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Rhapsody in Red, White and Blue: The Co-Evolution of Popular and Art Music in the United States during World War II

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Keywords
Music, Art Music, Popular Music, Jazz, World War II

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I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honor and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the honor code.

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World War II was a watershed event in twentieth century American history. All aspects of life, including music, both found roles to play in the war effort and were forever altered by the conflict. Past work on the subject of American music in World War II tends to focus heavily on the nature and impact of popular music during this time period. While this paper will review and build upon this scholarship, art music during the war will also be considered. Using two distinctly different, yet complementary, autobiographies – those of army band musician Frank Mathias and composer Gunther Schuller – the functions and impacts of both popular and art music on the American war effort will be analyzed and compared. Their stories will then be contextualized within the larger narrative of twentieth century American music, showcasing how World War II – through the increased influence of jazz – shaped the evolution of both popular and art music in the United States during the early 1940s.

Keywords: Popular Music, Art Music, World War II, Frank Mathias, Gunther Schuller

Music finds itself in a strange position when it comes to historical scholarship. Barring written notation and, relatively recently, audio recordings, music is not a physical concept. Indeed, it is a collection of physical sounds, movements, and emotions – even so, it is abstract. It is ephemeral, yet has served many functions and left many impacts on our world throughout human history. Music and its by-products have been harnessed in the realms of religion, politics, entertainment, therapy, education, and, perhaps most surprising, in the realm of warfare. In twentieth century American military history, popular music – music written and performed according to the prevailing contemporary popular taste – is usually assigned a primary role.[1] On the other hand, art music – music written and performed in line with the Western classical tradition – typically takes on a secondary role.[2] This state of affairs is not surprising. It is not difficult to produce evidence recalling the positive emotional effects of popular music on the audiences that it is intended for, especially the war-weary American soldiers fighting in World War II. Art music, however, is not as accessible to the general population and has not been studied in great detail in regards to the Second World War. This thesis will attempt to fill in this gap by reviewing the secondary literature on the subject and contextualizing the stories of two

[1] Representative popular pieces for the World War II era include "White Christmas," written in 1942 by Irving Berlin, "Bewtiched, Bothered, and Bewildered," written in 1941 by Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart, and "Swinging on a Star," written in 1944 by Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Burke. Much of this popular music is included in what musicologists refer to as the Great American Songbook. For a much more comprehensive, but not exhaustive, list, see William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *Music of the World War II Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 207-32.

[2] The Western classical musical tradition has its modern roots in European composers such as J.S. Bach and Hector Berlioz, and is characterized by predictable, consonant harmonic progressions, varied melodic ideas, and string-laden orchestrations. It is also commonly called "classical music." In the 20th century, Western art music became increasingly experimental, varied, and dissonant in nature. For the purposes of this thesis, art music is referring to the music that came out of the "common practice era" of European composition, which spans from the 17th century to the early 20th century and includes work by Bach, Berlioz, and others. American art music did not exist in any significant form during this common practice era, but it is the techniques of those composers that came out of the common practice era that American art music composers eventually borrowed from to produce their own music in the 20th century. Examples of representative pieces and composers will be given for both popular and art music throughout this text in order to ground the reader in the types of music to which I am referring. A major example of a piece stemming from the common practice era would be Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which is one of the most well-known pieces in all of Western art music. For more on this topic of musicology, see Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

World War II-era musicians – Gunther Schuller and Frank Mathias – within the narrative that they construct. At the end of this process, the co-evolution of both popular and art music in the United States during the Second World War will be outlined and analyzed, with respect to the functions that each music type fulfilled during the war, what influence each had during and after the conflict, and how jazz inspired changes across the two musics.

Historiography: Music's Roles and Impacts During World War II-era America

Most research studying music in World War II-era America has been focused on popular music, the roles it played in the war effort, and the impacts it had on Americans fighting abroad and those at home. Some of the prior work on this topic does not even list "popular music" as its main focus, but it ends up taking a primary role nevertheless. Designed as broad overviews of music of the time period, they devote much of their text to describing the nuances of popular music of the time. This is evidenced by chapters on jazz music, swing, the recording industry, the radio, country music, and patriotic songs. Generally speaking, these works were written to provide the answer to the question: What was the music of World War II-era America? As such, the discussion on American art music is quite cursory. This literature provides an encyclopedia-type synopsis of the music of the time period. This thesis will provide more of a nuanced view of both popular and art music through the use of two American musicians' autobiographies, which will provide a personal link in order to understand the music of the time period, the functions it served, and the impacts it had on those that were involved with it.[3]

There have also been past works that deal directly with American popular music in the World War II era, or some aspect of it. Perhaps the largest theme that courses through the

[3] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 81, 104, 123, 173, 193-94.

literature on this topic is that of American popular music's role as a unifier and morale-builder on both the battlefront and on the homefront. The narrative that is typically followed is that of the songwriting industry and its attempts to produce a tune that the American public, as in World War I with George M. Cohan's "Over There," would rally behind and vigorously support the war effort. The songs of films and Broadway musicals, positioned during the time period to reach a large swath of the population, are discussed in relation to their morale-building and entertaining purposes. The fate of swing and jazz music, the rise of rhythm and blues, and the propagandistic potential of American popular music are discussed. Previous work describes the time as a period of instability and great changes in music, by analyzing popular song charts or concert records. Even so, this literature tends to focus on general trends in American popular music during the World War II era, and only barely scratches the surface of personal narratives in providing specific examples of these trends.[4]

Finally, the scholarship on art music in the United States during the Second World War has been sparse. Exceptions include Annegret Fauser's *Sounds of War*, a text wholly dedicated to discussing trends in American art music during World War II. In this text, the author suggests that composers and performers of art music in the United States during the war were "forces of civilization" that were – at times even subsidized by the federal government – creating an entirely new American art music tradition that was said to be influenced by all the things that made America great.[5] These things that made America great were of course linked with

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[4] Peter Townsend, *Pearl Harbor Jazz: Change in Popular Music in the Early 1940s* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 6-9; Kathleen E.R. Smith, *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), ix-x; G.P. Mohrmann and F. Eugene Scott, "Popular Music And World War II: The Rhetoric Of Continuation," *Quarterly Journal Of Speech* 62, no. 2 (April 1976): 154-156.

