

Volume 3

2006

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Recommended Citation

Cathcart, Adam (2006) "Music and Politics in Hitler's Germany," *Madison Historical Review*: Vol. 3 , Article 1.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/mhr/vol3/iss1/1>

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Music and Politics in Hitler's Germany

In the years 1933-1945, Hitler's Nazi Party [National Socialist Democratic Workers Party / NSDAP] used music as a tool to forge political unity among Germans. Hitler and the senior NSDAP leadership instinctively grasped that among the arts, music was the most readily laden with ideology, and could inculcate both the youth and the masses with state-serving *Bildung*.¹ Nazi music education, promoted heavily by and among the Hitler Youth, expanded along with concerns of "cultural Bolshevism," and served as a counterpoint to "degenerate music."² Once in power, Hitler moved to purge music and music scholarship of Jews in an effort to promote the unique origin myths of the German *Volk* and further saturate citizens with racial theories. In keeping with origin myths and racialism were the Romantic works of the composer Richard Wagner, a prominent anti-Semite who would assume supreme musical status in Hitler's Germany.³ In such a personalized regime as Hitler's, the dictator's tastes virtually defined official aesthetic norms.⁴

Throughout the period of Hitler's chancellorship, the musical bureaucracy of the NSDAP would struggle to balance the tensions between art music (symbolized by Wagner) and popular demand for music such as jazz. These very tensions were also reflected in the musical policies of the German occupation of Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia, an occupation which simultaneously plundered antique musical treasures and brought about demand for popular fare behind the lines. Ultimately the adoring songs of the soldiers - many of them graduates of the Hitler Youth -- would transform into a dirge. German musical culture and education would thereafter split between the Allied-occupied West and the anti-fascist East. This paper will examine administrative, educational, and artistic aspects of musical policies in the Third Reich.⁵

¹ Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

² John Eckhard, *Musik-Bolschewismus: Die Politisierung der Musik in Deutschland 1918-1938* (Stuttgart & Weimar: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 1994). See also Hans-Erich Volkmann, ed., *Das Russlandbild im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: Boehlau, 1994).

³ Saul Friedländer and Jorn Rüsen, *Richard Wagner im Dritten Reich: Ein Schloss Elmau-Symposion*. (Bremen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000).

⁴ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 2003).

⁵ Erik Levi's *Music in the Third Reich* is essentially aimed at an audience of traditional musicologists. His fifth chapter entitled "Technology Serves Music:

Nazi Musical Hierarchy

The appearance of absolute hierarchy in the National Socialist state was belied by a befuddling proliferation of informal bureaucracies. Justified by vague and turgidly-worded memos from their Führer, Hitler's close associates carved out their own personal spheres of influence.⁶ Hitler's unwillingness to clearly lay out lines of command, combined with his intense personal interest in artistic policy, resulted in an administrative situation in the arts which was exceedingly complicated. In 1933, competing National Socialist entities separately claimed control of all musical theaters in the Reich, proclaimed jurisdiction over all state musicians, pronounced guidelines for publication of musical materials, and sparred over administration of musical culture generally.⁷ A key figure in these struggles, and a key figure in any study of Nazi cultural policy, was Alfred Rosenberg. For all of his failings - from inflating Hitler's trust to vacillating administration in the occupation of the East - Rosenberg undeniably possessed a keen awareness of the power and potency of art forms as a means of ideological struggle.⁸ In response to electoral defeats in 1928, Rosenberg had fashioned a political contingent upon the arts that would attract the German middle class to the NSDAP. He also established the Nazi Society for German Culture [*Nationalsozialistische Gesellschaft für deutsche Kultur*].

In keeping with the administrative entropy that characterized Nazi operations, Rosenberg's Society for German Culture spawned still more organizations. The League of Struggle for German Culture [*Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*], founded in 1930, became an important offshoot. This organization consisted of departments for music, cinema, visual arts, and radio, and effectively served as the forerunner of Goebbels's Ministry for Enlightenment and Propaganda [*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*]. In 1933, Rosenberg's adjutants seized control of German music

Radio and Recording during the Third Reich," which amalgamates popular and traditional music history. Unfortunately, the role of music education is outside the scope of his enquiry. See Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 124-146.

