Nazism, Judaism, and the Politics of Classical Music in Germany

Dr. Timothy L. Jackson (Distinguished University Research Professor of Music, Music Building, Room 111, tel. (940) 565-3748 (wk), e-mail: zelechin928@gmail.com. Re. Private consultations: the student is responsible for requesting meetings with the instructor. The best times to meet are MWF 11pm. The course will be offered within the Division of Musicology, Music Theory and Ethnomusicology within the College of Music and also contribute to the Minor in Jewish Studies. It will be open to Juniors and Seniors in music and arts and sciences. Ability to read music will not be required but is helpful.

The Course

To date, the issue of the interrelationship between musical aesthetics and Nazi ideology remains controversial. Is Richard Strauss's opera Capriccio (1942) a Nazi opera? Certainly, most listeners would prefer to think not, and enjoy this opera as "pure" music. But was this kind of "disconnect" between the world of art, music, and political ideology – although popular with prominent figures like Strauss who, after the war, sought to obscure or deny their Nazi pasts - tenable during the Third Reich? It was Goebbels, building on Hitler's pronouncements on music and the arts, who early on posited an intimate connection between art, music, and politics, reminding German artists that "The artist undeniably has the right to call himself non-political in a period when politics consists of nothing but shouting matches between parliamentary parties. But at this moment when politics is writing a national drama, when a world is being overthrown – in such a moment the artist cannot say: 'That doesn't concern me.'" This course explores the multifarious connections between Nazi ideology, politics, anti-Semitism, and Classical music in Nazi Germany. Weekly readings for the course will be selected from both primary and secondary sources. As primary sources, we will consider Nazi pronouncements on music and art (Hitler, Goebbels), the polemical writings of Richard Wagner (which assumed quasi-canonical status in the Third Reich), recordings of concerts and performances within Nazi Germany, as well as the writings and music of anti-Nazis including novelist Thomas Mann and Arnold Schoenberg. Secondary sources readings will be taken from the "preliminary bibliography" provided below.

Indeed, the very seductiveness of Hitler and the Nazis for Strauss - and many other "cultured" Germans like him - had been their promise to rid Germany of the hated modernism of Schoenberg (and the other "atonalists" and "modernists" as well as Jazz musicians) thereby restoring the culture's "organic" connection with its putatively indigenous traditions. The "renewed" tonality of Strauss, Pfitzner, Egck, Orff, etc. "reestablishes" the "old" Germany (Weimar being considered the aberration). In the ideology of the Third Reich, Classical music - defined as the music of the great "German" composers including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Liszt, Bruckner, Bruckner, and Brahms – played a primary role both as propaganda for the Third Reich and as the purest embodiment of its political and racial ideals. Music was the art-form in which Germans had excelled above all nations; according to the Nazi racial theory of "Blut und Boden" ("Blood and Soil"), German music, like the German People ("das Volk"), was rooted in and sprang forth from German soil. By contrast, Jewish composers, like Felix Mendelssohn, as Wagner had advocated in his infamous tract "Judaism in Music," were "rootless cosmopolitans" and thus incapable of true creativity. As a "foreign body" ("Fremdkoerper") within a putatively homogenous German culture, all Jewish musicians and composers had to be rooted out, if not murdered, then driven into exile. The Nazis organized a traveling exhibition of "Degenerate Music," featuring the works of primarily although not exclusively Jewish composers; their music was associated with Communism, "Jewish-Negro" Jazz and "atonality." The course concludes with a survey of responses from outside the Third Reich to the Nazi "perversion" of Classical music.

Assessment Procedures:
The course-work will encompass both weekly reading and listening assignments, and two essays on assigned topics.

The first essay will address the following issue:

1) Is there evidence – external and internal - that the *Symphonic Serenade* was in any way Korngold's response to Strauss's "Metamorphosen," and, if that was the case, what is the significance of Korngold’s reply to Strauss?

2) To what extent might Strauss’s setting of Hoffmansthal’s libretto for “Arabella” reflect a pro-Nazi interpretation of the text?

Weighting of Assignments:

2 x 35% and 30% in class discussion and participation.

**Preliminary Select General Bibliography (Background Reading):**


--- *Smart Jews : the construction of the image of Jewish superior intelligence*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996


--- *Different drummers : jazz in the culture of Nazi Germany*, New York: Oxford, 1992


--- *Undertones of insurrection: music, politics & the social sphere in the modern German narrative*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993
Marking policy:

To receive a grade, all written assignments must be submitted no later than one class after the announced due date. One unit may be deducted for lateness (e.g. A becomes A-). Attendance is expected at all classes. Students may obtain advance permission to submit work late or miss class.

The instructor reserves the right to drop a student from the course for unexplained absences or any other reason deemed appropriate.