



Spring 2014

# Banished from the Present: Musicians in Nazi Germany

Thomas G. Bennett  
*Gettysburg College*

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# Banished from the Present: Musicians in Nazi Germany

## **Abstract**

This essay analyzes musical life in the Third Reich. More specifically, the focus will be on the Nazis' regulation of music and the role that musicians themselves played in determining and enforcing cultural coordination. While some evidence extends into the war years (1939-1945), the bulk of the information presented here took place in the pre-war Nazi era (1933-1939). The purpose here is to show that those musicians who worked with and under the Nazis were affected in different ways and had varying levels of agency within the National Socialist system. Some have been branded collaborators, others victims, and this paper will question this binary system of classification. Following a trend of historical revisionism in this field, this paper takes into account that the question of culpability is now less certain than ever.

## **Keywords**

Music, National Socialism, Nazism, Germany, musician, World War II

## **Disciplines**

Cultural History | European History | History | Military History | Music

## **Comments**

History Senior Thesis

# Banished from the Present

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Tom Bennett  
April 21, 2014  
Gettysburg College

## Contents

Introduction	2
Historical Debates over Music in the Third Reich	4
Historical Background: Music in Weimar Germany	7
Richard Strauss: The Apolitical Musician	12
Wilhelm Furtwängler: Defiance or Inactivity?	17
Degenerate Music, Part I: Jews and Atonality	23
Degenerate Music, Part II: Jazz	27
Conclusion: Choice and Culpability	32
Bibliography	35

## Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DTU	<i>Deutsche Tanz- und Unterhaltungssorchester</i> (German Dance and Entertainment Orchestra)
HJ	<i>Hitler-Jugend</i> (Hitler Youth)
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
Promi	<i>Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda</i> (Reich Propaganda Ministry)
RKK	<i>Reichskulturkammer</i> (Reich Culture Chamber)
RMK	<i>Reichsmusikkammer</i> (Reich Music Chamber)
RRG	<i>Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft</i> (Reich Broadcasting Corporation)
RRK	<i>Reichsrundfunkkammer</i> (Reich Radio Chamber)
SA	<i>Sturmabteilungen</i> (Brownshirts/Storm Troopers)
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i> (Security Squad)

## Introduction

When Adolf Hitler and the Nazis seized control in 1933, few could have predicted exactly how effective the new regime would be in reforming all aspects of German life. Nazi power extended throughout the political, social, and cultural spheres, enabling a coordinated authoritarian government to emerge from the ashes of the Weimar government. The success of this authoritarian rule came as a result of the Nazis' determined efforts to control and consolidate every aspect of life within Germany. The immediate effects of Nazi power were felt nationwide, by Germans in all social and cultural spheres. All forms of artistic expression were to be regulated, and those which the state deemed unfit were to be banned.

By the first week of April, 1933, Hitler had replaced members of government at regional and national levels with loyal Nazis and had put in place laws restricting the rights of Jews.<sup>1</sup> Poet and musician Oskar Loerke wrote in his diary on April 10, 1933, in reaction to the Nazis' sweeping reforms:

Hailstorms as I step out into the garden. Loneliness. Almost all my friends are dead, gone, missing. Thinking is forbidden, as is thinking of human beings in humane terms...Should highly skilled artists who have put Germany's name on the map throughout the world be struck dead because some idiosyncratic deviation in their way of thinking does not suit the tastes of the ruling elite?...To live and not to be left to live, it is sheer hell. I gathered my academic files and packed them up today. I cast them aside—that too is a closed chapter in my life. Banished from the present—and if you're wallowing in the bellows of reminiscence, you're not allowed to admit it. Rivulets of joy bleed themselves dry. What is a human being?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 278-279.

<sup>2</sup> The title of this paper, "Banished from the Present," is taken directly from this excerpt of Loerke's diary. The phrase captures a feeling of hopelessness that feels relevant to the situation of musicians within the Third Reich. Oskar Loerke, "Diary Entry," April 10, 1933, first published in *Oskar Loerke: Tagebücher 1903- 1939*, edited by Hermann Kasack (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1955), 270-71, in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 537.

Loerke's grief parallels the feelings of many German musicians at the time of the Nazi takeover. Others managed to overlook the racist discriminatory policies of the new government and saw the end of Weimar Germany as an opportunity for musical resurgence and career enhancement. Famed composer Richard Strauss opened the first meeting of the *Reichsmusikkammer* in February of 1934 praising the new Nazi culture bureau as "the first step on the way to revitalizing the whole fabric of musical life in Germany..."<sup>3</sup> He continued, clearly hopeful of the potential of the NSDAP to bring positive change to Germany:

The fact that so much has changed in Germany, not only politically but also in the realm of culture, since Adolf Hitler's seizure of power—the fact that the National Socialist government was able to breathe life into such an entity as the Reich Music Chamber proves that the New Germany is not inclined to allow artistic developments to more or less simply come as they may and stand on their own, but rather that there is a desire to pursue targeted means and methods for intervention that will provide new impetus for the life of our musical culture.<sup>4</sup>

These two contrasting opinions highlight the extreme emotional responses of musicians toward the Nazi takeover. Some feared and hated the Nazis while others either agreed with their policies or saw the new government as a wellspring of progressive opportunity.

The question, then, deals with the agency of musicians within the cultural systems of Nazi Germany. Were musicians, as Loerke put it, "banished from the present," forbidden to think and create for themselves?<sup>5</sup> Or could musicians further their music as well as their reputations by aligning with the Nazis and giving in to their will? This discussion hinges on the effects of the musical coordination efforts of the *Reichsmusikkammer*. How much control did the RMK wield over musicians, and how much power did musicians themselves hold within the context of the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Strauss, "Speech at the Opening of the Reich Music Chamber," February 13, 1934, first published in *Bücherei der Reichsmusikkammer*, Bd.1, *Kultur-Wirtschaft-Recht* (Berlin, 1934), 9, 10. In *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2013), 529.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Loerke, "Diary Entry."

Nazi cultural state? Cultural coordination programs established by the Nazis placed theoretical absolute control of music with the *Reichsmusikkammer* to distinguish between acceptable and degenerate music and musicians and to enforce the banning of unfit music across Germany. Yet to a certain extent within this structure, the individual musician was responsible for sealing his or her own fate as a victim, an observer, an objector, or a collaborator.<sup>6</sup>

### **Historical Debates over Music in the Third Reich**

This subject gained a foothold in 1963 with Joseph Wulf's *Musik im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation (Music in the Third Reich: A Documentary)*. Though no English translation of this work is available, other sources have recalled its importance as the first noteworthy collection of key archive materials and music sources from the Nazi era.<sup>7</sup> Yet many of the sources were incomplete or distorted and Wulf's annotations held little merit among critics, and his Jewish ancestry likely colored what coherent commentary he provided.

In 1982 Fred K. Prieberg, a German musicologist and author of *Musikpolitik* works, published *Musik im NS-Staat (Music in the Nazi State)*. Again, there remains no available English translation of this book, but from contemporary music historiographies and reviews, it is clear that this work remains a valuable summary of the whole of musical culture and politics in Nazi Germany.<sup>8</sup> A revisionist historian, Prieberg noted an important trend in the post-1945 era of "silence and misinformation" regarding the activities of musicians in Nazi Germany and sought to unravel the notion of the musician as victim.<sup>9</sup> However, according to critics, "he tended to draw his portraits in tones of black and white; his language was often shrill and

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<sup>6</sup> While the reception of music by the German people is undoubtedly an important topic of discussion, this paper will mainly focus on the experience of musicians and the music they produced. The major exception is in regards to jazz within the Third Reich (beginning on page 27).