⁶ Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 142.

⁷ Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, p. 15.

⁸ Reinhard Doerries, "Alfred Rosenberg's Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: A Pattern of Cultural Totalitarianism" (M.F.A. thesis, Ohio University, 1960), pp. 57-60.

publications such as *Die Musik*, which thereafter incessantly warned of the deleterious effects of "un-German," (i.e., Bolshevik and Jewish) musical culture. Membership in the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* shot upwards. From a membership of one thousand in 1932, the *Kampfbund* saw more than 20,000 new members join up in the first eight months of Hitler's Chancellorship.⁹ Music thus functioned not only as an emblem of German distinctiveness, but served as a magnet for mass involvement in party activities.¹⁰

Rosenberg was the early architect of Nazi cultural policies, but he was not their ultimate champion. On July 20, 1933, only months after the *Gleichshaltung*, Hitler arrogated far-reaching oversight over state culture to Joseph Goebbels.¹¹ A philologist and failed writer, Goebbels welded the whole of German artistic culture to the aims of the Nazi state.¹² The diminutive Goebbels would have lasting impacts on German musical culture. The ease of Goebbels' first task—the co-opting of arts organizations—had been facilitated by the financial devastation of the preceding Weimar Republic. The Weimer era may have produced some of Germany's greatest cultural figures, but a period of fiscal abundance it was not. Orchestras, the Berlin Philharmonic among them, were actively seeking state support and patronage from any party in 1933.¹³ Guided by Goebbels, the Nazis supplied the Philharmonic with operating funds and in the process armed themselves with a significant tool that conferred the Party additional legitimacy among German elites.

Not only symphony orchestras fell under Nazi sway. On September 22, Goebbels established the *Reichsmusikkammer* (Reichs Chamber of Music). Although Richard Strauss was the president of the RMK, real power lay in the hands of the organization's chair, Peter Raabe, pliant and anti-Semitic musicologist.¹⁴ By 1934, the organization consisted of seven departments for composers,

⁹ Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, pp. 10-16.

¹⁰ Willem deVries, *Sonderstab Musik: Music Confiscation by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg under the Nazi Occupation of Western Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), p. 21.

¹¹ deVries, *Sonderstab Musik*, p. 22.

¹² Theo L. Dorpat, *Wounded Monster: Hitler's Path from Trauma to Malevolence* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002), pp. 206-207.

¹³ Pamela Potter, "The Nazi 'Seizure' of the Berlin Philharmonic, or the Decline of a Bourgeoisie Musical Institution," from *National Socialist Cultural Policy*, Glenn Cuomo, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) pp. 39-66.

¹⁴ Raabe did not enjoy teaching, and was better known for his contributions to the fields of music performance and Nazi cultural policy. Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts*, p. 51.

performing musicians, concert managers and publicists, choral and folk singers, music publishers, music dealers, and music instrument manufacturers, respectively.¹⁵ The high degree of organization indicated also that the RMK was not free to set its own course in the arts. In keeping with his desire to see the Propaganda Ministry become the cultural arbiter for all of society, Goebbels would provide the RMK with direction from above. As scholars would later note, "the Reichsmusikkammer and German musical life were to become a single entity."¹⁶

Although orchestras suffered purges of their Jewish personnel, orchestral programming was not immediately brought into harmony with the anti-Semitic party line. Felix Mendelssohn, Berlin's *wunderkind* of the early 19th century, initially escaped censure, and his celebrated Violin Concerto remained on the programs of the Berlin Philharmonic. Stravinsky, another problematic Jewish genius, enjoyed a 1935 performance of "Firebird" in Berlin.¹⁷ In the autumn of that year, however, the NSDAP cultural apparatus initiated more codified efforts to end the performance of music even marginally associated with Jews. On September 1, 1935, Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry issued a document for internal circulation, outlining a "blacklist" of 108 composers whose works could no longer be played in the lands ruled by the Reich. Of the composers listed, most were Jewish. Goebbels clearly attributed high importance to both classical music and the elimination of the "Judenfrage" within the community of musicians.¹⁸ As if the ouster of scores of composers had not made his case explicit enough, Goebbels orchestrated a public ceremony outside the venerable Leipzig Gewandhaus in order to tear down Mendelssohn's bust. Little would be left to chance in the sphere of high culture.