[5] Annegret Fauser, *Sounds Of War: Music In The United States During World War II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

multiculturalism, patriotism, spontaneity, and democratic ideals – all aspects of American culture that were also supposedly hated by the enemy. Put more concisely, changes in American art music throughout the Second World War reflected tensions between nationalistic and internationalist elements of American society. This argument is a sound one, and it will be put into a more personal framework once the narratives of Frank Matthias and Gunther Schuller are interwoven into it.[6]

Overall, the great body of literature tackling the roles and impacts of music in World War II-era America have focused solely on popular music alone, analyzing broad trends in the medium and discussing exactly what musics were included in these trends. These works only make cursory mentions of art music during the time period, let alone its functions or impacts. There is a paucity of scholarly work on art music for the same time period. What does exist puts weight on the producers of American art music throughout the war using their talents to help give the United States some feeling of moral superiority over its European counterparts, keeping in mind the balance of tensions between nationalistic and internationalist thought.

Before Frank Mathias and Gunther Schuller are introduced and their narratives used as examples of the co-evolution of American popular and art musics during World War II, it is necessary to set the backdrop of this story by outlining the public opinion of these two musics at the outbreak of the conflict, as well as throughout it.

Popular Music at the Dawn of and During World War II

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States was thrust into yet another global struggle. Music, like many other abstractions surrounding

[6] Fauser, *Sounds Of War*, 5-7.

American life, could not escape the reach of the Second World War. It is important, then, to know what kinds of music Americans were exposed to at the start of the war. So what music did Americans listen to at the time of Pearl Harbor?

Not surprisingly, there is no one answer to this question. Perhaps the most accurate single answer would be to say that Americans were listening to big bands. By 1941 big band music was still all the rage in the United States, with over 439 of the 15-20 member ensembles in existence in the country.[7] This large number of musicians were elements of the Swing Era that swept the United States following World War I and which led to the rise of the big band as a major provider of musical entertainment. It was during the Swing Era that mainstream white audiences were introduced to and began to embrace elements of African American jazz as well. While big band music is often associated with jazz, it is important to note that big band music – especially that of the Swing Era of the 1930s – differed from the "hot jazz" that music critics began to chat about in the interwar period.[8] Swing Era big band music did, in some ways, emulate authentic African American jazz, in that it swung and contained several timbral and improvisatory elements of the music form.[9] However, this big band music was not entirely a replication of jazz music. Instead, a good number of big band songs being listened to by Americans at the time of

[7] Ninety percent of these bands were actively touring the continental U.S. For more on this, see Mohrmann, and Scott, "Popular Music And World War II," as well as Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*.

[8] "Hot jazz" is here referring to to the blues-based, improvisatory African American art form that didn't gain full acceptance into white mainstream audiences until following World War II. Essentially, "hot jazz" refers to authentic jazz in the African American tradition, or at least the closest that listeners actually had access to at the time.

[9] Swing is an interesting, highly subjective concept that may elude non-musicians. It generally refers to the forward-moving feeling created in jazz-oriented musics by placing emphasis on syncopated beats ("off beats") that serves as the heartbeat of the medium over which everything else is placed. Timbral refers to timbre, which is the particular sound quality being produced at any given time by a musician and his or her instrument. An example of African American timbral influences would be a dirty or bluesy timbre (an less than perfect, clear tone). While the mostly all-white big bands of the Swing Era did incorporate elements of swing and African American timbres in their music, it was quite clear to some audiences the stark difference between hearing a white big band play 'jazz' and an African American group playing jazz. For more on this perceived contrast, see James Reese Europe, "A Negro Explains 'Jazz,'" *The Literary Digest*, April 26, 1919, 28-29.

Pearl Harbor would be classified, in the musical jargon of the time, as "sentimental." "Sentimental" music, unlike pure traditional jazz, usually contained romantic themes and was performed with a relatively smoothed-over stylization. Examples of this style would include the music of Kay Kyser and the vocals of artists such as Dinah Shore and Frank Sinatra.[10] All three were very popular at the start of the war due to the accessibility and excitement of the music they provided to their audiences.[11]

The fact that "sentimental" music was popular at the outset of the war is important because it sets the stage for two different stories that would involve American popular music as the war continued. The first of these stories involves the American transition away from the Swing Era. As more Americans were pulled into the conflict, the dominance of this "sentimental" music was momentarily threatened. This was not entirely because the music was becoming unpopular. It was simply becoming too expensive and difficult to hire large groups of musicians to perform it. As such, many of the artists associated with big bands of the interwar period (such as Dinah Shore and Frank Sinatra) were forced to start solo careers in order to continue to produce music.[12] How this splitting off of popular artists impacted the recording and radio industries and formed the backbone of pop music will be detailed later. In addition, the decline of the big band both came about because of and further precipitated the rise of pure jazz

[10] Examples of "sentimental" pieces of music would include "Be Careful, It's My Heart," written in 1942 by Irving Berlin, "I'll Be Seeing You," written in 1938 by Sammy Fain and Irving Kahal, and "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To," written in 1943 by Cole Porter.

[11] Mohrmann, and Scott, "Popular Music And World War II," 145-146.Townsend, *Pearl Harbor Jazz*, 3-6; Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 81; Smith, *Tin Pan Alley Goes to War*, 12-15.

