

Popular Music in the Nazi Weltanschauung

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Most who are familiar with the Nazis' idea of "cultured" music think of Hitler's affinity for composers like Wagner and Beethoven, and his quest for new composers that would provide him with epic classical works. This information is old and tired, however, in comparison to the Nazi position on popular music, folk music, and "*Hausmusik*" during their time in power. For Goebbels, German music "was a direct reflection of the German soul" (Kater 1997, 178), and contained ideological potential for "education" of the masses. The Nazis had a hardline stance on what they considered to be degenerate, extending this term to jazz and many folk songs that were considered ideologically unsound. These songs continued to be popular despite attempts to ban them, however, and the Nazis attempted to find a solution to this problem in a number of different ways, including editing existing lyrics and even trying to promote alternative styles. This paper will illustrate the ways in which the Nazi leadership attempted to make music played within Germany conform to their principles both positively and negatively, take a look at how resistance functioned, and perform a brief analysis of some lyrical changes.

The Nazis initially had very many interesting ideas on how to maintain music within the Reich. The *Reichsmusikkammer*, or Music Chamber, a part of the larger *Kulturkammer* (Culture Chambers) organisation was formed, which theoretically excluded Jews from new membership—although, since it was formed from existing musical societies, Jews were incorporated into its membership and only later removed—thus ensuring that new music would be created only by "Aryan" Germans.

Music education, particularly private instruction, became an easy way for the Nazis to control what music would be created in the future, and the Music Chamber took advantage of this strength.

In the early years some Nazi leaders considered giving Paul Hindemith, a prominent German modernist composer in the 20's and 30's, complete control over the entire music scene in Germany, although he later fell out of favor. No completely overarching attempt at absolute control was made after this, but unofficial bullying and Gestapo intervention often played a much larger role than direct censorship. Jazz was an exception to this rule, and will be examined first.

Nazi officials were not hesitant to ban undesirable music outright, as the decree banning jazz almost immediately upon ascension to power in 1933 illustrates, although "Goebbels allowed jazz to be played on the radio" (Steinweis 1993, 141) and public performances were tolerated, at least officially, to avoid alienating the populace. Jazz musicians were often harassed by groups such as the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Fighting Alliance for German Culture) and "antijazz elements in the Music Chamber." (Steinweis 1993, 141) Despite his tolerance, Goebbels had no sympathy for jazz music, and he published an article on the non-musicality of jazz in his newspaper *Das Reich*. As the Nazis felt more settled in to their position of power, Hadamovsky, the "*Sendeleiter*" of German radio, announced a ban on the broadcast of jazz in 1935. For the Olympic Games in 1936, however, the Nazis wanted to promote cosmopolitanism and relaxed their decree: "[T]his did not mean: Strauss instead of jazz, but rather Strauss *and* jazz, at least until cancellation." (Beyer und Ladurner 2011, 108-9) This was clearly an exception that the Nazis tolerated only for the sake of their public image, however, and their true intentions in terms of jazz were certainly clear in Hadamovsky's declaration in 1935: "As of today, Nigger Jazz is finally switched off on German radio." (Bergmeier und Lotz 1997, 138) As in any aspect of Nazi rule, consistency was rarely a factor in the censorship of music, and policy varied based on the needs of the hour.

By 1937, Goebbels allowed the extension of controls on "undesirable and dangerous music." This meant that, initially only foreign music, but by 1939 all music was checked over by the *Reichsmusikprüfstelle* (Reich Music Verification Office) in the Ministry of Propaganda, although the operation remained small. The *Prüfstelle* could request works for screening, but it was not an overarching program, despite an attempt in 1942 by Dr. Paul Raabe, then President of the Music Chamber, to make all publications subject to the office.

Raabe's plan had been to declare a former jazz musician who adapted to Nazi taste, Oskar Joost, as censor for all "dance music"—the new name for jazz in Nazi Germany—: live, on the radio, or recorded; not unlike the way in which films at the time were screened and censored prior to release.

This never came to fruition, however, and throughout the war the office banned a relatively small total of 150 artists or works of varying styles, the majority being jazz.

In light of the popularity of jazz, however, the Nazis could not simply expect the music to disappear simply due to a ban. As a result, “the authorities tolerated, even encouraged, a watered-down, tamed, Germanized form of ensemble dance music that was supposed to function as an ideologically acceptable ersatz jazz but lacked the spontaneity and sensuality of the real thing.” (Steinweis 1993, 142) This endeavor was not likely to succeed, however, since most jazz listeners were unlikely to change their tastes; many went underground as the music began to be suppressed. Michael Kater notes that jazz was elitist in Germany, although many who listened to it belonged to “sectors from which future leaders ideally were recruited” (Kater 1992, 52) and perhaps this was another reason for the intense drive for the eradication of this style of music, despite the fact that a significant segment of the German population was not in the least interested in jazz.