<sup>7</sup> Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

<sup>8</sup> Kater, *Muse*, vii.

<sup>9</sup> Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), xii.

accusatory; and he...made many mistakes, factual as well as interpretative.”<sup>10</sup> Prieberg’s explanations of musicians’ roles in the Third Reich are seemingly lacking and naïve. A reviewer of his work proclaimed:

Prieberg runs the risk of shifting the responsibility for Nazism’s cultural offenses from the totalitarian state to Germany’s musicians, many of whom had no choice but to conform and obey the dictates of Germany’s leadership. In his effort to make the case of complicity and to confront the German nation with its unpleasant past, Prieberg has leveled a rash accusation.<sup>11</sup>

The complexity of the situation of musicians in Nazi Germany is lost amid Prieberg’s overgeneralized argument.

Since Prieberg’s work there have emerged three major names in the field of music history of Nazi Germany: Michael Meyer, Eric Levi, and Michael H. Kater. Michael Meyer’s *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich* covers much of the same ground as Prieberg. His thesis examines the measures of the *Reichskulturkammer* and the RMK to “demonstrate that musicians were not only victims of totalitarian measures but also accomplices to it.”<sup>12</sup> This allowance of a gray area in terms of culpability and Meyer’s tone throughout creates a more revisionist argument than the early music histories of Wulf and Prieberg. His discussions of folk music and public reception of music provide a more inclusive picture of the topic and give his work a socially relevant tone in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union. But Meyer’s argument is linear and offers few exceptions to Nazi totalitarian governance of music.

A few years after Meyer released his book, British pianist and music journalist Erik Levi released his own history of the topic. But *Music in the Third Reich* fails to live up to its predecessors. While Levi includes passages of useful information on the topic, his sources and

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<sup>10</sup> Kater, *Muse*, vii.

<sup>11</sup> Dana Mack, “Music in Naziland: A review of *Musik im NS-Staat* by Fred K. Prieberg,” *The New Criterion*, Volume 1 (February 1983), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Meyer, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich* (New York: P. Lang, 1991), 4.



arguments can be found almost entirely in the three previous works discussed. Levi's most novel contributions to the topic are in depth examinations of music publishing and recording, topics which, oddly, receive equal treatment to his discussions of Nazi control of opera or degenerate music. Levi's focus on broad structures in the world of music policy during the Nazi reign prevents individual experience from shining through. Michael Kater appropriately proclaims: "It does not even resonate with music, nor does it seem to be populated by real people..."<sup>13</sup>

Kater, then, proves to be the most forward thinking and active music historian among English-speaking critics of musical life in the Third Reich. His history of the topic, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich*, not only scraps the generic title-model of its predecessors, but also attempts to revise the revisionist arguments of Prieberg and Meyer. Kater stresses the importance of a "gray area" when it comes to German musicians of the Nazi period, much like Meyer.<sup>14</sup> He proposes a weaker and less organized picture of the Third Reich in terms of the control of music and the arts. The *Reichsmusikkammer*, in Kater's thesis, becomes less a tool of mass consolidation and coordination and more a method of bringing together individuals with personal agendas. Like Meyer and Prieberg, Kater places individuals at the forefront of the topic and seems married to the idea that music in the Third Reich was not controlled by the Reich, but by musicians themselves who, by their own political and private means, succeeded in gaining support from Nazi officials. The brunt of Kater's argument seems to revolve around the complexity of the situation during the Nazi era, a conclusion which could prevent any kind of conclusion at all. But Kater manages to produce the most convincing historical examination of music in Nazi Germany yet, and succeeds also in grounding the topic in human experience and agenda.

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<sup>13</sup> Kater, *Muse*, viii.

<sup>14</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 6.

There have been a number of particularly relevant titles dedicated to specific facets of music in Nazi Germany. Perhaps most notable is Kater's *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany*.<sup>15</sup> In this work Kater examines the use of jazz as a propaganda tool as well as an artistic form of expression against the Third Reich. Prefacing ideas he would solidify in *The Twisted Muse*, Kater used jazz, commonly thought of as an outlawed form of degenerate music in the Third Reich, to show a trend of social and political reassertion of culture. Two notable biographies of Wilhelm Furtwängler, one written by Prieberg and the other by author and filmmaker Sam H. Shirakawa have argued in defense of the controversial conductor.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in 2003 Michael Kater along with a colleague, Albrecht Riethmüller, compiled and edited a volume of sixteen contemporary articles dealing with a variety of topics within the sphere of German music in the Nazi era.<sup>17</sup> These specialized works fall within the revisionist camp of historical narrative. Each condemns the notion that the Nazi state held authoritarian control over the arts. Indeed, these recent works allow musicians considerable control over the fate of their music, their reputations, and their lives.

### **Historical Background: Music in Weimar Germany**

After World War I Germany faced economic collapse and the humiliation of military defeat. The Treaty of Versailles caused a rift within the Weimar republic and led soldiers and military men to revolt against the government. Allied forces were pressuring the government to demilitarize and disband forces across the country, and isolated pockets of soldiers felt unappreciated and humiliated, resulting in a series of conspiracies intended to overthrow the

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<sup>15</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Fred K. Prieberg, *Trial of Strength: Wilhelm Furtwängler in the Third Reich*, translated by Christopher Dolan (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994) and Sam H. Shirakawa, *The Devil's Music Master: The Controversial Life and Career of Wilhelm Furtwängler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller, *Music and Nazism: Art Under Tyranny, 1933-1945* (Laaber, Germany: Laaber, 2003).

republic. These acts proved the instability of the post-war government in Germany and established a lasting distrust between the army and the government. Matters of economics made the situation in Germany increasingly worse. Massive inflation that had originated during the war became evident in peacetime. The combination of inflation and Allied obligations established by the Versailles Treaty caused an economic collapse in Germany. Material wealth diminished, living conditions plummeted, and, most importantly, faith in the Weimar Republic shrank among soldiers and civilians alike.<sup>18</sup>

Musical life in Germany during the 1920s was an eclectic mix of nineteenth century classical traditions and new reactionary, experimental forms of composition. The post-war experience and economic situation caused many young composers to reject musical conservatism. The movement against which they rebelled, the “late-romantic neo-Wagnerian movement,” was headed by Hans Pfitzner.<sup>19</sup> Musical conservatives viewed the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century as the strongest era in German history and held the music from this period as the greatest ever written. Composers like Richard Wagner and Carl Maria von Weber were glorified by what became akin to “a nationalistic cult of the musician.”<sup>20</sup> Pfitzner condemned reactionary music and, in his 1920 essay “Die neue Aesthetik der musikalischen Impotenz. Ein Verwesungssymptom?” (“The New Aesthetic of Musical Impotence—A Symptom of Decay?”) he described a parallel between modern forms of musical expression and German national disintegration. Atonality, Pfitzner declared, was the result of Jewish and bolshevist influences.<sup>21</sup> Pfitzner’s defensive stance urged conservation and protection of German interests over all else. But his insistence upon paralleling atonality and Jewish influence served as a bridge between

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<sup>18</sup> Fischer, *Nazi Germany*, 65-67.

