



THE SCHOOL OF LISTENING  
MICHAEL P. STEINBERG

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I am forced to open my report with a lament. Though the ten months of the Wiko Fellowship end up being too short for all its lucky recipients – so hospitable is the institution, so enabling of serious productivity enhanced by community, collegiality, and the city of

Berlin – I was able to take advantage of this treasured opportunity for only two and a half months, from May 2 to July 15, 2016. (I had taken on a position in the senior administration of my university and in late summer 2015 was asked by the university president to postpone my scheduled sabbatical year.) Then another change in plans: in March 2016, I accepted the position of President of the American Academy in Berlin, as of August 15, 2016.

On arriving in Berlin, my principal scholarly goal was to make up quickly some of the time lost for two book projects as a result of my administratively heavy academic year. One of these was my announced Wiko project, a book called “The School of Listening”, focused on the global reception and reconfiguration of key legacies in the European musical tradition. This project remains in its early stages; however, the period at Wiko was invaluable in advancing its conceptualization, scope, and organization. On June 28, I was able to present this project to Ute Frevert’s “History of Emotions” seminar at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, a very productive and rewarding event for me.

This project involves communication and collaboration with several ongoing initiatives. Chief among these is the new Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin, and I was pleased to be able to invite the Academy’s new dean, Mena Mark Hanna, to the Wiko in the hope of seeding an ongoing institutional dialogue. Thanks to the generous and intellectually meaningful Wiko hospitality, I was also able to invite Pamela Rosenberg, former *Intendantin* of the Berlin Philharmonie and now the director of several important projects of music education for refugee adolescents in Berlin, as well as Saleem Abboud Ashkar, Berlin-based concert pianist and the co-founder of a new orchestra academy for refugee youth, which will begin its programming in October 2016. I am hopeful that these introductions will be meaningful and productive not only for Wiko but also for several of this year’s Fellows, including for example Anna Maria Busse Berger, as well as Ina Hartwig, the latter in her new post as City Councilor for Culture of the city of Frankfurt.

My scholarly docket also included work on a nearly completed short book called “The Trouble with Wagner”: an argument for the inseparability of aesthetic indispensability and political dubiousness in the music dramas of Richard Wagner, with attention mostly to the “Ring of the Nibelungs”. This project, whose completion is overdue, stems from my work as dramaturge on the joint Teatro alla Scala/Staatsoper Berlin production of the “Ring” between 2010 and 2013. The timing proved serendipitous, as the Staatsoper offered revivals of the cycle in June 2016. Rehearsals were scheduled in May and early

June, with the result that I was able to retest some of my arguments against the actualities of the stage. In addition, thanks to the generosity of the Staatsoper, I was able to invite some 25 Wiko Fellows and staff to an early stage and orchestra rehearsal of “Das Rheingold” on May 27, an event I introduced with an informal lecture on the production and its history.

Finally, my appointment to the American Academy occasioned several fruitful conversations with Wiko leadership that herald multiple avenues of collaboration in the future. The Wiko continues to set the example for Berlin and globally of intellectual hospitality and the elusive combination of stimulation and tranquility. I am profoundly grateful to have been part of it during spring 2016.