Music and Youth

With the inception of Nazi rule in Thuringia and across Germany, the NSDAP conspicuously sought legitimacy through the promotion of German music. The National Socialists thus merged their ideology with a deeply ingrained

¹⁵ deVries, *Sonderstab Musik*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Heister and Klein, *Musik und Musikpolitik im faschistischen Deutschland*, pp. 80-81. Quoted in deVries, *Sonderstab Musik*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Potter, "The 'Seizure of the Berlin Philharmonic,'" p. 53-54.

¹⁸ Friedrich Geiger, "Die 'Goebbels-Liste' vom 1. September 1935: Eine Quelle zur Komponistenverfolgung im NS-Staat," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, Albrecht Riethmüller, hrsg. 59 Jahrgang, 2002, Heft 2 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag) s.104-112.

German song culture in a successful bid to assume a leading role in the music education of the youth. Such a perspective is particularly necessary when one considers Germany occupied an elite position at the end of Weimar period as a world leader in the realm of music education. In the free-wheeling mélange that preceded Hitler's accession to the Chancellorship, a number of German music educators and pedagogues had experimented with bold pedagogical approaches that have since become the pillars of Western musical education.¹⁹ The emerging pedagogical canons promoted Carl Orff and J.E. Dalcroze, however, were eventually overwhelmed by the ideologically-driven National Socialist party machinery. Working from the basis of German tradition, German music educators were inevitably co-opted by the state.

Like the music historians whose work is examined by Pamela Potter, German music educators also had to pay obeisance to the skewed racial theories of the National Socialist leadership. While music historians were scrounging selectively for examples of "Musik im Judentum," the task of music educators became similarly wrapped up with the National Socialist cause. One National Socialist music educator, Fritz Jöde, wrote of the important role played by music in Kindergarten, a level he clearly believed should mark the beginning of overt state control over children. Euphemistically, Jöde wrote of Kindergarten as "a conclusive break from children's reliance on their mothers" and the beginning of "going their own way...to fulfill their goals and dreams as adults."²⁰ Kindergarten marked a clear opportunity for the state to sedulously promote Nazism through ideological texts.

Wolfgang Stumme, an educator and editor, became one of the most prolific advocates of National Socialist music education. His 1944 essay "Music in the Hitler Youth" reveals much about the climate for arts education under the Nazis.²¹ Stumme enthusiastically cited over nine hundred musical groups united under the banner of the Hitler Youth, including all manner of youth choirs. To this list, Stumme noted the presence of "orchestras, instrumental groups, groups of wind-playing comrades, music teams, sport and fanfare teams, song-

¹⁹ Carl Orff's *Schulwerk* was among the seminal texts of the time. The Swiss founder of Eurhythmics, Jacques Emile Dalcroze, and the composer and educator Ernest Bloch were also active as educators, composers, and authors in Munich in the 1920s.

²⁰ Fritz Jöde, "Haus und Familie: Die Musik im Kindesalter," from *Musik im Volk: Gegenwartsfragen der Deutschen Musik*, Wolfgang Stumme, ed., (Berlin: Berlin-Lichterfeld Verlag, 1944) p. 79-84.

²¹ Wolfgang Stumme, "Musik im Hitlerjugend," from *Musik im Volk*, pp. 21-31.

playing and puppet shows, and radio groups," all sponsored by the Hitler Youth. Stumme, in a veiled plea for resources in the waning years of the Second World War, linked the expansion of music groups to the war effort:

This high number [of musical groups] has arisen from the progress of the war, the beginning of which saw only one hundred unified [Hitler Youth] music groups. These groups evidence the foundational emotions of gratefulness that Germans hold toward all cultural efforts of the Hitler Youth; they also prove that political leadership and music education are intimately unified. The war has established itself as the father of music practice, and formed an explicit antithesis of the old Latin saying that during the war the muses must have silence. The rich number of Hitler's words [*zahlreich Führerworte*] on the "importance" of art are like the deepest kernels which the youth, in their action, transform into a constant state of fulfillment.²²

Throughout the war effort, Hitler Youth raised flagging morale by singing at community events, hospitals, and factories. In the words of one Hitler Youth executive, performances of the "Hitler Youth Cultural Circle" simultaneously supported the war effort and "expose[d] the boys and girls to our nation's most valuable cultural heritage."²³ German musical traditions thus fused with party-centered patriotism.