[12] For example, Sinatra performed with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra as its lead male vocalist until late 1942, after which we signed on as a solo artist with Columbia Records in mid-1943. For more on Sinatra and his career during World War II, see Charles L. Granata, *Sessions with Sinatra: Frank Sinatra and the Art of Recording* (Chicago: A Cappella, 1999).

as a widely popular American art form. This rise of jazz to the forefront of American popular music is one of the major impacts of the Second World War on American music.[13]

Americans' love of "sentimental" music would ultimately become the defining feature of how popular music found its chief function during the war – morale building. The manner in which popular music could improve the morale of both soldiers and individuals on the homefront was very much the concern of the songwriting industry and federal government. During the First World War, George M. Cohan's "Over There" motivated American troops fighting in Europe and those supporting them back home. Its patriotic theme appealed to many Americans. Songwriters after Pearl Harbor wanted to find a song that could do the same for the current crisis. These songwriters first attempted to write carbon copies of "Over There," with ultra-patriotic themes and war-driven imagery. No such song ever became popular on the charts, let alone became a unifying rallying cry for the American people in support of the war effort.[14] Instead, songs that contained no war references and maintained a romantic, "sentimental" theme tended to remain popular. Since it was impossible to create a single morale-building song without even mentioning the war, the quest for World War II's "Over There"-type war song was a lost cause throughout the entire conflict. The morale building would have to come from the romantic themes and excitement of post-Swing Era popular jazz music. In response, songwriters continued to write pieces reminiscent of the "tried-and-true familiarity of the love song."[15] These pieces

[13] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 81-84; Townsend, *Pearl Harbor Jazz*, 6-8.

[14] While it is true that some patriotic-themed popular songs – such as "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" by Frank Loesser – reached no. 1 on the pop charts during the war, their popularity was often short lived and overshadowed by more popular "sentimental" hits. See Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 107-08 for more on this topic and for more patriotic songs that would fit in this category.

[15] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 53.

became the core of American popular music, and were written and performed in the contexts of recording, Broadway musicals, and in films.[16]

While the persistence of "sentimental" music affected the transition from Swing Era big bands to pure jazz and pop, other popular musical styles emerged during the Second World War. Highlighting themes of love, hope, and loss, country music began to attract more attention with the decline of the big bands because it was similar to "sentimental" music. Pure jazz started to come to the fore of popular music. This movement would have long-term consequences for the history of American popular music. With jazz's disorienting and complex structure came traditional African American nuances (such as "dirty" timbre and increased improvisation). These nuances would lead to the rise of rhythm and blues and, eventually, rock 'n' roll toward the end of and following World War II. These music types resonated with younger audiences due to the raw emotionality with which they were typically performed.[17]

All of these aforementioned changes in popular music help us to understand that the Second World War was truly a transitional time for American music, with experimentation and mingling of musical styles common and, as the war raged on, necessary in order to keep the music business alive. Nowhere is this more true than in the realms of the recording and radio industries. Because of technological limits, the recording industry prior to World War II in the United States was largely a fledgling operation. Its products could only be accessed by the more wealthy citizenry.[18] The increasing independence of individual artists was linked to the rise of

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[16] Smith, *Tin Pan Alley Goes to War*, 26-27, 62-63; Krystyn R. Moon, "There's No Yellow in the Red, White, and Blue": The Creation of Anti-Japanese Music during World War II," *Pacific Historical Review*, no. 3 (2003): 333-334;Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 25, 53.

[17] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 81-82

[18] Not only was this early recorded music only available to wealthy individuals, the quality of such music was often quite passable because of the relatively primitive technology that was used to record music at the time. For more on the subject of the technology of records in the World War II era, see Granata, *Sessions with Sinatra.*

many independent record labels, which increased competition in the medium and led to the growth of commercial recording in general (and with that, the emergence of the jukebox and higher quality recording mediums). The recording industry enjoyed another surge in the federal government's V-Disc program, which was designed to provide popular music to American army personnel through the Special Services Division. Perhaps the most controversial episode in the history of recorded popular music occurred when the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) demanded much higher licensing fees for musicians to record their published music. A boycott of ASCAP-published works ensued for nearly 10 months, before the organization agreed to a lower licensing fee – but not before a competing music publisher, Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI), was founded. This development is a major example of the increasing competition that grew up during the war, and is further representative of the instability that music faced throughout this period.[19]

The increasing popularity of recorded music was also linked with the state of radio during the war. At the time of Pearl Harbor, American radio was considered to be enjoying a sort of golden age, with live musical acts appearing on air many times throughout each day. With the advent of commercial recording, however, disc jockeys spinning recorded popular numbers began to replace these live acts. In addition, the federal government also realized that radio could be used as a wide-reaching wartime propaganda tool.[20] Indeed, nine out of ten American households had a radio at the beginning of the 1940s. Both the U.S. government and private radio enterprises such as the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) paid for radio programming

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[19] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 104; Smith, *Tin Pan Alley Goes to War*, 68-69; John C. Hajduk, "Tin Pan Alley on the March: Popular Music, World War II, and the Quest for a Great War Song," *Popular Music & Society* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 505.

[20] While the U.S. government realized the power of radio in the New Deal era with President Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chats informing Americans of domestic issues, its use in wartime propaganda measures became very widespread following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939.

to reach as many Americans as possible. These listeners were bombarded with news of the war, patriotic exhortations such as the importance of buying war bonds, and – perhaps most importantly to some listeners – plenty of popular music. Radio stations started to adopt a streamlined process of combining frightening news of war with relatively happy, carefree popular music. An example of this process would be broadcasting news of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines followed by the popular 1941 big band hit "Chattanooga Choo Choo" and perhaps a short comedy sketch by Bob Hope. By the end of the war, the radio provided the easiest and fastest way that most Americans could be both entertained with music and learn about American military activity in Europe and in the Pacific.[21]

At the time of American entry into World War II, popular music was resting comfortably in the late big band Swing Era. This music, drawing inspiration from both traditional African American jazz and "sentimental" pop, began to transform once the war began. The persistent American love of "sentimental" songs led to problems in producing a great rallying war song. Songwriters and the government were forced to settle for love songs that continued to be popular throughout the war. The expensive and involved process of hiring big bands contributed to their decline. This was also due to the rise of jazz as a popular music in its own right. This in turn led to the rise of other music types, such as country, rhythm and blues, and, eventually, rock 'n' roll. These changes in popular music are also reflected in sweeping changes and developments in the recording and radio industries, which included transitions from live to recorded musical acts and more propagandistic material being broadcast. The early 1940s were truly a period of instability for popular music after all.

