

Report after 100 days

After 100 days at home I was finally able to return to my orchestra, the Southwest German Chamber Orchestra - <https://www.swdco-pforzheim.de/> - in Pforzheim, southwest Germany for a special online-concert - <https://www.youtube.com/c/s%C3%BCdwestdeutscheskammerorchesterpforzheim>.

It was the first time the orchestra played together and my first time conducting again since the middle of March. The rehearsals and concert took place in the orchestra's usual hall in the Congress Centre Pforzheim, but with a big difference. The orchestra was spaced out on stage according to the regulations of the health authorities with 1.5 meters between the musicians, and all the audience seating had been removed from the hall, making the acoustic very resonant (see photos). It took some time for us to adjust to the new circumstances, and it was initially not easy to hear well. At first we rehearsed only the strings, then tutti. By the day of the concert, 28th June, everyone had got used to the situation and was more relaxed – in fact,

enjoying the new challenge. The orchestra played excellently. The programme was Beethoven's "Prometheus" Overture, Mozart's D minor Piano Concerto (with Oliver Schnyder) and the "Italian" Symphony by Mendelssohn. Although there



was no live audience in the hall the musicians knew they were being heard and seen online by many people worldwide. It was a triumph over many obstacles and a milestone in the orchestra's path to the future.

The following week we were back on stage for the first of two CD recordings for a major German label. It was a real achievement that the orchestra manager, Andreas Herrmann, was able to arrange for these recordings in the diary in place of some cancelled concerts. We recorded three works for string orchestra by the English composers Christopher Wilson and Granville Bantock, all world premiere recordings. The orchestra was already used to the new acoustics and spacing from the online-concert, so we could get right down to work. The distance between the musicians was, however, a new challenge for the sound engineers, but they did a great job and achieved a fine balance and rich sound.

It was a total 10 days of intensive and deeply satisfying work after a break 100 days. I felt to be reborn. I must say, it was a joy to be with musicians, making

music again. I think we all appreciated how much we had missed the interaction with each other. There was indeed a new freshness and spontaneity. What was sadly missing was the interaction with the audience. This is the thing we must now work on hard – getting audiences back into halls. The problem is not the audience members, but rather the strict regulations. Some countries, however, are leading the way and are able to have almost normal audience sizes. A concert hall is a controlled environment, where people can gather without risk with certain basic rules and common sense. We need the audiences both to make music for and, of course, financially in order that orchestral music can survive. And they need us to enrich their lives with music.

I have been at home again during the last week and return to my orchestra on 13th July for the next CD recording. This time, double bass concertos and a symphony by the early Classical composer, Sperger – new to me. We will rehearse in our studio, which is much smaller than the stage we played on recently. But the same spacing has been prepared between the musicians and approved by the authorities. The rehearsal breaks will, however, be different. The room must be ventilated for 15 minutes after a maximum of 60 minutes playing. The recordings will be back in the Congress Centre in the medium sized hall, with a much drier acoustic than the main hall, which will make things a little easier.

One week later, to finish the season, the South West German Chamber Orchestra and I will have two open-air concerts in the grounds of a lovely castle not far from Pforzheim (see photo). The original date was in June but postponed in order to comply with government regulations. And, instead of one concert with an interval, we will play two (at 5:30pm and 8pm) of just one-hour duration with the same programme. This is to accommodate the smaller audience allowed into the castle courtyard.



This way, all audience member will be able to enjoy the beautiful summer's event in safety and adhering to social distancing. The organisers have even managed to plan for refreshments for the audience (and musicians) before and after each concert. The programme will be Mozart – Contredances KV 267, Haydn's Symphony No.73 "La Chasse" and the Fifth Symphony by Schubert - <https://www.swdko-pforzheim.de/termine/open-air-schloss-bauschlott-i-nachmittagskonzert/>

I am very grateful to have this month of work and pleasure and to see a perspective for the future. Thank you to all musicians, technical and office staff, sponsors, and to our audience, both online and live.

Douglas Bostock
Reichenau, 12th July 2020