How are the sounds of German produced? How do German speakers stress their words? How have the sounds of German developed over time? This book provides a clear introduction to the sounds of German, designed particularly for English-speaking students of the language. Topics covered include the role of the organs of speech, the state of the vocal cords and the differences between vowels and consonants. The articulation, distribution and spelling and the major variants of each sound are examined in detail. The book also discusses the regional differences between dialects and between the national standard varieties in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Students are encouraged to put theory into practice with end-of-chapter questions. Setting a solid foundation in the description and analysis of German sounds, The Sounds of German will help students improve their pronunciation of the language by introducing them to the basics of its sound system.

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The Sounds of German

Charles V. J. Russ
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Preface

This book was written in response to an invitation by Helen Barton of Cambridge University Press, to write something on German to fit in with the series on the Sounds of . . . . In my treatment of this topic I had to deal with a number of problems apart from the main one of describing the sounds of the language. The controversial theme of addressing what is the 'best' type of German forms the subject of Chapter 1. Discussion of this goes back to Goethe and is further complicated by the political development of Germany: unification in 1871 under Prussian, therefore North German, hegemony and the development of two German states between 1949 and 1989.

Chapter 2 swings back to looking at the basic concepts of articulatory phonetics, more detail being given for vowels in Chapter 3 and Consonants in Chapter 4. I have tried to find a wide range of examples, sometimes resulting in rather obscure words that are translated into English. For the most part I have assumed that the reader will either know sufficient German or have access to a good bilingual dictionary. Having described the articulation of the vowels and consonants I then show how they contrast with each other in a phonological system in Chapter 5. Much of this chapter consists of lists of oppositions exemplified for different phonetic contexts and is intended to be used as a reference resource rather than read straight through.

Like the other major European languages German has an orthography that stretches back to the eighth century. Since the beginning of its written tradition there has been a great variety of letters and their usage. Chapter 6 surveys different orthographic principles that have become important in the development of German and how well they reflect the sound system. In recent years there have been new changes and this will continue. Politics and bureaucracy have locked horns with linguistics!

But segmental sounds that were the subject of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 can be combined together to form larger units such as syllables. In Chapter 7 I look at
what sounds can combine together to form the beginning and end of syllables and in polysyllabic words form medial clusters.

German has never existed apart from other languages and Chapter 8 deals with the different ways other languages have influenced German: introducing sounds that didn’t exist before (nasal vowels) or consonant clusters, for example the Ps in Psalm. Also some clusters that have disappeared because of sound changes have been re-introduced, for example Tw in Tweed and -mb- in Bombe.

Another facet of sounds is that they may alternate with related sounds in different contexts: Tag, but Tage. These alternations can be described by phonological rules. Different types of phonological alternations, such as uumlaut and ablaut, and their origins are the subject of Chapter 9.

In language use sounds are strung together in phrases and sentences. Chapter 10 deals with this aspect of their use, including the array of unstressed ‘weak’ forms. The use of contrastive stress to mark semantic difference is copiously illustrated. Intonation is dealt with rather briefly and the reader is referred to the secondary literature.

German is, however, not simply spoken in Germany but also in Austria and German-speaking Switzerland. The differences of pronunciation form the subject of Chapter 11, in which there are also some samples of dialects that form the basis for the differences in the standard.

All that we have described up to now is the result of long phonological development over the centuries and these changes form the subject matter for Chapter 12, including such iconic changes as the High German Sound Shift. There are some sample texts for Old High German and Middle High German. The illustrations, tables and maps are to make the text more accessible and the CD provides some exemplification of basic sounds in the standard language.

My introduction to phonetics and the sounds of German was in my first term as an undergraduate studying German and Swedish at King’s College, Newcastle, later Newcastle University. Professor Duncan Mennie maintained in his inaugural lecture that I heard in my first term, almost fifty years ago, that ‘the student must be taught practical phonetics on the basis of [their] own spoken English and of German as German is recommended to be pronounced today’. I then taught German phonetics and linguistics at Southampton and York. This book is the fruit of those long years of teaching and publishing on this subject. I am grateful to many linguists who have encouraged me over the years, Professors Gerhard Augst, Friedhelm Debus, Walter Haas, Herbert Penzl, Stefan Sonderegger and Peter Wiesinger. I am also indebted to many German-speaking friends who have, very often unwittingly, acted as informants to my phonetic studies.
I am very grateful to my wife Jenny, who has shared the love of the German language for over forty years and also to our son, Jamie, who is now a head of modern languages, and our daughter-in-law, Kate, who also teaches German. Our other son, Thomas, found that knowledge of German can help in a practical way in the medical world. I am grateful for all their patience and understanding during the production of this book. But it is to our grandson, Oliver, born 30 September 2008, that I would like to dedicate this book. He loves making sounds and maybe some day these will be the sounds of German.
## Abbreviations

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<td>Austrian Standard German</td>
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<td>Central German</td>
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<td>GWDA</td>
<td><em>Großes Wörterbuch der deutschen Aussprache</em></td>
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<td>IPA</td>
<td>International Phonetic Alphabet</td>
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