<sup>19</sup> Levi, *Music*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Meyer, *Politics*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Levi, *Music*, 4.

Wagnerian musical ideals of the nineteenth century and those of the *Reichsmusikkammer* of the Nazis.

No complete study of the Third Reich in general is complete without mention of Wagner and his effects on a young Adolf Hitler. It is often too easy to equate Wagner with the Nazi Party. It is important that the two be kept apart, as separate identities from separate eras. With that in mind, it is still possible to draw connections between Hitler's regime and the works and ideals of his idol. Musically, however, Wagner's importance to the conservative camp in the years before the Nazi seizure of power cannot be disputed. His music was a signal of German nationalism, of the Reich, and of cultural recognition and superiority.<sup>22</sup> Symphony orchestras and opera became synonymous with nineteenth-century Germany. Yet it was the cohesion of music and ideology that cemented Wagner's importance in the early twentieth century, for he had established music as a political force, which could, conceivably, complement the totalitarian structures of a dictatorship. Wagner became a facet of political and cultural conservatism, and by the mid-1920s, as the Nazi Party grew in influence and numbers, the radical idealism of neo-Wagnerian conservatives gained cohesion and a broader platform. Purity became the goal of composers like Pfitzner, and the link between racial purity and tonal purity was often paralleled. Even famed composer Richard Strauss, a rival of Pfitzner, held Wagnerian aesthetics and nationalism as the fundamental victories in German cultural history.<sup>23</sup>

Popular musical discourse praises German music of the 1920s as novel and spontaneous, experimentations in the structure of musical tone and harmony. But in order to understand the importance of this new music, it must be seen within the context of the musical conservatism that was gaining speed in the wake of the First World War. Composers began to incorporate

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<sup>22</sup> Meyer, *Politics*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Levi, *Music*, 3 and Strauss, "Speech."

experimental ideas of tone and harmony into their pieces in ways which helped them to understand or express their experiences during and after the war. New musical expressions were a result of the social, political, and economic matters that rocked the Weimar Republic. But in turn, modernity became a reaction against the constraining attitudes of musical conservatism. The growing reactionary movement among younger composers evolved from what is known as the Second Viennese School.<sup>24</sup> This collection of musicians, pupils of Jewish composer Arnold Schoenberg, was active throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Stylistically, Schoenberg began experimenting with tones and changing scale progressions. He became the first major composer to experiment with atonality and twelve-tone composition. Schoenberg moved to Berlin in 1925 and his experimentation gained a foothold among young German composers seeking musical novelty and meaning beyond what neo-Wagnerians deemed appropriate.<sup>25</sup>

The musical period of Germany in the 1920s, often synonymous with progressivism and modernity was, in reality, perhaps more characterized by the clash between two growing and conflicting schools of compositional technique. Nationalism and idealization of the German people, the *Volk*, were aspects that conservatives felt were lacking in modern music. Many of Wagner's works are concerned with identity in the context of global ethnic relations. Issues of race and blood tie characters together in his operas and the *Volk* is seen to be the purist example of human decency and happiness.<sup>26</sup> In modernist works, like those of Schoenberg or Paul Hindemith, identity is not defined by race or ethnicity, but rather by individuality and self-expression. In the modernist camp, musical expression relies almost entirely on the choices of the composer. While conservative, neo-Wagnerian composition was constrained by issues of

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<sup>24</sup> The First Viennese School had been the term used to denote the trio of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven who all studied in the Austrian capital during the eighteenth century. "Second Viennese School," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press), accessed April 18, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Shirakawa, *Music Master*, 133.

harmony and tonal consonance, modernist, reactionary music became the ultimate expression of compositional freedom. Tonal dissonance was no longer avoided. Rather, dissonance became a means of expressing human emotions like fear and confusion. Musical composition was becoming more abstract, just as the ideology surrounding that music was becoming more accepting, breaking from Wagnerian views of race, ethnicity, and German superiority.

While the forces of progressive and conservative music battled in ideology and composition, there was a small, but growing popular music scene in Germany before the Nazi takeover. It would be unwise to omit a discussion of jazz and jazz musicians from an inclusive musical analysis of German history. As in America, cities were hotspots for jazz culture. Berlin, primarily, was where jazz and light entertainment flourished. Jazz was introduced into German culture after the First World War, likely by Germans who had heard it in POW camps and by the Allied occupation force.<sup>27</sup> Soon musically proficient Germans began to pick up on the syncopated style and dissonant voicings of American jazz. Jazz bands and ensembles began to grow from young musicians in the post-war cities of Germany. Much of their influence came from American and British musicians who were in Germany at the time. Michael Danzi was an American guitarist and banjoist who stayed in Germany from 1924 until the war broke out in 1939. His memoir allows a unique look at the politicization and culture of jazz in Germany. Following trends in the realm of high art, this popular form of contemporary musical expression suffered under Nazi rule, billed as *entartete music*, degenerate music from the American Negro and his Jewish collaborators, and banned by the RMK.<sup>28</sup> However, the popular potential of this

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<sup>27</sup> Kater, *Drummers*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, 32.

music as a tool of propaganda was not lost on Joseph Goebbels, who would, through his control of the RMK and the *Reichsrundfunkkammer*, develop German-jazz orchestras.<sup>29</sup>

This was the state of German music in 1933 when the Nazis came to power. Within the year Hitler had established the *Reichskulturkammer* to control all means of cultural expression within the Third Reich. Nazi synchronization of cultural structures became known by the term *Gleichschaltung*, a term derived from “a device that allows electric current to flow in only one direction, thus changing alternating into direct current.”<sup>30</sup> In theory, Nazi cultural coordination policies were meant to keep any and all forms of expression aligned with Party ideology. This meant repression of expressions labeled as degenerate and regulation of any forms permitted to remain. This called for the introduction of large umbrella organizations for the purpose of mass control. With Hitler’s appointment of Joseph Goebbels as head of the *Reichskulturkammer*, the process of cultural coordination began.

### **Richard Strauss: The Apolitical Musician**

Richard Strauss had gained international recognition in the late nineteenth century for his symphonic interpretations of poetry, including *Don Quixote*, *Death and Transfiguration*, and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Strauss was in his late 70s but was still actively composing. Goebbels saw the benefit of Strauss’ international fame and, as president of the RKK convinced the composer to agree to preside over the music division of the Nazi department of culture.<sup>31</sup> Here lies an important and controversial episode in the early history of music in the Third Reich. Why did Strauss agree to take such a position within the Nazi state? Strauss thought of himself as an apolitical musician, concerned only with furthering

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 127. Goebbels played classical piano recreationally and loved the concert atmosphere of Berlin. Kater, *Drummers*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Fischer, *Nazi Germany*, 278.

<sup>31</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 17.

his own art. The new Nazi regime could do little to bribe the already wealthy composer, and he was already a famous name around the world. The political and cultural power of the RKK did not intimidate Strauss into accepting the appointment. Rather, Strauss was fed up with the conditions of music in the Weimar Republic. Musicians were underpaid and had little control over compositional rights. Strauss believed that the Nazi regime might put into place structures that would benefit composers and musicians.



