

NECESSITY & MANIPULATION:

Music and Nationalism
France at fin-de-siècle, and Germany in the Third Reich

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Comprehensive Examination Response

Music and Nationalism

INTRODUCTION

Through the course of our nationalism seminar, we examined the musical practices of several countries and attempted to tease out nationalist paradigms and principles in their respective musical traditions. The following is a discussion of several ways music has been used for a nationalist cause, and how a particular music can come to define a country. This paper will examine the ways in which music was used in two countries that were each torn apart by war and depression: France at *fin-de-siècle*, and Germany in the Third Reich.

Nationalism Paradigm

To facilitate an understanding of how music has been used for a nationalistic cause, it helps to examine the principles of Nationalism. Historians and musicologists who study nationalism typically ascribe to one of four paradigms. The first paradigm accepts that nations and nationhood are extensions of ancestral and cultural bonds, and therefore are naturally inseparable from the human condition.¹ This highly simplistic approach, known as *primordialism*, can be useful for quickly sorting through large amounts of material and determining the essence of an issue. However, this paradigm cannot account for a great deal of circumstances that are natural to the human condition (such as migration, colonization, or intermarriage), and requires the researcher to concede the idea that nationhood has existed since sentient hominids began congregating.²

¹ Anthony Smith. *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 1.

² *Ibid.*, 4–5.

The second paradigm called *perennialism* elaborates the concept that human congregation innately results in nationalism based on the strength of the bonds created. Essentially the theory states that nations with weak bonds will dissolve only to be replaced by nations with stronger bonds, and that some bonds have existed for so long as to become perennial.³ The opposition to this paradigm often cites philosophical ambiguity and the risk of “imposing retrospective nationalism,” and thus self-legitimizing the theory.⁴

The third paradigm of nationalism is based on the belief that the idea of nations and nationhood are modern concepts. Appropriately named *modernism*, this paradigm concludes that nationalism did not exist prior to the end of the French revolution in 1780,⁵ and that any attempt to ascribe the model earlier is an attempt to justify either *primordialism* or *perennialism*. The *modernism* paradigm allows for a very detailed analysis of socio-economic, ideological, and cultural implications of modern industrial society, but has been criticized by opponents for its failure to consider civilizations prior to 1780.⁶

There are fundamental failures in all three paradigms. The scope of *primordialism* was too limited to the past, while *modernism* offered a perspective too limited to the present. *Perennialism* can be generally characterized by a lack of focus. To address these failures, Benedict Anderson proposed a fourth paradigm he titled *historical ethno-symbolism*.⁷ This comprehensive theory is centered on tracing and interpreting the history

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.* 8–9.

of myths, communal memories, traditions, symbols, ethnicity, and customs.⁸ Another central component of the *historical ethno-symbolism* paradigm is the ability to suggest a culture's future trajectory based on past and present continuity and durability.⁹ While the difficulty with this paradigm lies with its complexity, it does offer the most complete perspective on the subject of nationalism.

The following discussion of music and nationalism will draw on elements of both the paradigms of *modernism* and *historical-ethno symbolism*. To uncover the essence of nationalism it may help to examine the nature of identity.

Identity and Necessity

Each of us is inundated by a host of experiences everyday. The knowledge we gain from our experiences, and those of others, is used to create, reinforce and constantly restructure our identities. Ethnicity, cultural heritage, education, social-class, religion, environment, and past experiences are some factors we use to establish a frame of reference for determining our present actions. These actions, consciously and subconsciously, are directly indicative of our belief systems and as a consequence, inevitably how we identify others and ourselves.

People are also social beings and rely on each other for a multitude of reasons: geographically, economically, psychologically, ideologically, and physiologically. But whatever the cause, it is vital for people to interact with others. When people interact they create shared experiences. The accumulation of shared experiences form the basis for communal identities. Of course our preferences for music can parallel both our personal and communal identities. Communal identities can develop for psychological and

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9–11

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17–18

sociological reasons. In these instances communal identities are often formed out a necessity.

France

France was broken and enormously in debt to the German States after their loss in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.¹⁰ Political ideologies for rebuilding France were divided along party lines. Liberals, Monarchists, Bonapartists, and Republicans all vied for control. A renewed interest in religion allowed the monarchists and conservative republicans to begin working together.¹¹ This *Moral Order* became the driving force to recovery, and an eventual shift to France's formation as a Republic in 1875.¹² Republicans were elected the majority and began looking for ways to unify the population across socio-economic and cultural lines in the hopes of creating a "society characterized by widespread trust, and confident mutual reliance."¹³ Ultimately, the solidification of a system of morals and beliefs, *mœurs*, becomes the method.¹⁴

With the method established, the only question the Republicans needed to answer was what means to use for the *mœurs* dissemination. In addition to a massively successful print-media campaign, Republicans turned to music to embody their belief systems.¹⁵ Prevailing thought at the time was that music was incorruptible. But the *Moral Order* and the socio-economic elite saw popular music as a threat to *mœurs*, a so-called "invasion of