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[21] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 105-10; 123; Smith, *Tin Pan Alley Goes to War*, 68-69.

Art Music at the Dawn of and During World War II

By the time the United States entered World War II, Americans had been listening to art music composed by European individuals for well over one hundred and fifty years. However, American art music was coming to the forefront of musical debates in the late 1930s, with an ever-increasing number of American composers attempting to compose art music with truly American roots. This American art music also became identified with the cultural struggle that the United States saw between themselves and their enemies in the war. In addition, shifts in the teaching of art music in American schools came about because of the war. These developments begin with the public consumption of art music at the start of the conflict. So what did this consumption look like? What kinds of art music were Americans listening to at the time of Pearl Harbor?

While many Americans did listen regularly to the music of Bach, Beethoven, and others like them,[22] some Americans were beginning to listen to the new wave of American music that was cropping up in cities throughout the country. This American art music, characterized by a relative simplicity and apparent modernism, came about partially because of the New Deal. The Federal Music Project (FMP), and later, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) had encouraged American musicians to compose and perform American music as a part of the government's attempt at restoring the American economy in the midst of the Great Depression. Even as these programs were phased out during the war, American musicians continued to compose and perform new American art music, but for a new reason. As America once again

[22] These composers, generally considered the paragons of the Western art music tradition, lost a great deal of popularity during the war because of their German heritage. It did not bode well with some Americans to listen to the music of the same culture as the Nazis, however many centuries had actually separated these composers from the Nazi regime. Bach and Beethoven contributed to music in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a full 100-150 years before the Nazis came to power in Germany.

found itself locked in a massive struggle with the Axis powers, American art musicians began to be seen as "cultural combatants," in that they were shining examples of American culture and were a "force for civilization."[23] This became important as America claimed moral superiority over the Axis powers – the quality of American art music became synonymous with American superiority over its enemies. In an effort to support this notion the federal government (both the Office of War Information [OWI] and the Treasury Department) began to subsidize American composers, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) urged radio programmers to play the "serious music" written by these composers over the air during the war.[24] These practices continued as long as the war lasted, which encouraged American composers to experiment with other musical styles in an effort to give their music a purely American voice. American art composers who were influential during the Second World War include Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and Virgil Thomson.[25]

Coupled with this shifting of American art music into an instrument of civilization that became more experimental and "American" in conception and performance in an effort to assert American culture's superiority over its enemies, the American school system also experienced a change in the way it taught art music to students because of the war. After Pearl Harbor, American music educators became more aware that they were in a very important position – teaching American students about the quality, and uniqueness, of American music. Knowing this, the American Unity Through Music program was adopted by the Music Educators National

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[23] Fauser, *Sounds Of War*, 4-6.

[24] Ibid., 10-12.

[25] Young and Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 189-194; Fauser, *Sounds Of War*, 3-7. Exemplary pieces by the mentioned composers include the country and western-themed ballet *Rodeo*, composed by Copland in 1942, *Symphony no. 3*, composed by Harris in 1938, and the score for the film *Louisiana Story*, composed by Thomson in 1948.

Conference (MENC) in October 1940. The following was published in the *Music Educators Journal* in March/April 1941:

> Music is a vital factor in building a state of mind and heart is essential to American spirit and morale, to worthy pride in things which are American, and to the confidence and assurance necessary to full appreciation, protection and maintenance of the American Way of Life. To this end, upwards of 45,000 school and college music leaders are intensifying their organized programs of music activities, not only in the schools and colleges, but in every sphere of our social structure.[26]

The adoption of this theme led American music educators all over the country to begin teaching American folk songs and American art compositions in their classrooms at highly increased rates. This was all part of MENC's overall plan to teach American music in the context of internationalism and international understanding throughout the war. According to American music educators, American children needed to understand that American cultural products, including music, were within an international scope. This was important for the morale of both adults and children alike throughout the war.[27]

It is important to note that American art music experienced changes as a result of the Second World War. Perhaps not to the extent of popular music for the same time period, but significant nonetheless. American composers, initially supported by New Deal policies and organizations and then supported by the OWI and Treasury Department once the war broke out, began to compose uniquely American art music with the intention of both finding an American voice in art music (because the genre had hitherto been dominated by European composers and

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[26] Committee on American Unity Through Music, "American Unity Through Music," *Music Educators Journal* 27, no. 5 (1941): 10, as cited in Amy Beegle, "American Music Education 1941-1946: Meeting Needs and Making Adjustments during World War II," *Journal Of Historical Research In Music Education,* no. 1 (2004): 55-56.

[27] Beegle, "American Music Education 1941-1946," 10-11; J. Scott Goble, "Nationalism in United States Music Education During World War II," *Journal Of Historical Research In Music Education* 30, no. 2 (April 2009): 106-07.

performers) and asserting American cultural dominance over its enemies. This led American art music to become increasingly experimental in nature. These shifts were also reflected in American music education, as the American Unity Through Music program encouraged music teachers to teach students more about American art music as a shining example of American culture.

It is against this backdrop – where American popular music was being transitioned out of the big band era and where American art music was being developed into a uniquely American art form that did not shy away from experimentation – that two musicians are introduced in this thesis. As will be seen, Frank Mathias is representative of an amateur musician who experienced music while on the battlefront. On the other hand, Gunther Schuller, a well-known composer who remained on the homefront for the duration of the war, is representative of a professional musician who experienced music back in the United States. Through their stories, a greater understanding of the effects of American popular and art music on the war effort – and the war's effect on them in return – will be gained.

