte*;" and Bernstein's *SLAVA!*¹² It is clear that not all police bands adhere to the same style and quality of repertoire. They

⁹LAPD Band: Our History," <http://www.lapdband.org/history.html>

¹⁰"Minneapolis Police Band Sharing Music With our Community Since 1917," <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/police/about/band/index.asp>

¹¹<http://hkpegasus.wordpress.com/category/world-police-concert-in-hk-2006>.

¹²<http://hkpegasus.wordpress.com/category/world-police-concert-in-hk-2006>.



may all share the common purpose of serving their respective communities through providing music for ceremonies and entertainment, but not all bands, and not all band conductors, share the same taste in repertoire or hold to the same performance standards.

Police bands around the world serve the public much the same as the civic wind ensembles of the Medieval and Renaissance periods that participated in the daily events and activities of their thriving communities. These professional bands performed concerts for the public, took part in church services, stood watch over the city, and provided the citizens with live music that today would be heard through a loudspeaker or, more likely, through an IPOD. The musicians enhanced the daily lives of the citizens and, through their membership in guilds, strove to protect and conserve their high level of musicianship and the performance rights of their fellow musicians. As did the civic wind musicians who served their communities over seven centuries ago, police bands today entertain civilians, enhance the atmosphere of official ceremonies, and strive to reflect the spirit and soul of a public institution committed to serving and defending its electorate. Such an organization serves also the music profession by providing performance and employment opportunities to outstanding and dedicated musicians who are willing and able to combine their highly refined musical skills and education with the more mundane demands of daily life in government. The musical opportunities for these musicians, however, can be rewarding. As is the case in the Polizeimusikkorps Baden-Württemberg and various police bands in America, some of these wind organizations are able to offer their members opportunities to perform chamber music as well as playing in a large ensemble. All of these bands perform concerts and recitals that present to the public a wide variety of repertoire in an even wider array of indoor and outdoor venues. Events such as the World Police Band Concert, sponsored by the Mainichi Newspaper of Tokyo, provide the public with a unique perspective on how law enforcement on a global scale, with each band serving the daily needs of its citizenry, strives to build trust between the citizens and the police and to strengthen humanitarianism through the international language of music. To quote the



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great British poet William Wordsworth, who, in 1798, in his work, *The Tables Turned*, wrote¹³:

*Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society.*

¹³John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 16th edition. Justin Kaplan, general editor. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992.