From left to right: Richard Strauss, Heinz Drewes (Director/Conductor of the *Reichsmusikkammer*), and Joseph Goebbels, early 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Despite the cordiality of Strauss and Goebbels in this image, the two harbored distaste for each other. Strauss scorned Goebbels in private, calling him, among other things, a “pipsqueak.”<sup>33</sup> Goebbels wrote of Strauss in his diary: “Unfortunately we still need him, but one day we shall have our own music and then we shall have no further need of this decadent neurotic.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Richard Strauss – Heinz Drewes – Joseph Goebbels,” *Felix Draeske Webpages* (Sand Lake, New York: International Draeske Society/NA). [www.draeske.org](http://www.draeske.org). Accessed April 18, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Ralf Georg Reuth, *Goebbels* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 402.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Kennedy, *Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 293.



Strauss' agenda for musical rights and compensation allied him with a totalitarian regime, and that regime would, within three years, track his correspondence and ultimately remove him from office. Was Strauss naïve in his expectations or was the outcome of his appointment unfathomable in 1933? Had political motivations tainted an otherwise apolitical artist? Strauss did not conform to Nazi standards of ethnic ideology. He believed that art and music should not conform to standards of race and nationality. Strauss was not willing to acknowledge the “Jewish Question” and could not stomach the banning of music for ethnic reasons. For instance, during the so-called “Hindemith affair” of 1934, Strauss urged the council of the RMK not to ostracize Paul Hindemith or ban his opera *Mathis der Maler*.<sup>35</sup> But by allying himself with Goebbels and the Nazis, had he immediately forfeited the right to these beliefs?

As president of the RMK, Strauss was expected to conform to Nazi standards, both musically and socially. Strauss pressed for a fundamental improvement of music education within the Nazi system, convinced that the “mindless belching-out of ‘patriotic...battle songs’ in the schools and Hitler Youth associations” would strain and ruin the voices of adolescent males.<sup>36</sup> But ultimately, these concerns went unnoticed by Goebbels and the RKK. Perhaps had he served for a longer period of time, Strauss could have achieved more lasting musical reform. The incident by which Strauss was dismissed as head of the RMK two years after he was appointed its president is important insofar as it can determine whether or not he ever firmly grasped the extent of Nazi coordination.

The case of Richard Strauss and Stefan Zweig is a controversial chapter in the context of music in the Third Reich. Strauss brought on Zweig, a Jewish immigrant from Austria, as his librettist in 1932 and encountered criticism from Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg, head of the

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<sup>35</sup> The Hindemith affair will be discussed in further detail in the next section on Wilhelm Furtwängler (see pages 19-21). Kater *Muse*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 206.

*Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Militant League for German Culture) when their first work together, *Die schweigsame Frau*, was to be premiered in the summer of 1935.<sup>37</sup> In July of that year, Strauss received in the mail “Dr. Goebbels approval of the request to relieve [him] of [his] position as president of the Reich Music Chamber,” which, at Goebbels command, he signed and returned, thus technically resigning of his own accord. Ostensibly Strauss had retired from his position due to “old age.”<sup>38</sup> In reality, his forced removal was the result of a letter intercepted by the Gestapo, correspondence between the composer and his Jewish librettist.

*Die schweigsame Frau* premiered in Dresden early in the month. Strauss insisted that Zweig’s name be included on the billing, contradicting Nazi law. Goebbels and Hitler refused to attend the premier and prohibited any subsequent performances. Disgusted and perhaps embarrassed, Strauss sent Zweig a letter criticizing Nazi race and ethnicity policies. Within the letter Strauss protested the notion of politicized, nationalistic music: “Do you believe I am ever, in any of my actions, guided by the thought that I am ‘German’? Do you suppose Mozart was consciously ‘Aryan’ when he composed? I recognize only two types of people: those who have talent and those who have none.”<sup>39</sup> The Gestapo dispatched the letter to Goebbels and within the week Strauss had signed his own letter of resignation.

Ironically, the government which Richard Strauss had believed would benefit his apolitical, music-centric ideals was the same force which effectively removed him from musical and social life for the next decade. In the aftermath of the affair Strauss sent a letter to Hitler himself, a weak attempt to retain some semblance of the Führer’s respect and to possibly push

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<sup>37</sup> A librettist is a writer of libretto, the lyrical text of an opera. Kater, *Muse*, 206.

<sup>38</sup> Homer Pearson, *Music at War* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1943), 109.

<sup>39</sup> Kennedy, *Strauss*, 297.

for further performances of *Die schweigsame Frau*.<sup>40</sup> Among drawn out portions of flattery and flowery exhalations of Herr Hitler, Strauss includes this passage within the letter:

The letter in question includes three passages that have been called into question and interpreted to mean that I have little sympathy for anti-Semitism or understanding of the concept of the *Volk* community or of the significance of my position as president of the Reich music Chamber...In light of the series of works that I have created as a German composer in the course of my lifetime, I sincerely would hope that I need not provide any further assurance that this letter and all its quickly thrown together statements cannot be seen as a characteristic representation of my ideology or my true outlook.<sup>41</sup>

This last ditch effort of the composer to gain the good graces of the Führer may indicate a loose, wavering moral code. Strauss opposed anti-Semitic legislation and concerned himself chiefly with musical talent, paying little or no mind to racial or ethnic concerns. Yet in the wake of his dismissal the composer was willing to concede to the Nazis and their ideology. Ironically still, Strauss never received a reply from Hitler, a humiliating blow to the already damaged composer.

Strauss was replaced by Peter Raabe, a music educator and puppet of Joseph Goebbels, who had no second thoughts about banning music or musicians at the whim of party officials.<sup>42</sup> After the Stefan Zweig affair, Strauss retired from the forefront of German musical life for a few years, never legally ostracized but essentially a *persona non grata* within the Nazi state. His operas were often suppressed, and until the Summer Olympics of 1936 in Berlin, Strauss spent most of his time away from the stage. He managed to gain some favor of Goebbels for his *Olympische Hymne*, performed at the games, and nearly won the good graces of the Nazis again.<sup>43</sup> Both Goebbels and Hitler loved Strauss' compositions, regardless of how they felt

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<sup>40</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 208.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Strauss, "Letter to Adolf Hitler," July 13, 1935, first published in Joseph Wulf, ed., *Musik im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1983), 198, 199. In *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 530.

<sup>42</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

about the man and his politics.<sup>44</sup> But after the *Kristallnacht* of 1938, defamatory remarks about the composer picked up again, concerning the Stefan Zweig affair as well as Strauss' Jewish daughter-in-law Alice. Harassment of Strauss and his family continued throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s. In 1941 Strauss moved his family to their home in Vienna, which effectively became a prison for the composer.<sup>45</sup>

Strauss had been an ardent supporter of Nazi rule in 1933, despite disagreeing with their policies on ethnic relations. By the end of the war he had been in and out of Nazi favor more times than he could count: Praised for his compositions one month, denounced for harboring Jewish family members the next; tolerated, at best, by Hitler and Goebbels, yet perpetually harassed by police and the public. Strauss had tried to use his role in the RMK to his advantage, to promote music education and to further composer's copyright laws. But this apolitical composer was to be "[used and abused]" by the Nazis, ultimately becoming a poster-child for the musician-as-victim.<sup>46</sup> Strauss was certainly a victim of the regime, but his initial motivations and actions must not go unnoticed.