***G.I. Jive*: Frank Mathias and Music on the Battlefront**

Frank Furlong Mathias was born in 1925 in Maysville, Kentucky.[28] He spent most of his childhood and adolescent years there and in nearby Carlisle, both of which were very small, rural communities predominantly populated by white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant individuals (though the Mathias's were among the few Roman Catholics in the region). In 1942, he received an opportunity to play the tenor saxophone his mother had purchased for him when he was 12 when he received a call from the bandleader of the Maysville-based group Kentucky Kavaliers (a

[28] Interestingly, this would also be the birthplace of "sentimental" and later jazz singer Rosemary Clooney in 1928.

dance band with similar composition to a medium-sized big band). Mathias had earned a reputation for being a competent saxophone player through various local performances and competitions, and the Kavaliers had noticed and wanted him to join. He also had the penchant for what competition judges labeled as "going astray."[29] Mathias acknowledges that this comment was more or less correct, and it reflected his fascination with the improvisatory jazz elements of the Swing Era. The Kavaliers, impressed with Mathias's playing, added him to their roster and paid him six dollars for every dance he played for. Mathias fondly recalls his days with the Kavaliers, when the audiences would go wild over the swing tunes he played and he learned more and more how to play swing, "sentimental," and jazz music (Mathias even goes on to note that the romance in the music was important to both him and his audiences).[30]

But Mathias would not remain with the Kavaliers for long. In August 1943, he was on his way to Fort Thomas, Kentucky to be inducted into the United States Army. While training there, Mathias – on the merit of high scores on IQ and other specialized tests – became a member of the Army Specialized Training Program and was immediately sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for his ASTP infantry training. His plans in continuing with the program were cut short when he failed the mathematics portion of a subsequent exam while at Fort Benning. This immediately put Mathias in a fearful state – would he be shipped out as just another infantry man and placed on the front lines, at only 18 years old? While he did not have any evidence to suggest that he would not be, he continued his training at Benning, where he first experienced a United Service

[29] Frank Furlong Mathias, *G.I. Jive: An Army Bandsman in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 4. "Going astray" was contemporary lingo for improvising or soloing in the jazz idiom.

[30] Ibid., 5-6.

Organizations (USO) show, complete with what Mathias termed as "Negro jazz" and other dance music.[31]

Mathias got his lucky break when he saw a flyer for the 184th Army Ground Forces Band – they were to be holding auditions for new members! He passed the audition and, after a short furlough, joined the band in January 1944. Mathias remarked at the power of the ensemble, saying "I had heard big, full-blowing bands like this one on the radio, and now I was in one! The screaming brass, swirling saxes, and driving rhythm section would have blown my beloved Kavaliers through the walls of the Maysville Armory."[32] Mathias recalled several times when audience members, and especially the female audience members, would come up to the bandstand during base dances to request a particular popular song:

> The best thing about these dances was the women... They and their dates continually drifted up to the bandstand, requesting songs or simply watching in admiration. The front line saxes were in a perfect position for flirting, a meeting of eyes that occasionally struck sparks: "You sure did play nicely on "Moonlight Mood"; I just love saxophones anyway!"
>
> "Gee, thanks a lot – I love playing for you. What would you most like to have next?"
>
> "'The Nearness of You' would suit me fine."
>
> "We've already played that, darn it, but wouldn't 'Taking a Chance on Love' suit you just as well?"[33]

The comments and conversations that Mathias recalled from his days at Fort Benning once again showcase his big band, "sentimental" roots that were being increasingly influenced by the jazz of the late Swing Era.[34]

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[31] Ibid., 6-8, 10, 11-13, 16-18.

[32] Ibid., 40.

[33] Ibid., 44-45; "Moonlight Mood" was written by Harold Adamson and Peter de Rose, "The Nearness of You" was written in 1938 by Hoagy Carmichael and Ned Washington, and "Taking a Chance on Love" was written in 1940 by Vernon Duke. All are examples of "sentimental" songs rooted in the Swing Era.

In addition to playing for dances, Mathias recalled fondly his band's playing in radio broadcasts. According to Mathias, the 184th had its biggest radio opportunities when the War Department selected them to provide music for the nationally-broadcasted NBC show "Army Hour." This show saw the 184th playing a number of "sentimental" hits, as well as some newly-penned jazz standards such as Count Basie's "One O' Clock Jump."[35] When not performing for dances or radio broadcasts, Mathias remembered relaxing with the black cooks and orderlies at Fort Benning. He described the two groups as having a natural affinity for each other, mainly because the jazz that Mathias and his fellow musicians were playing in their popular big band charts had African American roots, and the 184th respected that lineage. Mathias's time in the 184th was a time filled with plenty of popular, "sentimental" music, live dances, and radio broadcasts.[36]

It was September 1944 when Mathias, with the 184th having been disbanded, was sent on the S.S. *Monterey* as an infantryman headed toward the Pacific. He joined the ship's orchestra and played for dances on the overseas journey, but he did remark that no one seemed to get quite as excited about the popular music he and his band played as those who enjoyed the music back at Fort Benning. When Mathias and the rest of his transport arrived at New Guinea in late 1944, he became disillusioned with the war, experienced light fighting, and greatly missed his saxophone playing. He did remember hearing popular music and propaganda from both sides on radio programs such as "Tokyo Rose," however. The music in these programs was enjoyed greatly by him and his comrades. This indirect exposure was to be the only musical experience

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[34] Ibid., 32-33, 40.

[35] Ibid., 45.

[36] Ibid., 46-47.

that Mathias would have on New Guinea, and one that he thought he would have to settle for for the remainder of his deployment.[37]

Mathias spent several months moving from island to island with his fellow infantrymen in the Pacific before he eventually ended up on the island of Bougainville in the G Company of the 37th Ohio National Guard "Buckeye" Division. He caught another lucky break when he was invited to join the division band because of his Military Special Occupation designation of 439, which stood for Bandsman, Saxophone. Mathias immediately felt at home with his new fellow bandsmen, and got back into the routine of playing dances and parades with the group. He remarked that the 37th Division band was even better than the 184th was, "playing with the power of Count Basie, yet with the taste and accuracy of Glenn Miller."[38] This quote in particular showcases Mathias's ideas on the power of jazz, of which Count Basie is heavily identified with, and the clean nature of "sentimental" big band groups such as those headed by Glenn Miller. Mathias remembered the band playing songs such as the comedic "Der Fuhrer's Face," and other pseudo-patriotic popular pieces.[39]

In January 1945, the 37th Division was part of the assault on Luzon, a port on the northwestern coast of the Japanese-occupied Philippines. The division band was to carry heavy weapons and unload supplies on the beachhead. Although Luzon was said to be heavily defended, the 37th faced little resistance when first storming the beaches; the Japanese had already fallen back to defensive positions further inland.[40] The band got to work quickly

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[37] Ibid., 61-62, 79, 81-82.

