



COMMENT: Berlin decides...or doesn't

By Jessica Duchon, 12 May 2015

After a lengthy meeting yesterday to elect their new music director, to replace Sir Simon Rattle in 2018, the members of the Berlin Philharmonic have left the post empty for now. The orchestra has said that it plans to hold another election within one year.

Orchestra Board member Peter Riegelbauer said: 'After an orchestra assembly which lasted 11 hours, we have unfortunately come to no decision. There were positive and lively discussions and several rounds of voting, but unfortunately we were unable to agree on a conductor.' He added that the orchestra must 'take the time that is necessary' to reach a decision.

Speculation had been rife that the post could go to Christian Thielemann, Gustavo Dudamel or Andris Nelsons – but with the first two likely to be seen as respectively too traditional and too non-traditional and the third potentially unavailable, having recently taken up the helm at the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the dearth of suitable candidates cannot have made this an easy day. Daniel Barenboim and Mariss Jansons had apparently both ruled themselves out.

More seriously, the election, or lack of it, leaves a big question or two hanging in the air. Is there no suitable candidate? Where have all the great conductors gone?

Is this simply a case of an orchestra – typically enough – failing to agree, when any one of these names, and probably plenty of others (around 30 are thought to have been considered), might have done a splendid job? As with any large company, you will generally find among the members of an orchestra as many opinions as there are people. It would be more surprising if they ever agreed on anything.

Or is the globe awash with conductors who are very good, but just not good *enough* for what is still considered the most prestigious orchestra in the world? And, indeed, awash with conductors who are sometimes not very good

at all, but might simply have, for example, the right chutzpah, the right contacts and, perchance, the right hair?

Often the maestro is chosen by a management board and imposed upon the players. But musicians know when there's a charlatan in front of them – and earning a fee about 20 times their daily wage for the privilege.

Some of us believe that were there to be more women in the podium running at international level, the game would be upped still further, the standard lifted even higher and the choice, er, broadened. Here's hoping that next time an election is held, perhaps someone like [this extraordinary musician](#) might be in with a chance: