



The Impact of the Third Reich on Famous Composers

By Bwaar Omer

Germany is known as a land of poets and thinkers and has been the origin of many great composers and artists. In the early 1920s, the country was becoming a hub for artists and new music. In the time of the Weimar Republic during the roaring twenties, jazz music was a symbol of the time and it was used to represent the acceptance of the newly introduced cultures. Many conservatives, however, opposed this rise of foreign culture and new music. Guido Fackler, a German scientist, contends this became a more apparent issue when Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) took power in 1933 and created the Third Reich. The forbidden music during the Third Reich, known as degenerative music, was deemed to be anti-German and people who listened to it were not considered true Germans by nationalists.

A famous composer who was negatively affected by the brand of degenerative music was Kurt Weill (1900-1950). Weill was a Jewish composer and playwright who was using his compositions and stories in order to expose the Nazi agenda and criticize society for not foreseeing the perils to come (Hinton par. 11). Weill was exiled from Germany when the Nazi party took power and he went to America to continue his career. While Weill was exiled from Germany and lacked power to fight back, the Nazis created propaganda to attack any type of music associated with Jews and blacks. The "Entartete Musik" poster portrays a cartoon of a black individual playing a saxophone whose lips have been enlarged in an attempt to make him look more like an animal rather than a human. The cartoon character wears a patch with the Star of David to indicate that Jewish music is also animalistic, inferior, and non-German.

During 1937 and 1938, the view of degenerative music became worse as the Nazi political leaders deemed it to be illegal to listen to jazz and swing music. The presence of a new, modern "Swing Youth" made the situation worse, making a strong jazz and swing music culture, and the police enforcement could not stop them (Fackler par. 2). While Hitler was against any "Jewishness" in music, he respected and supported Ludwig van Beethoven, Richard Wagner, Anton Bruckner, and Richard Strauss. The legacies of these composers were affected by the Nazi regime and appropriation of their music has changed how they are perceived in contemporary society.

Known as the innovator of the Romantic era, Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770-1827) music influenced both the Allies and Axis during the time of the Third Reich. Famous for his Nine Symphonies, Beethoven introduced new ideas to the world of music and is regarded as a renowned figure. Many statues and paintings have been created to honor him and his work, such as the Beethoven Frieze by Gustav Klimt (1862-1918). His legacy has lasted to this day and his music was, like today, an idealized work during the second World War. In World War II, both the Allies and Axis used Beethoven's music to represent different ideals and purposes.

Adolf Hitler admired Beethoven. Douglas Johnson, Scott G. Burnham, William Drabkin, Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson observe that Beethoven's music served as the symbol of German Heroism to the Nazi supporters and Nazi soldiers. Soldiers used his music to invoke feelings that gave them the courage to fight. The Third Reich also used his emotional and dramatic music in their propaganda and to further their political initiative of German nationalism (Johnson et al. 263). The Nazi regime took the identity of Beethoven and appropriated his work for their own will. Hitler loved the fame associated with Beethoven and wanted to use his music as an example of what it was to be German. Beethoven's presence was known throughout Germany as his music boomed in concert halls and across the radio.

The Third Reich was not the only side to use Beethoven. The Allies used Beethoven's compositions as well, but for very different reasons. For example, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony symbolizes contrasting attitudes between the Allies and Axis. The Nazi regime used his music as a source of power to show that the German people were strong and elite, while the Allies used the Fifth Symphony as a composition to represent peace and victory (Fancourt par. 2). People in the United States used the opening of the Fifth Symphony during the development of Morse Code. This is seen in the letter "V" of Morse Code (short-short-short-long). The clicks used for this letter are made up of the same four opening beats of the composition. The Roman numeral for five is the letter "V", connecting back to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The use of Beethoven's symphony illustrates how the Allies wanted to attack the psyche of the Third Reich by using their most beloved German figure against them. Reclaiming the name Beethoven, and utilizing one of his most famous motifs to say, 'we are the victorious ones, not you'. The British Broadcasting Company had a hand in spreading this idea throughout the different countries that were a part of the Allies, and the BBC news had a four-note timpani that played at the opening of their broadcast that was similar to the four-note motif of the Fifth Symphony. The French also made great use of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as a symbol of endurance and steadfastness during an awful German blitz on London in 1941 (Fancourt par. 4). Daisy Fancourt writes, "Maurice van Moppes wrote lyrics to the opening bars of the symphony, calling it 'La chanson des V' (The song of V)." The song was broadcasted on Radio-Londres, most influentially on 1 June 1944, when the Allied forces sent the first messages to France to prepare for attack. The French used the Nazis' propaganda against them by incorporating Beethoven's iconic motif into music of their time.

The Third Reich turned to Beethoven's compositions during their times of despair. When Hitler's death was announced over the German radio, the Funeral March from the Eroica Symphony was played (Johnson et al. par. 263). This piece evokes emo-

tion and although the composition wasn't written for the death of Hitler, despair can be felt through this piece - the same type of despair felt by the Nazi regime.

While Adolf Hitler was still alive, he wanted Richard Wagner (1813-1883) to serve as a German icon, because Wagner was an anti-Semite and a German national. Wagner wrote an anti-Semitic essay that claimed Jewish participation in German music was immoral. Although there are many different views on what Wagner had to say about Jews and Judaism in music, some people argue he was very anti-Semitic while others say his words have been taken out of context. Regardless, there was enough anti-Semitism in Wagner's essay for Hitler to manipulate and use it to aid to his argument of the inferiority of the Jewish people. Wagner's *Judaism in Music* (1850) had two overarching points: first, was that the Jewish people were not able to reach the "musical heights" of European composers; and second, Jewish composers would just throw together different forms from composers throughout time and that they were incapable of composing original pieces (Friedmann par. 2). Works of Jewish composers became more and more famous during Wagner's time, and there are many accounts of remarks saying that Wagner was envious of the growing popularity of Jewish music, yet there is no account of Wagner acknowledging such a statement. Wagner's contribution to the Third Reich was mostly political, because he was an avid essay writer and the Nazis wanted to use his nationalistic viewpoints as validation for their malicious intents.

With these two views of Wagner's essay, Hitler was able to portray this musical genius as a supporter of the Nazi regime and all of their ideals. Although we cannot know to what degree Wagner agreed with the beliefs of Hitler, we can see that he was anti-Semitic. Wagner was used as a symbol of the Third Reich through his glorious "music dramas." Due to Wagner's anti-Semitic background, some musicians and scholars believe we should not play his music. His background affects how we see him today compared to how we see Beethoven. There is

reasonable evidence showing Wagner held some anti-Semitic beliefs, but there is no proof that Beethoven had any. Although the Nazis used both composers, the animosity scholars feel for musicians of the Third Reich is directed toward composers like Wagner.

Focusing on the more religious aspects of Nazism, Hitler turned to a man known for his masses, religious compositions, and for being the organist at the St. Florian Church in Austria. Hitler admired Anton Bruckner (1824-1896). Bruckner's music style was derived from sounds of the organ, military bands, and dance orchestras (Pace 26). Hitler associated himself with Bruckner because both of them were born in Linz, Austria. Hitler used Bruckner's compositions to legitimize and build a Nazi identity through music. For example, Bruckner's trumpet opening to his Third Symphony was the opening to radio broadcasts of the Nazi agenda. Bruckner's compositions were played profusely at cultural events, such as Hitler's cultural speeches at the Nuremberg rallies (Korstvedt 139). Hitler was aiming to define the perfect Aryan race from a religious perspective and the use of Bruckner's music helped him make his point. Benjamin Korstvedt writes: "Bruckner's music fit Nazi aesthetic desiderata: with its monumental sweep, its outwardly clear and balanced formal outlines, its chorale-like passages, and its prominent use of brass instruments, it was easily heard as profoundly 'German' music untainted by decadent cosmopolitanism" (133). It almost seemed that either the Third Reich was built upon the sounds of Bruckner or that Bruckner's compositions fit the nationalistic sound of the Third Reich. Hitler attempted to argue that Bruckner was most likely against all Jewish influence, because Hitler was unsuccessful at establishing himself as an artist in Vienna. He paralleled the idea that Bruckner was unaccepting of foreign music to the reluctant acceptance of Bruckner's music in the Viennese music community, and Hitler blamed that reluctance on the Jewish presence in Vienna (Korstvedt 139). Hitler wanted Bruckner and himself to appear "of the same kind." He wanted to present himself as