### **Wilhelm Furtwängler: Defiant Objector or Party Loyalist?**

In Wilhelm Furtwängler's *Notebooks: 1924-1954*, a collection of personal writings on music, philosophy, and life, the first direct mention of National Socialism occurs in the first entry of the year 1945, written after the Nazis had surrendered and after this most famous German conductor of the twentieth century had moved to Switzerland:

Of course it is my position that I really know National Socialism and not only from the outside...but am among those who experienced it over a period of twelve years. I know how many people there were, for example, who had to become party members in order to be able to exist at all. I know what the system of force and terror was really able and bound to achieve...And I know how far removed the German [population] really was

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>45</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 210.

<sup>46</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 209.

from this terrible phenomenon to which it had given birth. Otherwise I would not have stayed in Germany. My remaining there is the best proof of the fact that there is still another Germany, and whoever denies this should at least wait until this other Germany is able to speak once more. That people do not believe in its existence is due to the fact that National Socialism has silenced it thoroughly.<sup>47</sup>

Furtwängler may be the most controversial figure in the history of music in Nazi Germany. He has been portrayed as a “saintly musician (with human little foibles), proud but shy...” and as a conscious observer who, as the war dragged on, aligned himself more and more with the Nazi Party.<sup>48</sup> His own recollections—and indeed a myriad of historical arguments in the last fifty years—have painted the conductor as an example of the defiant musician, working within the Nazi system to fight to keep the idea of Germany alive. Furtwängler acknowledged the enormity of Nazi rule, but stayed within Germany because he believed that to be the only way of preserving the “secret, genuine Germany” from being completely absorbed by the Third Reich.<sup>49</sup> Furtwängler did indeed stick up for musicians’ rights in the first years of Nazi rule. Yet it is odd that while Richard Strauss was shut up in his Austrian home, under constant threat of harassment by Nazi police forces, Furtwängler was being offered a lakeside villa and became close with both Goebbels and Hitler.<sup>50</sup>

Furtwängler may not have been as dedicated to the preservation of Germany as he let on in his *Notebooks*, but in the first few years of the Third Reich he paralleled—or perhaps overshadowed—Strauss’ efforts at securing musicians’ rights and promoting ethnic equality within the music industry. Even before the RMK was established, Goebbels and Promi (Reich Propaganda Ministry) had taken control of all symphony orchestras within Germany. As conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, Furtwängler was quickly consumed by Nazi influence,

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<sup>47</sup> Wilhelm Furtwängler, *Notebooks, 1924-1954*, translated by Shaun Whiteside (New York: Quartet, 1989), 155.

<sup>48</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 195, 202.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 210, 201.

forced to adhere to party standards. The cultural purges of 1933-1934 resulted in the forced emigration or imprisonment of thousands of Jewish musicians and their families. Furtwängler used his influence as an esteemed conductor to help opera singer Frida Leider find work in Germany and abroad.<sup>51</sup> Furtwängler also helped other Jewish musicians get visas for emigration during the purges. He could have joined the masses of German musicians fleeing the new regime, but instead insisted on staying. He became a musical consultant to the Nazis and vice president of the *Reichsmusikkammer*, serving under and often representing Richard Strauss.<sup>52</sup>

*(Archives de l'Opéra).*



*Furtwaengler en répétition avec l'Orchestre de l'Opéra, le 2 juin 1934.*

*Photo : X.*

Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting in Paris, 1934.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Shirakawa, *Music Master*, 143.

<sup>52</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 199.

<sup>53</sup> "1934, Paris," Société Wilhelm Furtwängler, [www.furtwangler.org](http://www.furtwangler.org), accessed April 18, 2014.

In 1934, Furtwängler programmed Paul Hindemith's newest opera, *Mathis der Maler*, for the summer season of the *Staatsoper* (Berlin State Opera). Hindemith was a talented young Aryan composer, but did not live up to Hitler's cultural and political ideals. His composing style was called bolshevist and his Jewish wife and lack of admiration for the regime earned the man and his music the epithet of degenerate.<sup>54</sup> Hindemith was a modernist who represented a younger generation of composers not easily swayed by party politics.<sup>55</sup> Furtwängler did not care whether or not Hitler and the Nazis liked Hindemith or his music, and his decision to program the composer's new opera infuriated Nazi officials. Herman Göring removed *Mathis der Maler* from the *Staatsoper* program schedule, and an enraged Furtwängler demanded to speak with Hitler himself, the only one with authority to approve the continuation of the opera.<sup>56</sup>

What followed might suggest a defiant Furtwängler, promoting art for art's sake despite any personal or political repercussions. And indeed, this may have been Furtwängler's finest, boldest hour. He took the matter personally, not necessarily as a defense of the music, but as a matter of musicians' rights to perform:

When I stood up for Hindemith, I actually did not do so as a demonstration for his art—its ultimate worth still is very much up in the air and his mode of making music far removed from my own. Rather, as a matter of principle, I wanted the public, the nation at large, to be provided with an opportunity to pass judgment *by themselves*.<sup>57</sup>

On November 25, 1934 he published an article called "The Hindemith Case" in which he defended the composer and even compared him to Richard Strauss, who was still in Hitler's good graces as a Nazi-sanctioned composer.<sup>58</sup> Furtwängler went on that same day to conduct the Berlin *Staatsoper* in a production of Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, further twisting the

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<sup>54</sup> Hitler himself, as early as 1929, had called Hindemith's work degenerate. Shirakawa, *Music Master*, 181.

<sup>55</sup> Meyer, *Politics*, 349.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 199.

<sup>58</sup> Shirakawa, *Music Master*, 183.

knife in the back of Hitler's government. When Furtwängler stepped into the pit before the performance, he was met by the thunderous applause of Berlin's cultural elite (some of them ardent anti-Nazis) who filled the theater. Göring, in attendance, was outraged by the support for Furtwängler and called Hitler, proclaiming that the conductor was "endangering the authority of the government."<sup>59</sup> The Nazis openly condemned Furtwängler and, angered by the constant ridicule, the conductor resigned from his positions as vice president of the RMK and conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. Hindemith left Germany for America and the Berlin premier of *Mathis der Maler* never occurred.<sup>60</sup> This might have been a good time for Furtwängler to leave Germany, at odds with the regime and without the support of the RMK, but again he remained.

Had Furtwängler's story ended there, he might very well be considered that "saintly musician" of Ronald Harwood's play *Taking Sides*.<sup>61</sup> But over the course of the next decade, Furtwängler would actively and deliberately seek to ally himself once again with the Nazis. He met with Goebbels early in 1935 and the two smoothed over the Hindemith affair. Furtwängler published a retraction of the Hindemith article, apologizing for any political consequences it may have had and claiming that the piece had been written solely with musical intentions in mind. His position had never been to interfere with Hitler and Goebbels' goals or the "direction of cultural policy," he said.<sup>62</sup>

Regaining respect of Goebbels and Hitler, Furtwängler's career again began to pick up in 1935. He was conducting the Berlin Philharmonic more often and served as a guest conductor for the *Staatsoper*. His performances became hugely popular with Nazi elite in Berlin when Hitler and his entourage were in attendance. Many of Furtwängler's Berlin performances became

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<sup>59</sup> Shirakawa, *Music Master*, 183.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>61</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 195.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.



symbols of Nazi culture and prestige, cementing his role as a propaganda asset. He conducted Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* at the Nazi rally which instituted the Nuremberg Race Laws in September 1935.<sup>63</sup> Such performances and loyalties show a clear shift in Furtwängler's ethics, highlighting how far he had come since helping Jewish musicians emigrate in 1933 and defending Hindemith in 1934.