[38] Ibid., 92.

[39] Ibid., 89-94.

[40] The Japanese eventually executed a series of delaying actions on the Philippines intended to impede what was perceived as an inevitable invasion of Japan. They put up stiff resistance at Clark Field and Manila in late 1944 and early 1945.

unloading the supplies that came in during the subsequent waves of the invasion. Mathias and his company witnessed numerous American bombing operations and Filipino in-fighting episodes during their time on the island, all the while manning defensive guard positions for their division's advancing infantrymen. The 37th was also involved in the American recapture of Clark Air Base in January 1945, and was eventually assigned to be a part of the military force that was to invade Manila that February.[41]

Since Mathias and the bandsmen were chosen to be a defense platoon for the division headquarters at Manila, the unit didn't undergo nearly as much intense fighting as the battle is known for. Mathias and his comrades did share some close encounters with the Japanese, but they generally played out to no consequence to Mathias. According to Mathias, the 37th took the famed Intramuros District of Manila[42] "block by block, gun by gun" though heavy street fighting and an almost constant barrage of American artillery.[43] It was at Intramuros that Mathias discovered the war atrocities of the Japanese, and became as disillusioned as he had ever been regarding fighting in the Pacific. When the battle ended in March, Mathias and the 37th set to work rebuilding portions of the city.[44]

When all threats had been eliminated in Manila, the 37th division band got its instruments back, much to Mathias's excitement. It did not take long until the "Buckeye Band" was back to playing live dances: "...we played many of the old songs as well as the new ones: The Flat Foot Floogie, Dipsy Doodle, The Music Goes Round and Round, Fools Rush In, GI

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[41] Ibid., 97-98, 112-13, 119, 127.

[42] The Intramuros District of Manila was in the center of the city and was also known as the Walled City because of the nearly 350-year -old stone walls and buildings that lined every street of the city.

[43] Ibid., 144.

[44] Ibid., 128, 140-41, 147-48, 153-55.

Jive, Moonlight Cocktail, Brazil, and All or Nothing At All."[45] The band played military music and marches for the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur, "Take Me Out to The Ball Game" for a competitive baseball match between two American infantry regiments, and even played a concert full of Glenn Miller hits for a regimental ballroom dance.[46]

Figure 1. Frank Mathias takes a saxophone solo at a Manila hospital in March 1945.[47]

But playing in the band was not to last long. Mathias and his division took part in the Battles of Baguio and Balete Pass in the March and April of 1945, and also took part in what Mathias called the "blitzkrieg" fighting of the Cagayan Valley in June of that year. Undergoing constant, forward-moving fighting, Mathias and his comrades once again set down their

[45] Ibid., 157. Note that the songs that Mathias lists are a combination of patriotic songs, comedy songs, and "sentimental" songs.

[46] Ibid., 153-55, 157. Mathias only mentions one of these Glenn Miller hits in reference to this concert, "The Moon Is a Silver Dollar."

[47] Ibid., Illustrations (non-paginated section).

instruments and set to work guarding the division headquarters. In the last few days of June, a massive artillery duel erupted between the Americans and the remaining Japanese forces, giving Mathias his first real taste of fear and a near death experience. By August, military operations in the Philippines, at least for the 37th, had given way to mopping up operations in the city of Tuguegarao. It was in Tuguegarao that Mathias would be diagnosed with jaundice and the deadly tropical disease of malaria, the latter of which had been contracted by Mathias from a mosquito in the Cagayan Valley just weeks before. As atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending the Second World War, Mathias spent his time in a hospital tent recovering from the diseases. He and his comrades began to think of returning home following the official Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945. He started for home in December, had a relatively uneventful trip, and made it back to Carlisle, Kentucky, by January 1946.[48]

Following Frank Mathias's wartime story, several salient themes emerge. First, the songs that Mathias mentions in his memoir are almost all of the late Swing Era, big band, "sentimental" variety, with some patriotic tunes sprinkled throughout. This is not surprising, as he and his band mates were in charge of entertaining troops that were accustomed to hearing such songs that were popular at the onset of the war. Also, Mathias's love of playing for radio shows exemplifies the importance of radio during the wartime era. In addition, Mathias's mentioning of the African American roots of jazz early on in his wartime career, along with mentions of tunes by Count Basie and a declared liking of "going astray" on the saxophone call attention to his growing love for jazz as the war progressed, which parallels the arc of musical taste occurring back on the homefront with young listeners – the decline of the big band and the rise of solo artists and pure jazz to the forefront of popular music. Mathias's story shows us how American popular music

[48] Ibid., 157-160, 162, 184, 187-88, 194, 199-201.

became increasingly varied and experimental in nature during the Second World War, with pure African American jazz and solo artists taking the place of Swing Era composers and performers as the war continued.

Notably absent from Mathias's account of being an army musician in World War II is any serious mention of art music. While he does mention the term "classical music" several times to describe some of the music he hears, certainly none of that music he recognizes by name or composer.[49] Therefore, it is not likely that Mathias and his band mates were exposed to much of the art music that was being played over the radio and being sold on records during the war. For a discussion of American art music during the war, it is more appropriate to look to another musician – Gunther Schuller. Schuller, a composer and musician known for works that included influences from both popular and art musics, can give us a better personal story to put against the backdrop of the evolution of American art music during World War II.