The music of the Hitler Youth played an important role in state indoctrination and public morale, and the visual arts thus validated and eulogized the idea of musical youth. A mural by Jürgen Wegener shows the ideal musical setting for the boys of the Hitler Youth. The centerpiece of his triptych shows six boys in a circle, grasping bugle and drum, joining in the anthem entitled "For us the sun never sets."²⁴ Such images were infused with the National Socialist desire to unite the nation through the martial music of the youth. It was not merely by coincidence, after all, that Leni Riefenstahl chose to highlight group musical activities of German youth in her film apotheosis of the Nazi Party, *Triumph of the Will*.

²² Wolfgang Stumme, "Musik im Hitlerjüngend," p.21.

²³ Hitler Youth War Service Plan, 3 February 1940. Quoted in Jeremy Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, Vol. 4, *The German Home Front in World War II* (Exeter, United Kingdom: University of Exeter Press, 1998), pp. 399-400.

²⁴ From the textbook *Neubau des Deutschunterrichts*, ed. Wilhelm Rathrath, Vol. IV: *Das fünfte und sechste Schuljahr: "Vond der Heimat zur Nation"* (Münster: Heinrich Buschmann Verlag, 1936), pp. 238-239. Quoted in George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), pp. 290-291.

Beyond mere imagery, National Socialist musical curricula dipped deep into the stream of German folk tunes, creating a base of easily-retained tunes onto which nationalist texts could be sedulously placed.²⁵ The Nazis thus used the classic totalitarian model of music education first promoted by Plato, while simultaneously drawing upon theories of Martin Luther in order to improve the efficacy of their musical indoctrination.²⁶ In an age proliferating with radios and jazz, however, these techniques would be severely tested. The Nazis were not alone in their efforts to secure the loyalty of the youth. Music was a battleground through which the NSDAP endeavored to wrest control of children's hearts and minds from Germany's established churches.

While maneuvering to separate the youth from the churches, the National Socialist Party also moved to counter secular rivals in the sphere of music education. As became apparent in Vienna, the NSDAP expanded its influence among the youth by establishing *Hitler Jugend* music schools.²⁷ The *Anschluss* of 1938 had not resulted in the immediate Nazi control over the musical apparatus; indeed, Vienna's relative cultural autonomy in the early months of the *Anschluss* was reflected in the independence of all twenty-seven of the city's youth music schools. As part of political consolidation in 1938, the National Socialists opened two branch schools [*Zweigschule für Volk und Jugend*]. The first of these schools was planned for and administered by the Hitler Youth.²⁸ By 1942, the Hitler Youth music school had attracted sufficient numbers of students to close down six of Vienna's non-Nazi youth music schools. Administrator Othmar Steinbauer, the head of the Hitler Youth schools, celebrated this triumph in a statement flecked with Austrian dialect: "Now only the Party is the force for progress. In strenuous cooperation with the community of Vienna, we set out to create a school fully new in form, through which the *Volk*, the youth, the industrious classes, and the artistic

²⁵ Fritz Jöde, "Haus und Familie: Die Musik im Kindesalter," from *Musik im Volk*, p. 85.

²⁶ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 2003).

²⁷ The importance of music to the Nazi mission is all too often overlooked in scholarly treatments of the Hitler Youth. See Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

²⁸ The second school was devoted to the [*Deutsche Volksbildungsrecht*] as part of the Nazi society "Strength through Joy" [*Kraft durch Freude*].

elite will unite and train for music."²⁹ The unity that had eluded Germans during the Weimar period could now be achieved through dedication to a common musical culture.