humbled and hardworking as Bruckner. He wanted to transform Bruckner's ideals to align them, in appearance, with his own. Bruckner never outright stated that he was anti-Semitic, yet Hitler drew connections from his own beliefs to make it seem as though Bruckner was against Jewish presence in music. With Bruckner's past and the manipulations that Hitler used it is easy to assume he was an anti-Semitic composer. Like Beethoven, no evidence has been found to prove Bruckner held anti-Semitic beliefs, which is why he still strives in the music community. Composers such as Beethoven, Bruckner, and Wagner did not live to see the rise of the Third Reich, or to witness the affect it would have on their music. For composers who were part of the Nazi regime, their situation was arguably far worse.

The Reichsmusikkammer was an institution that promoted true German music in Germany during the Nazi regime, and their president was the composer Richard Strauss (1894-1949). Whether Strauss agreed with the anti-Semitic ideals of Hitler remains unknown, yet it is recognized that the situation in Germany improved his position and career. When he was appointed the president of the Reichsmusikkammer in autumn of 1933, he received copyright protection for *all* German composers (Gilliam and Youmans par. 27). Although Strauss' views toward the Nazi ideals is unclear, it is evident that he was more concerned with his own career over political gains. Strauss was afforded a great deal of influence through his position at Reichsmusikkammer, yet he chose ignore most of the political events that surrounded him. His personal life and connections with people were more important to him than the politics of Germany. Bryan Gilliam and Charles Youmans wrote that "by replacing Toscanini, who had resigned in protest from the Wagner festival in 1933, Strauss saw an opportunity to make a gesture of goodwill towards the Wagner family, yet in doing so he clearly chose to ignore the fact that this played right into the hands of the National Socialists, who were eagerly seeking international legitimacy"(par. 28). Strauss held his artistic ego and

the connections he had with other composers in a much higher regard than the radical politics that enveloped him. He was so removed from the politics and the Nazi regime that he would not call Hitler "der Führer," his official title (Gilliam and Youmans par. 28). It is difficult to pin blame on Strauss for not actively fighting against the politics of the Third Reich, because if he did then he would have likely been killed or exiled. He worked in the best interests of himself and of his loved ones. And, as Beethoven never pronounced anti-Semitic beliefs, neither did Strauss. Strauss was solely focused on life and music.

These composers were heralded by Adolf Hitler in his pursuit to legitimize and validate the Nazi Regime. They were known as influential figures of their time and were looked upon with admiration, but Hitler changed the legacies of some of these men. The composer most affected by Hitler's scheme was Wagner. Scholars are divided between rejecting Wagner for his anti-Semitic beliefs or letting his music stand for itself. Some people argue that Wagner was dead at the time of the Third Reich and should not be so closely associated with Hitler's ideals, while others believe Wagner deserves to be treated with the same contempt as other anti-Semites of that time. One must also consider Strauss, who was alive during the time of the Third Reich, had a large part to play in the selecting the music that was allowed in the Nazi State, yet his legacy has not been tainted as badly as Wagner's. Bruckner was also deemed to be associated with Nazi ideals, though he did not have any outright anti-Semitic beliefs, yet his legacy remains intact. Beethoven and his legacy emerged from the Third Reich completely unscathed which is likely due to the immense popularity and influence Beethoven has around the world, transcending any association with Nazism. The impact of the Third Reich on many great composers can be seen through these examples, and because of the Third Reich, many will forever be remembered differently.

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