

MUSIC GROUP PERFORMS IN U.S.-GERMAN. Veterans Concert with Deutsche "Orchestra Docs"

By L. Brent Mathews

After retiring from a career with AT&T, I turned to the first love of my life, musical performance, playing the trumpet and singing in a number of different venues. In the year 2000 a friend in the Columbia Concert Band introduced me to a national musical organization, the Veterans Administration - National Medical Musical Group (VA-NMMG).



On November 7, 2005, the VA-NMMG orchestra and chorus produced a two hour Veterans Day program at the Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, after which some of us traveled to Germany and gave several concerts in conjunction with musicians there.

On Thursday, November 10, the day after our arrival in Kaiserslautern, we performed jointly at the Haus des Bürgers with the U.S. Air Force Jazz Band, "Check Six", which is stationed at the Ramstein Air Force Base nearby.

Moving on to Frankfurt am Main, we next rehearsed for and gave a joint Deutsch-amerikanisches Ärzteorchester-Freundschafts-Konzert on Saturday, November 12 at the Alta Aula Jügelhaus Campus Bockenheim, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, with excellent German musicians associated with Verein DoctorsHobbies.com e.V. Our group provided help with the German orchestra (cello, bassoon, string bass) in the first half of the program and their orchestra helped fill in our string sections, including the concertmistress chair.

Wolfgang Ellenberger, president of Verein DoctorsHobbies.com e.V., conducted the German orchestra and played Haydn's D Major piano concerto under his own baton. As host for the evening, he introduced Dr. Vincent Costigliola, president of the European Medical Association and Dr. Victor S. Wahby, founder and conductor of the VA-NMMG Orchestra and Chorus, both of whom

expressed their enthusiasm for this opportunity to build German-American friendship through music and to enhance communication among the participants.

Our "German Odyssey" ended in Berlin, where on Wednesday, November 16, in the Philharmonic Kammermusiksaal, the Frankfurt concert was repeated with the addition of some Berliner musicians. The Germans also added a stunning rendition of Franz Schubert's "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen" (Shepherd on the Rock), featuring soprano Emiko Okuyama and clarinetist Dr. Isa Bittel.

Professor Dr. Martin Paul, Dean of Charity Hospital of the Berlin University of Medicine, welcomed the enthusiastic audience and introduced William Robert Timken, American Ambassador to Germany, Professor Dr. of Philosophy Dieter Lenzen, President of the Free University of Berlin and Professor Dr. Hans Jürgen Prömel, Acting President of the Humboldt University of Berlin.

While one might not expect from these volunteer, somewhat under-rehearsed musicians, the perfection we witnessed the night before from Daniel Barenboim conducting the Staatskapelle in Schoenberg and Mahler, still, our musical selections were varied and entertaining and when they were especially exciting, the volume of the applause gave me chills.

We returned to our Hotel Jolly Vivaldi, to be personally greeted by Ambassador Timkin, who, in his remarks at our post-concert banquet, quipped that it felt good to him to be immersed in a little American culture after not having been home since he began his German tour of duty in August. We partied half the night and boarded our bus to the airport for a 7:10 a.m. takeoff after only one hour of sleep. Later, my wife reminded me that we had slept through the takeoff!