A Life In Pursuit of Music and Beauty: Gunther Schuller and Music on the Homefront

By 1941 Gunther Schuller was only 16 years old, yet by that time he had already gained considerable musical experience.[50] Schuller was born in New York City to German parents, his father a violinist with the New York Philharmonic. He spent his early childhood in New York, visiting Germany with his parents yearly. In January 1932, Schuller's parents sent him to Germany to receive a German education. While Schuller did recall happy times in Germany, he also remembered being incensed at the changes that were occurring because of the rise of the Nazi regime in the mid-1930s. Indeed, he returned to the United States shortly after Hitler and

[49] Ibid., 11-12.

[50] Gunther Schuller, *Gunther Schuller: A Life in Pursuit of Music and Beauty* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 3. Even though he was only in his teens and early twenties during the war, Schuller claimed to have a photographic memory and leaves a very detailed account of his entire career in this memoir, starting from age three onward.

his lieutenants introduced Schuller's school to the program of the *Hitlerjugend*, or Hitler Youth, in 1936. Hs parents' displeasure toward the new Nazi regime, coupled with a serious eye injury sustained by Schuller in the first week of December, saw him home in New York by Christmas 1936.[51]

Back in the United States, Schuller's passion for performing and composing music, fostered by his musician father, blossomed. According to Schuller, he increasingly turned to his musical studies when he returned to his school in Queens because of the difficulties he had developed in expressing himself in English during his extended stay in Germany. He joined the St. Thomas Choir School in the fall of 1937, where his education was heavily imbued with the musical traditions of European art music. In addition to academic studies, Schuller recalled that the St. Thomas Boys Choir sang such pieces such as Georg Handel's *Messiah*, Joseph Haydn's *Creation*, Johannes Brahms' *Requiem*, Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, and works by early composers such as Palestrina.[52] These works are centerpieces of the Western art music tradition, and show that American art music in the years leading up to the Second World War was principally dedicated toward performing the works of common practice era European composers. Before leaving the St. Thomas Choir School in 1940, Schuller recalled hearing music by these and other common practice era composers – such as Beethoven, Bach, and Strauss – on trips to Carnegie Hall, on the radio, and on records.[53]

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[51] Ibid., 16, 23-25, 33-35.

[52] This repertoire is highly representative of the common practice era, with the composers and pieces mentioned firmly rooted between the 17th and late 19th centuries.

[53] Ibid., 36-38, 40, 49, 55. The sheer number of common practice era composers and pieces that Schuller mentions in the early part of his autobiography is too lengthy to list in this thesis. The ones that are most representative of the era are included, but many others exist in the original text.

It was during the end of Schuller's tenure at St. Thomas that he saw the influences of jazz on art music. In 1939, Schuller witnessed a concert by Duke Ellington, who was one of the most popular big band leaders of the late Swing Era and a major proponent of integrating more African American jazz influences into both popular and art music. Schuller listened intently as Ellington and his band performed jazz-infused art music for his audience:

> There was something about all those strange sonorities and that special rhythmic feeling that I knew I hadn't ever come across in any classical music...It is a most amazing unearthly sound...To hear that in a jazz orchestra, along with all the other remarkable sounds – the beautiful harmonies that I already knew from the music of Ravel and Delius [composers of the common practice era], the incredible orchestral blends, the strange array of muted sounds in the brass, the infectious rhythms – that was really a startling musical experience.[54]

Schuller's response to his first ever Ellington concert foreshadows his fascination with and incorporation of jazz in his later art music compositions and, more broadly, the influence of jazz on art music during the Second World War. The experimental nature of jazz was soon to find a significant position in the birth of American art music, with the war providing the impetus for creating such an art form.[55]

By the fall of 1941, Schuller was attending the Manhattan School of Music and playing French horn for the school's orchestra. Schuller remembered being at a dance party with friends on December 7, 1941 when news of the attack on Pearl Harbor took the place of big band music on the radio. As the United States entered the war, radio immediately became the most important aspect of Schuller's musical education and entertainment. He specifically remembered the radio shows directed by Andre Kostelanetz and Morton Gould, with their symphonic, art-music inspired arrangements of popular "sentimental" tunes by the likes of George Gershwin, Cole

[54] Ibid., 57-58.

[55] Ibid., 56-60.

Porter, Jerome Kern, Vincent Youmans, Richard Rodgers, and Vernon Duke. This type of radio show further showcases the blending of popular music and art music that was occurring leading up to and during the Second World War.[56]

Figure 2. Schuller just after becoming first horn for the Cincinnati Symphony in 1943.[57]

In 1943, Schuller became principal horn for the Cincinnati Symphony, and he spent his time there doing two very important things – playing the works of common practice era European composers and learning a great deal about the jazz that was cropping up in American music. During this time, he also began to compose art music that had serious jazz influences, such as the *Suite for Woodwind Quintet* and the *Jazz Harp Concerto*. According to Schuller, he wrote those pieces out of reverence for the jazz style and a hopeful prediction that, one day, jazz and art music would become reconcilable. Schuller remarked on the dichotomy between the two genres in the early 1940s:

[56] Ibid., 82, 87-88, 91-92.

[57] Ibid., Illustrations (non-paginated section).

> Remarkably, jazz and classical music were at the time equally popular; both were extensively represented on both radio and in live presentations...and in size their respective audiences were just about equal. The two music genres, though each had its loyal partisans, were considered absolutely antithetical to each other, and were rigidly segregated.[58]

Schuller's comments on the divisive nature of the two musics goes along with the standard American practice at the onset of the war – the performance of common practice era composers and pieces. His hopeful prediction, however, did seem to slowly start to materialize: musicians such as Ellington had already begun to combine the two genres in their music. Schuller had witnessed that in 1939, and saw Ellington live several other times during the war. Reading Schuller's autobiography, it is clear that the jazz of Duke Ellington was a major influence on his compositions, and points to the larger influence of Ellington's work on American art music in general.[59]

Not only did Schuller see art and jazz musics begin to combine during the Second World War – he also claimed to have seen jazz become its own form of American art music:

> I realized that while classical music considered itself an art music, intrinsically non-functional, intended to be enjoyed and valued on its own terms *as art*, jazz in its first thirty, forty years was an inherently functional dance and entertainment music. But over the decades, jazz developed...into an art form. This became really clear in the 1940s with...the trend away from big bands toward small chamber groups... A whole roster of tremendously gifted, innovative players...came along in the 1940s and transformed jazz into a wholly creative, serious, essentially noncommercial form of music that could only be defined as an art form.[60]

Schuller acted on his thoughts on this subject by arranging jazz hits – mainly those of Ellington and Cole Porter – for the Cincinnati Symphony. He believed that jazz was becoming its own art

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[58] Ibid., 182.

