

Baden-Baden hosting the 4th Café de l'Europe

It was the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II who labelled the thermal town of Spa as “Café de l'Europe” while he was staying there for his annual summer retreat in 1781. In remembrance of this attribution, the EHTTA had organized, within the frame of its *Sources of Culture* project, a series of eight prestigious round tables called “Cafés de l'Europe”. The 4th Café de l'Europe took place in Baden-Baden on April 17, 2014, in the Kulturhaus LA8 during the town's famous International Easter Festival of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Many European spa towns of the 19th century boast a rich and age old musical tradition. However, only few offered such a rich mix of music and culture as Baden-Baden. In recognition of this music heritage Baden-Baden chose the title “Thermal Towns of the 19th Century as Places for Musical Inspiration” as motto for its “Café de l'Europe”. **Reinhard Hübsch** of the cultural channel SWR 2 (southwest broadcast) was hosting and moderating the Open Forum that assembled an illustrious group of experts in the field of music and history. After a short introduction on Baden-Baden's outstanding role as “Europe's summer capital” given by senior professor of modern and recent history at the University of Mannheim **Peter Steinbach**, **Andreas Mölich-Zebhauser**, General Manager and Artistic Director of the Festspielhaus und Festspiele Baden-Baden GmbH, Martin Hoffmann, Artistic Director of the Berlin Philharmonic, former President of the German Gramophone Association **Andreas Holschneider**, Chief Conductor of the Baden-Baden Philharmonic **Pavel Baleff**, pianist **Bernd Glemser** and **Peter Steinbach** were discussing the importance of music and culture as means to foster the attractiveness of a town.

The participants unanimously acknowledged that, throughout the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Baden-Baden accommodated nearly every European musician or composer of distinction, among them internationally known artists as Johannes Brahms, Clara Schumann, Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz, Johann Strauss, Paul Hindemith or Kurt Weill. Many of them came to stay for a certain period of time, some even decided to live here, putting their stamp on the town's flourishing cultural life. Especially in the 1920s Baden-Baden became some kind of El Dorado for modern music, hosting the outstanding festival for contemporary music “Deutsche Kammermusik”.

The participants also agreed on the fact that it has indeed been Baden-Baden's often ridiculed reputation as nostalgic thermal spa town that has contributed to the boost the town is experiencing today. As in the good old days, the town's main attractions today were not its spas but its rich cultural life with broadcasting station, countless cultural and sportive events and numerous music festivals throughout the year with the stress put on classical music. In this connection, **Martin Hoffmann** of the Berlin Philharmonic raved about Baden-Baden as festival town and praised the wonderful atmosphere with excellent working conditions and a multitude of chamber music venues.

While all speakers were sharing a mounting concern over ageing audiences, they unanimously acknowledged the fact that classical music has always attracted a more distinguished, elderly clientele and that it was therefore not advisable to curry favour with teenage subculture. Nonetheless, enhancing musical education and modernizing the approaches to classical music for example via video stream was regarded as an important device in fighting over-ageing, as **Martin Hoffmann** of the Berlin Philharmonic and **Andreas Mölich-Zebhauser** of the Festival Hall Baden-Baden pointed out.

Andreas Holschneider emphasized two other aspects of Baden-Baden's evolution in becoming an internationally renowned thermal spa, namely its open-mindedness towards international influences and cultural patronage. He underlined his conviction that both aspects were still valid in today's world and therefore recommended higher financial effort in the field of culture. If Baden-Baden wanted to encourage further commercial use of its assets, he said, it had to do its bit.

The Open Forum concluded with a Brahms intermezzo played by **Bernd Glemser** and the performance of **two actors of the Baden-Baden Theatre** who interpreted passages from the correspondence between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. Michel Thomas-Penette introduced the project of the interactive novel and **two actors from the Marché aux Grains Theater, Bouxwiller**, represented two historic characters of the novel, who came across each other in the "Cafés of Europe", these literary salons, places for discussion and meeting places which were the great thermal spas from the 18th Century to the early 20th Century.