For the next decade Furtwängler served the Nazis, declining the position of chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic in 1936 for moral and practical reasons.<sup>64</sup> He continued to conduct within Germany, headlining the popular Bayreuth Festival in 1936 and 1937 as well as conducting a special performance for the Berlin *Hitler-Jugend* (Hitler Youth) early in 1938. During the war he spent time touring with the Philharmonic throughout Nazi occupied Europe, playing in Hungary, Switzerland, and Sweden. After the war he was tried and acquitted as a Nazi party official during the Nuremberg trials. He continued to conduct until his death in 1954, and biographers have tried, in the years since, to exonerate the controversial life of Wilhelm Furtwängler. But despite these attempts, evidence clearly shows that after 1934 Furtwängler consistently and deliberately aligned himself with the Nazis. Regardless of whether or not he ever became a believer in Nazi ideology, by the time the Nazis invaded Poland he was well respected and admired by both Goebbels and Hitler. Goebbels noted that Furtwängler was "overflowing with national enthusiasm," and made a point of observing later in the war that "the tougher things become, the closer he moves to our regime."<sup>65</sup> Such praise from the Reich Culture Minister is evidence enough to conclude that Furtwängler's role in Nazi Germany was far from that of an objector or of a victim.

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<sup>63</sup> *Die Meistersinger (The Master-Singers of Nuremberg)* was deemed by Hitler the "representative festive opera of the Nuremberg party rally." Kater, *Muse*, 200.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

## Degenerate Music, Part I: Jews and Atonality

We have seen how Nazi policies enforced by the Third Reich interrupted the lives of perhaps the two most famous German musicians of the period. Both Strauss and Furtwängler had achieved fame and fortune well before 1933. Both were members of the German cultural elite and, despite varied instances of disharmony with Nazi policies, both worked in a genre of music that was Nazi-sanctioned. But music within Germany during the 1930s included more than symphony, opera, and patriotic marches like the *Horst Wessel Lied*.<sup>66</sup> German musicians dabbled in modernist structures that broke from the harmonious tonality of romantic music. Influences from across Europe and across the globe had been building within German cities in the early twentieth century, so that musical forms like jazz had a foothold among the masses of German teens and young adults. These types of music were detested by Hitler, and therefore by the Nazi party as a whole and were thus labeled *entartete music*—degenerate music.

Atonal modernist music was often associated with Jewish influence, a connection linked to the work of Arnold Schoenberg and the Second Vienna School of the 1920s. Nazi racial ideologies developed a dichotomy between German music and Jewish music. “Jewry and German musics are opposites, by their very nature they exist in gross contradistinction to each other,” noted Goebbels.<sup>67</sup> But Jewish music existed outside of the modernist realm, and indeed within much of the romantic, classically influenced music the Nazis so loved. As we have seen, Jewish influence appeared in the compositions of Strauss and the collaborations of Furtwängler. The RMK and the Nazis struggled with a definition of Jewish music with little success before concluding that it was “everything German music was not.”<sup>68</sup> The task of defining Jewish music later fell to Nazi-sanctioned musicologists, notably Hans Joachim Moser. Replacing prominent

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<sup>66</sup> The *Horst Wessel Lied* was the beloved marching song of the SA. Kater, *Muse*, 153.

<sup>67</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 76.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

music scholars like Alfred Einstein and Curt Sachs who were silenced or compelled to emigrate by the Nazi regime, Moser compiled a nationalistic, anti-Semitic music dictionary, the *Dictionary of Jews in Music*.<sup>69</sup> Racial-music research became a popular practice of musicologists and findings were used to support Nazi ethnicity laws. As was a common stereotype perpetuated by the Nazis, Jewish musicians were said to be motivated only by money rather than by national interest or a loving respect of their art. Jewish musicians, the Nazis said, could not contribute anything creative or original, but compensated through imitation and occasionally technical supremacy. Jewish composers like Felix Mendelssohn, Gustav Mahler, and even Schoenberg, in his earlier years, were said to have plagiarized genuine German composers, despite their international association with German musical tradition.<sup>70</sup>

The racialization of music in the early years of the Third Reich resulted in the purges which led to Furtwängler's initial disapproval of the Nazi state. Consequently, thousands of Jewish musicians were exiled. Legally, anti-Semitic legislation was implemented in November of 1933, stipulating that members of RKK subdivisions would be banned if they did not embody "reliability and sustainability."<sup>71</sup> Members of the RMK were systematically screened and the undesirables were determined and removed. Identifying and removing Jewish influence in music, particularly in clubs and small venues within Germany's cities, was tasked to a special RMK police force made up of Nazi-supporting musicians.<sup>72</sup> As structures were put into place signaling the opening of the Holocaust, Jewish musicians faced the same fates as other Jews. Jewish musicians were forced into ghettos and, eventually, into concentration camps. Temporarily, in the mid-1930s before mass emigration and extermination occurred, Jewish musicians were

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<sup>69</sup> Albrecht Dümling and Peter Girth, *Entartete Musik: Banned by the Nazis* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, 1991), 5.

<sup>70</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 77.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

allowed to practice their art within the *Jüdischer Kulturbund* (Jewish Culture League).<sup>73</sup> In 1938, in the wake of the Nuremberg laws and *Kristallnacht*, both Jewish as well as defamed non-Jewish musicians left the country in waves. All in all, however, a total of only 278,000 German Jews were able to leave Germany.<sup>74</sup> Among the 11 million people who died in Nazi controlled concentration camps were Czech composer Viktor Ullmann, an accomplished student of Arnold Schoenberg, and opera composers Leon Jessel and Richard Fall.<sup>75</sup>



Arnold Schoenberg<sup>76</sup>

Beyond the ethnic and political implications of nationalism and patriotism, Nazi ideology stated that racial elements accounted for particular musical aesthetics, some desirable, others undesirable. Austrian composer Gottfried von Einem remarked that the musical ideal of the Nazis was “the opposite of Schoenberg—music in C major.”<sup>77</sup> While this may be a shallow conclusion, failing to take into account the various, often contradictory elements of Nazi musical

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<sup>73</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 97.

<sup>74</sup> Dümling and Girth, *Entartete Musik*, 51-52.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>76</sup> “Arnold Schoenberg (Composer/Arranger),” Bach Cantatas Website, last modified July 27, 2011. [www.bach-cantatas.com](http://www.bach-cantatas.com), accessed April 18, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 177.

aesthetic, the implication remains fairly reliable. Romantic music was the ideal, and the largely consonant, pleasing chords of Wagner's symphonies were the epitome of musical expression. By 1938 there was an established exhibition dedicated to showcasing degenerate music. The most reviled and feared form of musical aesthetic was atonality. In Moser's music dictionary, atonality was described as

a musical style that has abandoned any point of reference to a functional tonal center in the overall harmonic fabric of composition; strictly speaking, the artistic quality cannot be achieved using this method for longer intervals because the listener will always tend by default to seek and underlying logical order to the music...The intellectual history of the atonal style can be traced to its attempt at a radical, constructivist liberation from the oppressive legacy of the romantic period, with all the demands it placed on musical content, and at the same time as the culmination of an intensity of dissonance that had increased consistently with each passing epoch, as a reflection devastating postwar experiences of revolution and inflation, as a symptom of cultural decay...Fortunately, already now most of these symptoms have been overcome through a return to basic tonalities...Central European representatives of atonal style were Arnold [Schoenberg] and his protégés Anton von Webern, Alban Berg, A. Hába, and with some reservations and only momentarily, P. Hindemith, Bartók, Stravinsky.<sup>78</sup>

Despite his romantic-influenced early music, Schoenberg was synonymous with atonality. His teaching and experimentation as the leader of the Second Viennese School secured his place as a degenerate musician to the Nazis. He managed to immigrate to the United States in 1934, but his music, as well as those of other modernist, atonal composers, were consistently displayed and condemned as unworthy. At the 1938 degenerate music exhibition in Düsseldorf a poster read:

The Theoreticians of Atonality!