Epitomizing this common musical culture was folk music, a genre which took on renewed importance in the Nazi period. Although Germans had been drawing inspiration from their linguistic and mythical origins since the early nineteenth century, the Nazis enacted a particularly forceful and self-conscious turn to this product of the *Volk*. A 1934 essay by Fritz Stein, a music professor in Bremen, directly illustrates the connection between Nazi ideology and folk music. Stein's essay "On the Nature of German Music" posited that folk music was the key method of unifying a fragmentary people.³⁰ Moreover, as long as it remained undiluted and true to its German roots, folk music was an essential means of gaining respect abroad. The purity of German music, the sacred symbol of the *Volk*, was also a means of national cultural defense in a hostile world. Stein described the responsibilities of the musician in the Third Reich:

The task of the German guardians of music is to be the intermediaries between art and the *Volk*. Our experience with German musical culture allows us to understand uniquely; we are the defenders of our highest musical inheritance, of its fullness and fulfilling purity. To further this defense, we must win over the *Volk* through orderly plans of education [*Erziehung*]. Our foundational work strives for unity, and we must strive to complete the desired and worthy goal: to create the great musical unity of Germans and to further struggle for the world recognition of German music.³¹

With "world recognition of German music" came the possibility of German music serving as the glue for a new German empire. Indeed, military campaigns into such regions as Poland and Ukraine prompted German musicologists to press hard for folk music education as a means of cementing the consolidation of the newly acquired Eastern territories.³² As the Germans knew from their own experience, political consolidation could be considered complete only when broad masses of

²⁹ "Musikhochschule der Gaustadt Wein," *Volkische Beobachter*, Ausgabe Wien, Nr. 148, 12. August 1938. Quoted in Fred K. Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), p. 251.

³⁰ Professor Fritz Stein, "Vom Wesen deutscher Musik," *Bremer Nachrichten*, 5. Sept 1934. Quoted in Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat*, p. 260.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Pamela Potter, *The Most German of the Arts*, p. 153.

citizens could raise their voices to the same tunes and words without fear of reproach.

National Socialist efforts to guarantee the loyalty of German youth, however, inevitably clashed with ecclesiastical tradition. Up until the forceful emergence of youth movements in the early twentieth century, German churches had held a monopoly on ritualistic rites of passage. A regional report from a National Socialist Party Chancellery in April 1943 outlined several difficulties confronting the party in its competition with the churches. The report stated that although induction ceremonies for new *Hitlerjugend* had followed all guidelines issued by the Propaganda Ministry, progress in recruiting new members remained slow. The report complained:

These [*Hitlerjugend*] ceremonies are still not accorded the importance which they deserve, particularly in those districts where the churches are strong. The fact that a large number of those being inducted had already participated in a corresponding church ceremony was particularly invidious.³³

The report went on to highlight the importance of the "musical background of the ceremonies," criticizing wartime conditions for the lack of "appropriate musical backing."³⁴ Although Germans were feverishly importing pianos appropriated from Jewish homes in France and the East, Allied bombs were steadily consuming musical instruments of all vintages, particularly pipe organs.³⁵ As posited by the educator Stumme, the organ was absolutely necessary for instilling the baptismal "spirit of Nazi celebration" [*"nationalsocialistische Feiargestaltung"*].³⁶ Lacking an appropriate musical backdrop, local Hitler Youth leaders could rely only on group song to create the mystical ambience for the rituals. Ultimately, the combined strength of

³³ Quoted in Jeremy Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, pp. 405-406.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rosenberg was bringing pianos into the country for not only the Hitler Youth, but the Wehrmacht and the SS. See Willem de Vries, *Sonderstab Musik: Music Confiscation by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg under the Nazi Occupation of Western Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996). For further documentation of Nazi looting, see United States National Archives and Records Administration, Office of Strategic Services, *OSS Art Looting Investigation Reports, 1945-1946*, Microfilm Publication # 1782 (Washington, D.C., 2001).

³⁶ Stumme, "Musik im Hitlerjugend," from *Musik im Volk*, p. 30.