Nonetheless, the Nazis attempted to formulate a new version of jazz that would conform to the party’s principles. Dr. Fritz Pauli, the head archivist in the German Broadcasting Company, outlined the ideal German dance band as having “twelve violins, four violas, four saxophones, three trombones, three trumpets, piano, zither, percussion, bass, as well as two bassoons and two bass-clarinets.” (Bergmeier und Lotz 1997, 142) Furthermore the style was to have a violin-based melody as the focus, rather than the rhythm of the music. Early in the Nazi period, a jazz group called “*Die Goldene Sieben*” was formed, but they were soon considered “too jazzy” for some of the more conservative Nazis, and were disbanded before the war began. In 1935 a national competition was held, through which the Nazis hoped to find a suitable replacement for jazz music as “New German Dance Music.” In this contest, local bands were encouraged to participate, and although its organization was very poor, a final round was held in 1936 in Berlin, although the winning band never became a hit. For most this attempt was a failure and “a scam” (Kater 1992, 54). For the third-place band, Fritz Weber’s, however, it was only free publicity, wsince the group from Hamburg had already been popular before the competition.

Notably, there were no attempts to harness jazz, or a “Germanized” replacement, for overtly propagandistic reasons.

Though Goebbels touted cultural artifacts, among which music numbered, “as a palliative to soothe the general population or a tonic to condition the fighting morale of the troops” (Kater 1997, 178), he also knew “that ‘National Socialism set to music’ was not what listeners wanted.” (Bergmeier und Lotz 1997, 141) Propaganda swing was used on foreign broadcasts, however, with very unconcealed propagandistic tendencies. This was done to attract listeners in Britain and America, and many strict Nazis were against this, although Hitler and Goebbels both agreed that it would be more likely to attract an audience. Like many measures that were put in place by the Nazis, bans on jazz music were often only partial and improvised. Hesitance by Goebbels and others to put very strict controls on the production of music in general, for fear of destroying creativity—albeit a limited sense of the word—allowed bands that were often borderline “unacceptable”, such as *Die Goldene Sieben* or Fritz Weber’s orchestra mentioned above, to continue playing.

Despite loose official controls, Nazi party members often controlled, directly or indirectly, many theaters and clubs in which jazz could be played, and thus prohibited the performance of jazz in a more indirect way. The Gestapo also made periodical raids at clubs where shows were being played, to ensure that there was no degenerate music in the set list. All this only proved to push jazz further into an underground scene. Many jazz musicians edited their style, at least publicly, so that it conformed to Nazi ideals, and listeners played records or listened to foreign broadcasts in secrecy, often either in groups of close friends or with the aid of headphones. Most of these listeners were youth of the middle or upper class, and “named themselves Hot Boys, Swing Boys or Lotter Boys; their female equivalents were called Swing Girls, Swing Babies or Jazzkatzen.” (Beyer und Ladurner 2011, 105) These groups were mostly found in larger cities, such as Berlin or Hamburg, although groups also existed in Kiel and some medium-sized cities. These groups did not go unnoticed by the Nazis, however, and the *Sicherheitsdienst* the Gestapo worked on rounding up some of the groups, arresting 31 “swing youths” in 1940 and nearly an entire concert audience in 1941. Most wound up in concentration camps, often sent to small local camps for children, although in some extreme cases, for the most rowdy “musical gangster-groups” (Beyer und Ladurner 2011, 164)—as the Nazis called them—a verdict could mean deportation to Auschwitz.

Hausmusik was another area of music affected by the Nazis. *Hausmusik* was the term for music played by amateurs, generally in the setting of the home, although there were generally also some larger performances.

Their approach to this music was as if it was something new that could bring about the recovery of cultural life in Germany, “as though the nineteenth century had not been filled with middle class people engaged in that same effort.” (Kater und Riethmüller (ed.) 2003, 136) The Nazis, through the Chamber of Music, and another organization, the “*Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Hausmusik*” (Work Society for House Music), brought about a “perfect” *Gleichschaltung* (consolidation) for the genre. This meant that, like jazz, in public performances *Hausmusik* became a thoroughly “Aryan” art, although in private nothing had really changed. The practice of playing music in the family setting, or before a few friends or comrades would simply have proven too expensive and burdensome to censor, so the Nazis contented themselves with the control of new publication of sheet music and magazines on the genre. A presentation of “proper” *Hausmusik* also factored in more subtly to propaganda artifacts like film. In *Wunschkonzert*, a light entertainment/propaganda—as nothing was beyond the reach of Goebbels and his ministry—film from 1940, a small performance is inserted into the plot, where a character plays Beethoven to his mother and some approving houseguests. A very large Beethoven bust also figures prominently atop the piano in this scene, suggesting quietly both the correct attitude toward these performances, and the proper kind of music to be played. Public displays of this genre became an affirmation of “the drive to social and political uniformity” (Kater und Riethmüller (ed.) 2003, 143) that the Nazis promoted, although their own rhetoric preferred to call it “unity”.

