



Why choose between continuity



**German culture in Britain**

# Headbangers and high Kultur

**A new breed of artists is changing British tastes in German culture**

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AT FULL pelt, the sound of the German heavy metal group



Rammstein: not your grandfather's lederhosen

Rammstein is an awe-inspiring din, enhanced by stage pyrotechnics, a lead singer wearing flaming eagles' wings and band members in Aryan blond wigs. The mixture of what one critic called "situationist anthems, German drinking songs and opera," has brought the noisy crew an enthusiastic British following, part of which was recently on display at a

gig in Manchester.

British enthusiasm for modern German culture is quietly growing, and not just among headbangers. Hardy perennials, like recitals of Schubert *Lieder*, German-style Christmas markets in British towns and intermittent performances of Goethe and Schiller plays are now regularly supplemented by avant-garde art, as well as work by challenging composers like Heiner Goebbels.

Cate Blanchett, an actress and director, is about to take to the Barbican stage in "Gross und Klein", a modern surrealist play. Tanztheater Wuppertal, the dance company founded by the late Pina Bausch, will soon begin a lengthy season at Sadler's Wells, while galleries are showing works by artists like Tino Sehgal and Hans-Peter Feldmann. Even German humour, not usually seen as a bankable export, has a following. Henning Wehn, who styles himself as "German comedy ambassador to the UK", tells jokes about mutual stereotypes while wearing a stopwatch on stage to reflect German punctiliousness.

Britons have periodically admired German culture. Thomas Carlyle, a 19th-century historian who inspired Germanophiles of that era, enthused about the country "speaking the same old Saxon tongue and thinking in the same old Saxon spirit with ourselves." War hardened feelings—as, more subtly, did official British resistance to German reunification. But unification eventually brought the countries closer, argues Sabine Hentzsch of the Goethe Institute in London, which is about to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Much of that has to do with the rise of Berlin as a European cultural centre. Damien Hirst and other figures in the Young British Artists movement spent time in Berlin in the post-unity party atmosphere of the 1990s and still exhibit there. Some artists split their time between the British and German capitals, including Wolfgang Tillmans, a photographer who has cited "the mix of damp carpet and apricot-scented potpourri, Marmite and repressed but omnipresent sexuality" as some of the delightful things about Britain.

Rüdiger Görner, professor of German studies at Queen Mary's college in London, says Germans have become increasingly intrigued by British multiculturalism. As for the British, fashions have simply changed. A generation whose parents laughed awkwardly at John Cleese in "Fawlty Towers," a television comedy, shouting "Don't mention the war!" at bemused German hotel guests is, he suggests, "simply getting bored by clichés."

Although old resentments are periodically revived by football clashes, they are not enough to override the growing affinities between the two countries. Yet there are strict limits to the British love of things German. Many fewer school students are learning the language than did so 10 years ago, meaning fewer have the slightest idea what Rammstein are on about.

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