Nazi art and music was unable to uproot sacred institutions whose techniques of musical and aesthetic indoctrination had matured over millennia.³⁷

Wagner and National Socialist Culture

In their drive towards legitimacy, the Nazi Party took pre-existing elements of German nationalism and amplified them tremendously. In the Nazi period, therefore, the philosophical underpinnings of musical culture increasingly rested upon Wagnerian ideals. The composer's well-known writings and compositions accorded with Hitler's ideology, and the cult of Wagner grew prodigiously under the Nazis.³⁸ Wagner Societies, already a fixture of bourgeois [*Bürgerlich*] German life, further proliferated across the country. Individuals joined for divergent reasons: some were prompted by Hitler's nationalistic awakening, others by careerist desires, while others desired only the appearance of ideological conformity. Reflecting the prevalence of Wagner as a symbol for German culture, Wehrmacht troops brought scores of the opera *Parsifal* to Paris, placing their Teutonic totems prominently in the looted homes of elite French musicians.³⁹ Even simple German soldiers took great pains to affront French musical culture and thereby validate German national pride.⁴⁰

Among artistic circles, Wagner formed the centerpiece of Germanic musical rhetoric. In an essay in the prominent journal *Die Musik*, critic Walter Abendroth decried recent products of modernism while holding up Wagner as the unattainable paragon of German musical expression:

[Avant-garde music] was a foul, anti-Volk bacillus that denigrated the cultural body through cynicism and calculation.

³⁷ For discussion of Nazi policy toward German churches, see Claudia Koontz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), chapters 7 and 8. For an interesting perspective on the impact of Nazism on postwar churches, see Matthew D. Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Some recent scholarship takes a radical view of this connection, describing Wagner as "the source of his [Hitler's] identity." See Joachim Kohler, *Wagner's Hitler: The Prophet and his Disciple*, Ronald Taylor, translator (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, Inc. [Polity Press], 2000), p. 264.

³⁹ Willem de Vries, *Sonderstab Musik*.

⁴⁰ Such incidents, however, did not prevent German bureaucrats from allowing performances of French music altogether. For an illuminating discussion of opera in Vichy France, see Jane Fulcher, "French Identity in Flux: The Triumph of Honegger's *Antigone*," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36:4 (2006) 649-674.

Thus, we seek a renewed clarity to eliminate this bacillus which has caused much grief. So we come - in the sight of our society, misled classes, and uprooted intellectuals - and return to the agreed music-historical situation: composers (not only Germans but naturally especially Germans) are groaning under the expressive weight of the name and the spirit of Richard Wagner.⁴¹

Wagner, in other words, served as a perpetually-correct model from whom proper inferences could be drawn.

Hitler's personal connection to the cult of Bayreuth made Wagner's image all the more powerful during the *Gleichschaltung*, when moderate statements and apolitical behavior were cause for suspicion.⁴² Hitler's intense interest in Wagner's ideals stemmed from the Austrian's adolescent self-perceptions as a transient artist in Linz and Vienna, cities where he attended many operas as a virtual bottom-feeder in high cultural circles. Some have speculated that Hitler's failings as a young man enflamed his deep desire to use the arts, particularly opera and the visual arts, as a means of propelling him to a position from which he could "save Germany."⁴³ A performance of Wagner's *Rienzi* in 1906 had called forth visions of grandiosity in the young vagrant.⁴⁴ Wagner's musical architecture, his ideals of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and his heroic heralds had influenced Hitler profoundly.⁴⁵ Moreover, Hitler's traits of nationalistic anti-Semitism found validation in the Wagnerian oeuvre.

Hitler's intimate connections to Wagnerian art forms profoundly influenced the artistic direction of state policy in the Third Reich. This influence extended beyond Hitler's idle table talk about the supremacy of German tenors.⁴⁶ Wagner's opera was accorded with the highest respect by the Nazi Germany because Wagner's work celebrated the genesis of the German nation

⁴¹ Walter Abendroth, "Kunstmusik und Volstümlichkeit" in *Die Musik*, März 1934, s. 413-414. Quoted in Joseph Wulf, *Musik im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Gütersloh: Siebert Mohn Verlag, 1963), p. 359.