Folk music was also affected by Nazi ideology, and perhaps in the most interesting ways. The *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* regularly hosted musical presentations of traditional folk music and dance, for which Goebbels had particular scorn, interestingly. Particularly, drinking songs often were transformed into marching songs for the *Wehrmacht*, and traditional hiking songs were edited for use by the *Hitlerjugend*, although the HJ had many instances of songs that were composed for their own sake and oozed unabashed propagandistic messages. Many of traditional hiking songs were also outright banned, however, when they did not conform to the Nazi ideology.

The song, “*Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuß*” (“Dark brown is the Hazelnut”) exists in many forms, likely due to regional differences, but a version of the song on a record from 1960, and a version online described as a “German Military War Song” (Unknown 2008) contain some interesting differences that appear to be intentional, when considered from the standpoint of Nazi ideology.

Both songs speak of falling in love with a girl of a tanned complexion, although in the *Wehrmacht* version a stanza about “a girl that once lived in a little town in Poland...she was the most beautiful child one could find” (Various 1960) is left out. The sentiment is decidedly against the Aryan ideal of the time, but it is difficult to trace whether the omission was purposely done in the 1930’s. The *Wehrmacht* version is also written from a much more male-dominant perspective, as it says “girls have neither court nor house, girls have no money.” (Unknown 2008); a line that does not appear in the other version. The non-*Wehrmacht* version of the song seems to put the female character of the song on a more equal plane with the male, singing: “I’ll not kiss you, she said,” (Various 1960), implying a certain empowerment for the girl; something that also did not factor into the ideology. Furthermore there is no mention of property in the version on the record. This may not be conclusive evidence that the song was converted by the Nazis in order to be used in the army, but there are further instances where the changes have been confirmed as altered for use by the HJ.

The *Hitlerjugend* attempted to appeal to the youth of Germany with “entertainment in free nature” (Krauthäuser 2010, 20), but for many their totalitarian education program did not suit them. Hence groups like the *Edelweißpiraten* (Edelweiss Pirates) and the *Totenkopfpfadfinder* (Skull and Bones Pathfinders), among others, were created by dissident youths who sought to avoid the strict militarism of the HJ. As the Nazis clamped down on publication of unsuitable music, the songs of these groups were often written by hand into songbooks or transmitted orally. Like jazz, the Gestapo played a role in the suppression of these “radical” groups, and punishment was very strict. The youths participating in the groups thus created ways in which they secretly passed on their meeting places and times with secret codenames or passphrases, and would invent excuses to avoid having to go to HJ meetings. An interesting trial, in which a group of these youth were being persecuted for singing “prohibited youth-gang songs” (Krauthäuser 2010, 38), wound up with a not guilty verdict, when an HJ group marched by singing the very same song that those on trial were accused of singing. Most were not so lucky, however, and found themselves, if caught, facing time at a labor or concentration camp.

This is evidenced by the fact that one song, “Die Gedanken sind frei” [Thoughts are free] was also found in a camp songbook at Sachsenhausen.” (Krauthäuser 2010, 94)

Hiking songs were suppressed or edited due to international tendencies in the texts, religious sentiments, or, in the case of “Die Gedanken sind frei”, due to anticonformist sentiments.

There were also various songs that the so-called “youth gangs” wrote themselves, often referencing the name of their group (“Edelweißpiraten sind Treu” (“Edelweiss Pirates are Loyal”), for example). These songs stood in opposition to the songs of the *Hitlerjugend*, which generally stressed the typical Nazi ideals of national community and brotherhood, omitting references to non-Germanic regions of the world. The banned songs brought out brotherhood in many cases as well, but in an inclusive, world-encompassing way, in comparison to the glorification of Germany and military service that was the canon in the HJ.

Propaganda served a major role in Nazi Germany, creeping into all parts of life, political and cultural, private and public. Music was certainly no exception to this, and popular music played a large role in the everyday lives of the average German citizen in many ways. Though propaganda for foreign consumption was often much more explicit, the Nazis attempted to imbue cultural life with their vision of the German “master race” with varying degrees of success. Goebbels was insistent on plurality and light entertainment in cultural life, as he did not want creativity to be entirely stamped out, and this often put him at odds with other Nazi officials, despite his more influential position. Music geared toward the military or HJ tended towards a much more clear-cut propagandistic purpose, although it did build upon existing traditional music in some interesting ways. Music for the much larger civilian audience, on the other hand, was attempted to be kept as light as possible, though the popularity of outlawed music could not be stemmed throughout the period of Nazi rule.

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