



The Philharmonic Society performing in the Hanover Square Rooms, published in *Illustrated London News*, 1843. (Image: Public Domain)

## Cooperative Ensemble Practices in the 19th Century

Cooperative structures in music and theatre ensembles were common, successful and influential in 19th-century Europe. Researchers have nevertheless tended to assume that these ensembles were able to achieve an increasing degree of professionalisation thanks to the growing dominance of hierarchies in their organisation. This project will examine cooperative practices in leading historical ensembles, examining both their organisational structures and their artistic working methods. The findings of this project will be subjected to practical tests in collaboration with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra.

Kooperativ organisierte Musik- und Theaterensembles waren im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts verbreitet, erfolgreich und einflussreich. Dennoch geht die Forschung bisher davon aus, dass zunehmend hierarchische Ordnungen Grundlage ihrer Professionalisierung war. Das Projekt untersucht kooperative Praktiken führender Ensembles und nimmt ihre Organisation sowie ihre künstlerischen Praktiken in den Blick. Die Ergebnisse werden in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Freiburger Barockorchester in der Praxis erprobt.

**Introduction:** Some of the leading music and theatre ensembles of 19th-century Europe were organised as cooperatives whose members worked together artistically as equals. Their contemporaries assigned great importance to the non-hierarchical organisation of artists. This historical phenomenon has been all but forgotten today, even though other forms of cooperative work have been the subject of research. The present project will shed light on the organisation and artistic working methods of leading cooperative ensembles, namely the London *Philharmonic Society*, the Paris *Société des concerts du conservatoire* and the Berlin theatre society *Urania*. It also aims to reintroduce historical, cooperative modes of working in the context of today's artistic practices.

**Methods:** The practices of cooperative ensembles will be investigated in a source-based historical study, focusing on the fields of musicology, theatre studies, and the sociology of the arts. The findings thereby acquired will be put to a practical test in a cooperative research group including orchestral musicians from our project partner, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra. The methodology of this cooperation will be based on the concept of creative research and will combine musical practices with qualitative tools from the social sciences.

**Results:** The project's findings will provide a basis for reevaluating the prevalence, function and historical significance of cooperative ensemble practices. Common assumptions about the superiority of hierarchical collaborations in the arts will be challenged, and cooperative work will be reintroduced to today's music practices.

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