⁴² Pamela Potter, *The Most German of the Arts*, p. 147.

⁴³ Hitler's sketch books bear this out. See Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*.

⁴⁴ August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), p. 97.

⁴⁵ A recent sourcebook on Nazi Germany accords Wagner a great deal of influence, including an excerpt from the 1850 essay "Judaism in Music." See Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle, eds., *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens, translators, *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944: His Private Conversations* (New York: Enigma Books, 2000).

and exuded an ebullient *volkstum*. Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* was the primary expression of state-sponsored national identity.⁴⁷

Celebrations of Wagner's genius (and, by extension, the creative potency of the German people) were undertaken at tremendous state expense. In December 1938, for example, Hitler's adjutant personally authorized a payment of 150,000 DM for Clemens Kraus to direct *Tannhäuser* and *Arabella* in the Munich State Theater.⁴⁸ Naturally, the NSDAP leadership could justify such expenses with arguments about culture superiority and the need to instill the German *Volk* with the myths of their origins. Hitler's birthday celebrations were typically Wagnerian affairs, although Verdi's operas were sometimes performed in a concession to the alliance with fascist Italy.⁴⁹ Hitler's devotion to the annual festival in Bayreuth was such that in the dark days of late 1944, Hitler insisted that the Wagner festival scheduled for July 1945 proceed as usual.⁵⁰

Hitler ultimately saw the fundamental political gain to be reaped by declaring himself as the paladin of a reinvigorated and authentically German culture. From his position at the pinnacle of the National Socialist hierarchy, Hitler skillfully played the cultural card to buttress his legitimacy. Richard Wagner's music would serve a vital function in this endeavor.

Degenerate Music

Clearly, Nazi officials wished to use music didactically, using opera and symphonic music to heighten the sense of Teutonic identity among the listeners. Yet Nazi musical policy was not immune to popular pressures and public demand. Goebbels and his subordinates could never escape the necessity of providing light entertainment for the masses. This contradiction between high and middlebrow culture became markedly apparent in the wake of military defeats of 1942, which heralded shortages of food and consumer goods, as well as the

⁴⁷ Thomas S. Grey, "Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as National Opera (1868-1945)," from *Music and German National Identity*, Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 78-104.

⁴⁸ This document is held in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz and is reproduced in Fred Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), p. 309. The free flow of largesse for opera performances was one arm of a Nazi musical policy within which leaders used enormous amounts of discretionary funds. When a Japanese violinist toured Germany in 1942, Goebbels personally presented her with a priceless Stradavarius. See Prieberg, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat*, p. 309.

⁵⁰ Kohler, *Wagner's Hitler*, p. 268.

initiation of Allied bombing. While Goebbels wanted to strengthen the backbone of the populace with extravagant paeans to sacrifice, such as the film "Koblenz," German citizens increasingly demanded distraction from the heightening destruction around them. Like filmmaking, opera was expensive, but Nazis were willing to pay the price. Ultimately, however, distracting citizens with popular broadcast music became more important than engaging them in a polemical musical discussion of Germany's racial origins.

American music, particularly jazz, had flooded into Germany in the 1920s. Nationalist responses to this music focused on the negative African origins of jazz while combining fears of American occupation of the Rhineland. "Entarte musik," or "degenerate music," became a frequent target for the Nazis. The Nazis endeavored to steer Germans, particularly the young, away from such degenerative effects. In a directive to his propaganda ministry, Goebbels stated: "Publications should be produced in a popular style aimed at the masses and, in particular, at young people, and should demonstrate that the uncritical adoption of certain American activities, such as jazz music...shows a lack of culture."⁵¹ Extending on this theme, Goebbels instructed his subordinate to refer explicitly to "the grotesque distortions which occur, for example, in the transposition of Bach's music into jazz."⁵² Germanic music, like the *Volk* itself, had to remain pure.