The oldest of them all is the Jew Arnold [Schoenberg], author of the theory of harmony (1910).

The most "modern" of them is Paul Hindemith, creator of the theory of composition (1937).

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<sup>78</sup> Hans Joachim Moser, "Atonal," first published in *Hans Joachim Moser: Musiklexikon* (Berlin: Hesse, 1943). In *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 547.

We see in these frontrunners of the atonality movement—alongside parallel figures participant in the process of disintegration in the fine arts and in literature—the fundamental intellectual property holders for intellectual constructivism and the most dangerous destroyers of our racial instincts as a *Volk*. Our instinct is to see what is clear, what is pure, genuine, and organically grown; and we will oppose these driftless, rootless charlatans from the highest posts in the nation!<sup>79</sup>

Schoenberg's status as a Jew allowed the Nazis to ultimately determine that atonality and twelve-tone music were also Jewish. Thus, these modernist aesthetics were diluting the purity of harmonic German music and the ideal of the *Volk*. For this reason, composers who practiced atonality were condemned and defamed. Paul Hindemith could very well have been a musical archetype for the Nazis. Aryan in appearance, the young composer was technically one of the most accomplished in Europe. He considered collaborating with HJ representatives, and Goebbels had even contemplated putting the composer in charge of the RMK to reorganize the structure of the chamber's structure.<sup>80</sup> But for his dabbling in atonality, among other reasons, Hindemith was labeled a degenerate alongside Schoenberg.

### **Degenerate Music, Part II: Jazz**

Another form of degenerate music came not out of the music schools of Central Europe's major cities, but from America. Jazz music had a growing crowd in 1933 among young, German urbanites. Unpopular with figures like Strauss and Furtwängler who concerned themselves only with high art, jazz was performed in coffee houses and nightclubs, recognized by the young, culturally bohemian elite as an alternative to the older generation of concert goers. It occasionally found its way into more experimental scenarios of music composition. Modernist composers sometimes used influences of jazz rhythms or harmonies within their own pieces, notably in Ernst Krenek's opera *Jonny Strikes Up*, in which an African American jazz fiddler is

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<sup>79</sup> "The Theoreticians of Atonality!" poster from the Entartete Musik [Degenerate Music] Exhibition, 1938. In *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 548.

<sup>80</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 179.

the protagonist.<sup>81</sup> Tonally, jazz was just as harshly criticized as the modernist works of Schoenberg. Microtones, occurring in between half-step pitches and also known collectively as the “blue-sound,” were the cornerstones of jazz improvisation on instruments like the saxophone or the guitar, and were likened to experiments within the modernist camp on the implementation of quarter tones.<sup>82</sup>

These pre-1933 condemnations of jazz only heightened with the Nazi takeover. Ideologically, jazz stood for everything the Nazis hated. Goebbels proclaimed jazz as part of “Negrodom, the art of the subhuman.”<sup>83</sup> Jazz fit into the created definition of “everything that German music was not,” and thus was attributed not just to African Americans but also to Jews. Jews, within this model, were both musicians and the corrupt businessmen behind the popularity of American Negro music, and together the two racially inferior groups sought to simultaneously profit off the German citizenry and destroy German ideals. Alfred Rosenberg founded the Kampfbund to combat anti-German values from the “Negro-Jewish war” of jazz and other forms of degenerate art.<sup>84</sup> Jazz was seen to promote promiscuity, since the racism of the era had deemed the African race as hypersexual and primitive. Jazz, in its Americanized form, was banned, though this ban was hardly enforced to the fullest extent because of the music’s popularity.

By 1937 German jazz musicians worked at the behest of the RMK. Michael Danzi, an American banjoist working in Berlin before the war recalled: “In Berlin those who needed to work registered with the *Reichsmusikkammer*, where the jobs were handed out according to

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<sup>81</sup> Kater, *Drummers*, 21.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 20.

ability—jobs in coffee bars, restaurants, and parks were given to those with lesser talent.”<sup>85</sup> Those few German jazz artists with more talent were often idolized by fans, attaining fame but rarely the same kind of fortune experienced by Strauss or Furtwängler. Fritz Schulze was a classically trained pianist who instead decided to pursue a career in jazz. He was praised by American jazz periodical *Down Beat* as “by far the greatest Swing musician” in Nazi Germany.<sup>86</sup> Ernst Höllerhagen played clarinet and could emulate Jewish-American jazz great Benny Goodman. Hans Korseck was the preeminent German jazz guitarist of the Nazi era. His record collection included countless black market recordings of American and British jazz, including works by African American artists as well as Jews.<sup>87</sup> Ironically, Korseck was also an aspiring physician and was sent to the Eastern Front in 1941 as a doctor. Goebbels and the RMK ordered his return to Berlin as a valuable asset to the propaganda movement, but before the orders reached his unit he had shot and killed.<sup>88</sup> These three jazz greats may not be considered famous in the realm of twentieth century world jazz, but their passion for the art was proven through their uncompromising steadfastness to the performance of traditional jazz. This insistence on playing the music of African Americans and Jews sheds light on the importance of jazz as a means of political opposition. But popular demand for jazz simultaneously pushed a version of this art to the forefront of Nazi propaganda.

Jazz in Germany, as in America and the United Kingdom, was sustained by two structures: “a large listening and dancing public that geared itself to the music’s more commercial qualities, and a small, elitist core of purists who considered jazz as an art form,

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Danzi and Rainer E Lotz, *American Musician in Germany, 1924-1939: Memoirs of the jazz, entertainment, and movie world of Berlin during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era, and in the United States* (Schmittgen: N. Ruecker, 1986), 140.

<sup>86</sup> Kater, *Drummers*, 60.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.



studied the music seriously to the point of attempting to play it, and always adulated its creators.”<sup>89</sup> The culture continued to grow throughout the 1920s and into the Nazi era of the 1930s. This popularity resulted in reluctant actions by Joseph Goebbels and the RMK to create a new form of music, a Germanized form of jazz which became known as “New German Dance Music.”<sup>90</sup> Goebbels saw the opportunity of a merger of the popular art form, despite his hatred of jazz as a whole, and his own project, the radio. The *Reichsrundfunkkammer*, another subsidiary of the RKK was established to coordinate radio broadcasting. Goebbels proclaimed that the radio was the “eighth great power,” and for the purposes of mass propaganda and coordination, promoted personal household radio receivers for each family.<sup>91</sup> Goebbels used the medium of the radio both to pacify the public’s desire to hear jazz and to combat American-influenced jazz with the new, Nazi-sanctioned dance music.

