GEMA holds its first virtual AGM +++ Music creators need additional support +++ Massive decline expected in the 2020 financial year due to coronavirus pandemic

**GEMA held its AGM from 29 September to 1 October this year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, it took place entirely in the virtual arena. Members' Assembly resolutions included several changes to regulatory documents, among them a provision allowing more efficient and effective licensing of platforms with user-generated content (UGC). The Assembly was of the united view that music creators who have been particularly badly affected by the pandemic will require additional support.**

GEMA’S three-day Members' Assembly is at the heart of the supportive community of 78,000 members and is vital to its strong internal democracy. The Members' Assembly, which had orginally been scheduled for May 2020, had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic and when held was run in line with official government guidelines for such events. About 1,000 composers, lyricists and publishers met online, discussed agenda items and passed resolutions. This means more members than in the previous years took the opportunity to participate virtually and cast their votes. An important goal on all three days was that embers should be able to exchange views on the agenda topics just as they always do.

The GEMA Members' Assembly usually thrives on face-to-face contact between members during debates and resolutions. GEMA successfully facilitated this exchange in a virtual environment. Using a technologically sophisticated and extremely secure system, members were able to discuss items during live transmission of meetings, connect via video contributions and decide on motions via live voting features. The main assembly as well as separate meetings of different professional categories (composers, lyricists and publishers) took place in virtual meeting rooms.

"Our aim was to come as close as possible to a face-to-face event offering our members all the options for exchange and debate they are used to. We managed to pull this off with great success, given the limited possibilities we had, while the upside is that the Covid-19 pandemic acted as our digitalisation accelerator", summarizes Dr. Ralf Weigand, Chairman of the Supervisory Board. "GEMA has shown to be technically apt and innovative in an outstanding manner and we have set new standards as well as a positive sign for the future. Nevertheless, I think I can say on behalf of both our members and the supervisory board that we have all missed the physical encounters and direct exchanges we enjoyed during our past meetings. After all, those of us involved in music for so long are deeply defined by the experience of immediate personal expression and sensory vibes!

**Coronavirus pandemic the main topic, projected revenues for 2020 critical**

The AGM was stamped by the many members who were personally affected by the coronavirus pandemic. “It really hurts to see how many creatives are suffering from the effects of coronavirus,” Dr Heker said in his report to the Main Assembly. “You can feel it throughout GEMA. We were quick to take measures this spring to help members who live mainly off income from gigs and live events.”

GEMA reacted in March by introducing financial support schemes for its members and goodwill regulations for licensees regarding the shutdown of public and cultural life. Furthermore, GEMA has supported the German Government in distributing 30 million Euros out of the rescue package “Neustart Kultur”, which aims to revitalise cultural life in Germany and secure the existence of music venues and clubs.

Dr Heker underlined the following point to members: “We are aware that these acute support schemes are not enough. From a financial perspective, 2021 will be even more difficult for many of you. Our revenues will be lower than in 2020, and we will therefore pay out less to you.”

GEMA’s sales divison has been particularly badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with a drastic decline in collections. “Since March, hardly any events have taken place, which is an economic disaster of huge proportions,” says Heker. The sound recording business also saw a further decline in income, as trading was severely restricted for months.

The Management Committee and Supervisory Board of GEMA will advise in the coming months on additional support for members who have been particularly badly affected in order to cushion the consequences of the 2020 “Corona year”. With government, GEMA is campaigning in particular for specific programmes to support the solo self-employed to be set up. “Creators must again have the prospect of working and earning. Much has been put in place in a short time; now we should examine things closely and be smart in how we improve them.” This was Heker’s message to politicians.

The Chairman of the Supervisory Board, Dr. Ralf Weigand, addressed the members in a tone of urgency: "We are aware of the difficult and precarious situation of many of our members. I wish all music creators and publishers, but also our partners, the venue operators and concert organizers up and down the country, as much strength as possible. We need to stand together now! The supervisory board will work to ensure that the Federal Government's support programs are continued and better tailored to the needs of music lovers. The isolation and social upheaval caused by the corona pandemic shows that our society needs creative work just as urgently as places where music culture can be lived". Weigand thanked all members, and very explicitly the GEMA employees who have worked in the past months so impressively and with full commitment for the music-loving community. "The last few days have impressively confirmed that we stand strong in this crisis. Despite, or more precisely, because of our very open and vital discussions we were able, against all odds, to take important decisions democratically and consensually”.

**Major resolutions at the General Assembly 2020:**

**Changes to the Distribution Plan:** The provisions for determining the shares which authors and publishers receive per work during the distribution process were simplified, and a special provision was passed for the distribution of collections from mechanical performances for the 2020 financial year. This provision is intended to counteract distortions with the distribution which might otherwise occur if events are cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The provision is part of a set of measures that GEMA hopes will cushion the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic on its members.

**More efficient management of online rights:** GEMA has adapted the provisions in its Deed of Assignment regarding the management of online rights to the new legal situation which arose when the EU Copyright Directive came into force. The adaptations enable GEMA to manage its members’ rights in the online sector even more efficiently and effectively than before. Platform operators such as YouTube can, in future, obtain a licence from GEMA for a rights package which also includes the sync rights for non-commercial UGC and the [graphic] rights to display lyrics.Through these amendments, GEMA is making an important contribution to strengthening licensing solutions as set out in the EU Directive, which requires platform operators to pay adequate remuneration to rightsholders and protects private uploaders against liability risks.

**Simplified membership model:** The AGM resolved to modernise the provisions for GEMA membership. The previous, complex model with three membership levels was replaced by a simple two-tier structure. As a result, affiliated membership is subsumed into associate membership.

This year’s membership party had to be cancelled. The ceremony for the Fred Jay Award and the presentation of the Radio Culture Award, which usually take place during the membership party and the Main Assembly, will be held at another time.

GEMA represents the copyright of more than 78,000 members (composers, lyricists and music publishers) in Germany, and more than two million copyright owners globally. It is one of the largest societies for authors of musical works in the world.

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