Also dangerous to national morals was the music of the new avant-garde, which had reached a heyday during the free-wheeling Weimar period.⁵³ Individuals like Paul Hindemith, scarred by the experiences of World War One, had freely released their angst, and in so doing, had vented their distaste for the political and artistic order. Under the new life of the National Socialists, potentially dissenting voices were more or less silenced. In a 1934 essay from the newly co-opted NS musical organ, *Die Musik*, a musicologist discussed the orthodox view of the avant-garde:

Everywhere in Europe, we Germans have released the immediate products of cultural decay, which fall under the name "New Music." This "music" devours our *Volk's* living and characteristic art music, directly attacking our healthy origins that presently and by all means long to recover the smallest *Lebensraum*. This "New Music," in

⁵¹ Goebbels' instructions at daily conference, 16 December 1941. Quoted in Jeremy Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, p 485.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

sprit and essence, is antithetical to the people [unvolkstümlich] because it releases every natural dissatisfaction. Worse yet, it both knowingly and unconsciously denigrates the possession of the healthy feelings and desires felt by the strong, self-knowing Volk, whose music is a singular medium of expression, alert and humorous.⁵⁴

Faced with such pabulum in the mid-1930s, cutting-edge composers like Hindemith and Krenek had left Germany.

As for the state at war, clearly the Nazis could not stem the tide toward escapism in German musical life. Strauss' *Arabella*, a vapid three-act comedy set in nineteenth-century Vienna, was the most well known opera of the Nazi period. The opera's libretto is utterly devoid of political content, and there is nothing particularly Germanic about the story, other than the Viennese setting. But given the circumstances, the work functioned as a display of normalcy in a faltering domestic economy.

Far from the tinsel of opera houses in cities such as Berlin, German troops were listening to catchy popular tunes on BBC radio. The Wehrmacht brass complained of this fact to Goebbels, who thereafter conceded that German radio should retool summer programming in favor of relaxing comedy and light entertainment. In a rare bit of self-deprecation, Goebbels characterized the possible opposition to this idea: "We know that there are a number of grumblers who can't bear that idea and believe that one would survive the war better in sackcloth and ashes than with entertainment, cheerfulness and inner calm." Goebbels further remarked that "these things have been carefully thought out and considered from all sides," pre-empting complaints from cultural elites who might perceive an unwelcome shift in the policy.⁵⁵ Even in the prior period, Goebbels had shown some flexibility toward popular music, remarking:

Not all music suits everyone. Therefore that style of entertaining music that is found among the broad masses also has a right to exist, especially in an epoch in which the task of the state leadership must be, next to the difficult concerns that the times bring with them, to

⁵⁴ Walter Abendroth, „Kunstmusik und Volkstümlichkeit“ in *Die Musik*, März 1934, s. 413-414. Quoted in Wulf, *Musik im Dritten Reich*, p. 359.

⁵⁵ Goebbels' statement read at Ministerial Conference, 21 May 1941. Quoted in Jeremy Noakes, p 502.

intervene on behalf of the *Volk's* recuperation, support, and refreshment.⁵⁶

Acknowledging "difficult times," Goebbels could justify sponsorship of music that might otherwise have verged on the "degenerate."

Conclusion

German-speaking lands have always enjoyed a special connection with music. Germanic composers were a dominant creative force in classical music from the eighteenth century. Given this weighty musical inheritance and the preeminent position of classical music in German life, the atrocities of the Second World War stand in stark contradiction to the subtle humanism with which German classical music is imbricated. Indeed, classical music always lies at the crux of a question often posed of the period: "How could the Germans who held Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert so dear inflict such human cruelty as the final solution?" Unfortunately, Hitler's state turned this question on its head. The Nazis wielded the legacy of Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert precisely to justify the defense and expansion of German culture against "cultural Bolshevism." Faced with the question of musical culture in the midst of war, the Nazis may well have replied: "It is precisely because we love Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert that we inflict such cruelty."

⁵⁶„Musikfest woche für das ganze Volk. Dr. Goebbels sprach auf den Düsseldorfer Reichsmuiklagen.“ *Volkische Beobachter*, Nr. 149, 29 Mai 1938, s. 5, quoted in Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat*, p. 279.

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