New German Dance Music became a staple of wartime radio broadcasting. The RKK feared that BBC transmissions of American and British jazz would disrupt the war effort, both on the front lines and back home. The British, unlike the rest of Western Europe which was now occupied by the Nazis, had control over what and where they broadcast. The readily available radio receivers that Goebbels had promoted as part of the coordination of culture and the media were now in danger of enticing Germans with popular Allied messages and music. Goebbels planned to fight this “racy music” with German jazz. In 1941 the *Deutsche Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchester* (German Dance and Entertainment Orchestra) was instituted, the name

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<sup>89</sup> Kater, *Drummers*, 70.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>91</sup> Joseph Goebbels, “The Radio as the Eight Great Power,” first published as “Der Rundfunk als achte Großmacht,” in *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1938), 197-207. Translated by Randall Bytwerk, *Calvin College*, [www.calvin.edu](http://www.calvin.edu), accessed April 14, 2014.

contrived by Goebbels himself.<sup>92</sup> Popular jazz musicians from around Germany who had not been deported, recruited, or killed were hired by the DTU and performed weekly on the radio for the pleasure of the German people and soldiers. The dance music of the DTU was far from big band swing, peppered with string arrangements and lacking any instrumental improvisation.

Soon dance music became synonymous with jazz, much to the chagrin of jazz aficionados and jazz haters alike.<sup>93</sup> This ushered in an era of anti-Nazi activism by what came to be known as the “swing youth,” particularly notable within the city of Hamburg.<sup>94</sup> The swing youth were motivated by a love of jazz, but their movement drew upon much more than their passion for the music. A whole swing culture grew out of jazz, incorporating elements of music, dance, fashion, and all in all altering the psyches of many Hamburg youths. Dance instruction was taught in schools and HJ organizations, and these institutions forbade swing dancing. This prompted a counter reaction among many of the youths in Hamburg who considered themselves jazz fans. Thus, the so-called “Swing-Heinis” ignored the prohibition of swing dancing and took part in a blatant protest movement of Nazi policy. The swing youth movement began in the winter of 1937 and continued through the war, but was nearly crushed in March of 1941 when the Gestapo and RMK police forces raided one of their larger and more raucous parties, detaining over 300 kids and arresting the leaders.<sup>95</sup>

The actions of Hamburg’s swing kids and jazz loving youths across Germany were not necessarily deliberate acts of political defiance. The swing youths often denied having any sort

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<sup>92</sup> Kater, *Drummers*, 127.

<sup>93</sup> Wulf Bley, “Is It Jazz or Just Radio Dance Tunes?” first published as “Jazz oder Rundfunk-Tanzmusik?” in *Rufer und Hörer* 11, no. 3 (February 1934), 520-522. In *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013) 551-553.

<sup>94</sup> While the majority of the swing youth did not identify as musicians, their role in furthering the popularity and political importance of jazz as an art form is essential to the success of both the music and the musicians during the Nazi period. For this reason, it seems fitting to include their story as part of the jazz phenomenon. Kater, *Drummers*, 102.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

of “rebellious intent,” and were instead motivated simply by their individuality and love of both jazz and swing dancing.<sup>96</sup> Regardless, the case of the swing youth can be considered one of the strangest and most humanizing challenges to the Nazi dictatorship. Jazz itself possessed a dual role within the Third Reich; that of a propaganda tool as well as of a mode of disobedience and resistance. The Nazi regime could not stomp out jazz as an art form. Ironically, it gained an even stronger foothold in German culture and society throughout the Nazi period.

Yet as popular as jazz became in Germany during the Nazi period, it is clear that the jazz artist was not exempt from the same fate as his modernist brethren. Jazz musicians, especially those of Jewish decent, were not immune to racial policies of the Holocaust. Jewish Pianist Martin Roman was imprisoned at Terezín, where a jazz-loving Kommandant allowed him to take over a band of Jewish instrumentalists. The group became known as the Ghetto Swingers, and included one of the most promising young clarinetists in Europe at the time, Bedřich Weiss. The group performed for SS guards as well as Jewish block wardens. In 1944, most of the musicians were sent to Auschwitz. Weiss was killed on the first day. Other members of the Ghetto Swingers were periodically gassed. Only three members, Martin Roman included, survived the Holocaust.<sup>97</sup>

### **Conclusion: Culpability and Choice**

Culpability has been, since the end of World War II, a controversial question shaping the historical evaluation of anyone associated with the Nazi Party. Because of the *Reichskulturkammer* and political coordination of the arts, the roles of all musicians who remained active during the Nazi reign have been called into question. But culpability is immeasurable and abstract. Is it valid to declare Wilhelm Furtwängler—who aided Jewish

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<sup>96</sup> Kater, *Drummers*, 108.

<sup>97</sup> The information in this paragraph is from Kater, *Drummers*, 177-181.

emigrants in the first years of the Reich and stood up for Hindemith's right to question the Nazi state—a culprit because of his collaborations with the regime after 1935? Is Strauss a victim because of his falling out with Nazis despite his early involvement in the RMK? It is not the goal of this paper to decide one way or the other. Regardless, after the fall of the Third Reich, the world sought a culprit, and the German people became tainted by crimes committed by the Nazis. Certainly Nazi ideology was founded by Germans, but it is a fallacy to equate the whole of Germany with Nazism. Still, the question of culpability remains and thus colors this paper as well as any other historical analysis of the period.

Is it possible to define with any certainty one distinct fate of German musicians in the Nazi era? To do so would be to limit the importance of the individual, perhaps the only thing that all of these musicians have in common. Regardless of their style of music, their political opinions, or the ethnicity, each of these musicians made music for their own love of music. From Richard Strauss to Arnold Schoenberg to Hans Korseck; each acted alone. Certainly there was pressure, in various ways from Nazi institutions like the Gestapo, the SS, and the RMK. But ultimately, it does these musicians a great injustice to suggest that the Nazi state had unmitigated control over the roles of its subjects. Certainly, by the middle of World War II the ability to extinguish human life rested comfortably in the hands of the Nazis, and ultimately the lives of all Germans were subject to the whim of Hitler and his party. But the power of choice was something that the Nazis could never strip from these individuals.

In this instance, these musicians are no different than the rest of the millions of Europeans affected by Nazism. Each was an individual who made a choice. That choice often determined whether or not the individual would live or die. Other times, the individual was destined to die, regardless of that choice. The role of the musician in the context of the Third

Reich was important. Cultural coordination was a top priority for the Nazi elite in building their authoritarian world. Musicians were both entrusted and persecuted. More often than not, the working relationship between musicians and Nazis bridged the gap between trust and persecution. Strauss was given the highest musical appointment in the Third Reich before his falling out with the regime. Furtwängler was dismissed for backing a degenerate musician before he became, according to Goebbels, a “genuine patriot and warm adherent and advocate of our politics and martial leadership.”<sup>98</sup> Bedřich Weiss was praised for his talent by SS officers and allowed special privileges before he was shipped to Auschwitz and killed. Regardless of their fates, each made their own choices; to help the Nazis, to challenge the Nazis, to hide, to run, or to openly declare themselves an individual in a system that demanded conformity.

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<sup>98</sup> Kater, *Muse*, 202.

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