[59] Ibid., 111-12, 168-170, 182. An example of Ellington combining the two genres would be his *Black and Tan Fantasy*, originally composed in 1927.

[60] Ibid., 201.

music, so he began to bring in his own compositions and arrangements to be played by the orchestra. To Schuller, American art music found its voice during the Second World War due to the influence of jazz – but also because jazz became its *own* art music.[61]

Following the war Schuller went on to play with the Metropolitan Opera and eventually gave up performing to focus more on composing. In the 1950s and 60s, he advocated for the use of the term "Third Stream," which Schuller described as the music that had developed during and after the Second World War – a music that he said was the combination of jazz and classical music. He met and worked with many famous musicians throughout his lifetime, including Leonard Bernstein and Miles Davis, and composed jazz-infused art music well into the 1980s and 90s.[62]

Schuller's wartime experience is very much different from that of Frank Mathias. Schuller makes few direct references to the war, and his reflections are all through the scope of an accomplished classically-trained musician. His story does impart a great deal of insight into the evolution of American art music during the war, however. His early childhood musical experience – filled with his father's concerts at the New York Philharmonic and Schuller's reminisces of performing the central compositions of the common practice era at both the St. Thomas Choir School and Manhattan School of Music – reflect the standard practices of American art composers and performers during the interwar period. They were mainly concerned with performing and preserving the compositions of earlier European composers. As war drew near, Schuller began to see the influence of jazz on American music in general, and also foresaw how jazz would one day influence American art music in particular. His thoughts and predictions

[61] Ibid., 201-04.

[62] Ibid., 205-06, 300-01, 437-39.

regarding this topic are best illustrated with his fascination with Duke Ellington during the war. Near the end of the war, Schuller both predicted and participated in the transformation of jazz into its own form of American art music. His personal story reflects the idea that American art music composers attempted to find a unique American voice in their music during the war. What better unique American voice to utilize than jazz? Schuller's story also makes it clear that jazz composers such as Duke Ellington should be included alongside the more mainstream American composers that were active during the war. Schuller's wartime experience serves as an invaluable personal recollection of the evolution of American art music during the Second World War and, because of his involvement with both jazz and classical performers and composers, gives us insight into the co-evolution of popular and art musics during the conflict.

Coda

American popular and art musics co-evolved during the Second World War. Popular music turned away from the Swing Era in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and precipitated in its transformation the decline of the big band, the rise of solo artists, and the emergence of African American jazz-infused popular and "sentimental" music. While composers of American popular music were unable to produce a patriotic song that became universally popular during the war years, the popularity of this jazz-infused "sentimental" music raised the morale of civilians and soldiers alike. The recollections of army band musician Frank Mathias help us to understand these transformations through a personal framework. Mathias grew up during the Swing Era, and enjoyed the music that was produced during it. As he entered military service in early 1944, Mathias's fondness for jazz became apparent, and his time in the Pacific saw him playing pieces both from the Swing Era and from the new crop of jazz-infused popular music that circulated throughout the United States during the war. His lack of detail when it comes to art music

suggests that army personnel stationed in the Pacific may not have been exposed to the music enough in order to come to any conclusions regarding its transformation during the conflict.

American art music did not have a unique voice at the start of World War II. Performers and composers of art music before the war were primarily concerned with performing and preserving the music of the common practice era. This practice shifted as the United States was drawn into the conflict. Composers such as Copland, Harris, Thomson, and especially Gunther Schuller began to compose new American art music that reflected the inspirations of purely American influences – most notably jazz. In this way American art music found its voice during World War II, and that voice was one that echoed the influences of jazz on American culture. Schuller's autobiography provides firsthand evidence of this evolution. In his early years Schuller recollected being immersed in the musical culture of the interwar years, a culture in which the music of the common practice era was often performed and critically analyzed in the United States. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Schuller began to observe the effects jazz was having on American music, and he – through his interactions with Duke Ellington and his own compositions and arrangements – contributed to jazz's eventual elevation to being worthy of influencing art music in the United States. Furthermore, Schuller contended that jazz was elevated to become its own form of American art music during the war.

Through the stories of Mathias and Schuller, the co-evolution of American popular and art musics during the Second World War is brought into sharp focus. Both popular and art music in the United States were heavily shaped by the influences of jazz during the conflict. Jazz became increasingly popular, contributing to the decline of the big band and setting up the transition away from the Swing Era. This evolution is seen in the story of Frank Mathias. Jazz provided the unique American voice that composers of American art music wanted to imbue

within their work as the war drew on in Europe. Because of this, jazz became a common inspiration behind American art music, with jazz itself even being regarded as its own art music by some musicians. This evolution is seen in the story of Gunther Schuller.

World War II provided conditions that led to the increasing influence of jazz in the realms of American popular and art musics. In the co-evolution of these two musics, then, jazz is the lowest common denominator – its influences, felt more than any others during the war, fundamentally changed each of the two musics, albeit in slightly different ways. Nevertheless, the influence of jazz was the most important factor in this co-evolution during the Second World War. Without it, popular music may not have exited the Swing Era as early as it did, and American art music may not have found its unique voice. World War II was a defining moment in American music history – it arranged the co-evolution of popular and art music through the ever-increasing influence of jazz.

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