¹⁰ Jann Pasler. *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹² *Ibid.*,

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169–170

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175–176

bad taste.”¹⁶ From this debate grew the necessity to find a form of music that was immune from popular music’s (and *petit bourgeois*) influences.¹⁷

Opera, specifically that of the *opéra-comique*, a full length opera that juxtaposes spoken recitative and sung aria, became that form of music. Opera flourished, especially in Paris: Thomas’s *Mignon*, Saint-Saens’s *Sampson and Delilah*, and Massenet’s *Manon* to name a few. To the socio-economic elite, opera embodied all the virtues of the modern *mœurs* while simultaneously providing an excellent method to incorporate symbolism and mythology. The effect of symbols on society cannot be underestimated. Of course a popular French symbol at the time was Jeanned’Arc.¹⁸ But opera and symbols were not enough. Republicans and the *Moral Order* were only able to reach the upper-middleclass and elite segments of society. If they were ever to achieve unity, they needed a method to reach beyond socio-economic divisions.

Formal education became central platform for inspiring *mœurs*.¹⁹ Despite political differences, everyone saw the youth as the “best hope.”²⁰ The socio-economic elite believed the working-class could be controlled through education.²¹ Additionally, they believed that “taste” could be taught.²² The validity of these last two remarks should be challenged, but the latter is arguably not completely off the mark. After the devastating loss in the war, Monarchists, and later the Republicans, seized the opportunity to promote an agenda for music education.²³ Through the renewed support of choral societies, and festivals, *orphéons* (choirs), singing became wildly

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176–177.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 186–187.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

²¹ *Ibid.*,

²² *Ibid.*, 193–194

²³ *Ibid.*, 197.

popular with a levels of society. Singing was also inexpensive, and groups of all skill levels were plentiful. These two reasons can account for some of success of the *orphéons*.²⁴

Ultimately, the initiative for music education culminated in 1881, when singing became mandatory in schools.

Through philosophical debate and reinterpretation, *mœurs* quickly became synonymous with the idea of “fraternity,” that is the sense of belonging derived from family.²⁵ Eventually, the idea grew to include society as an extension of the family, and thus in France a national identity.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this account. Nations can be formed from psychological and sociological necessity. Troubling socio-economic conditions and political unrest caused by France’s loss of the War gave rise to the acceptance of *Mœurs* in favor of better living conditions offered by unification. People both inside and outside of France were told what to believe by the Republicans and the *Moral Order*, who controlled the media, as a necessary way to maintain their agenda’s momentum. While opera, to socio-economic elite (and a lesser extent bourgeois) and was a necessary class expectation, the Republicans and *Moral Order* used it as the method to disseminate *Mœurs*. Similarly, while the Republicans and *Moral Order* were able to reach the lower middle-class and poor through the music education system to necessitate their agenda, to the poor the popularity of singing groups grew out of economic necessity and practicality of resources.

Psychological and sociological necessity is not the only factor to consider when determining how cultures establish communal identities. Political, military, and religious

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

agencies are enormous catalysts to such ends, and often use manipulation and propaganda accomplish a specific agenda. These agencies target specific audiences and strategically control information and resources.

GERMANY

Before and during WWII, Germany struggled with the duality of musical identity. This struggle was propagated by the socio-economic elites' desire to differentiate their musical ideals from that of the masses. The elite gravitated to what they called "serious music," which sought to emulate the *Grand Style* romanticism, mythology, and nostalgia of Bruckner, Brahms and Beethoven.²⁶ The masses' preference for neo-classical "Light music," spoke to their desire for entertainment over pomp. Of course, this crisis of identity was further complicated by the infusion of academic modernism toward the end of the war.

A period of hyperinflation and depression left the Weimar Republic in economic ruin.²⁷ This allowed for the National Socialist Party led by Hitler to gain power in 1933, setting the stage for the "Nazification of music" as a tool for propaganda.²⁸ At the time Hitler gained power the socio-economic conditions for musicians, and for everyone else, were abysmal. Joseph Goebbels, head of ministry of propaganda, established the Reich Music Chamber RMK, a subdivision of the RKK, Reich Culture Chamber.²⁹ Initially, the purpose of the RMK was to salvage the vestiges of a German music scene left in ruin by

²⁶ Walter Frish. *German Modernism: Music and the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 18–19.

²⁷ Michael H. Kater. *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich*. Ney (York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1–3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

the decay of the Weimar depression.³⁰ Recovery was slow in the first few years of the Third Reich, but the Nazi party was able to economically turn things around. In 1936, Goebbels established the *Künstlerdank*, a ‘pension-like’ assistance program for musicians. Shortly after, he instituted a government enforced competency based pay scale for professional musicians, in which Nazi affiliation was mandatory.³¹ Despite economic progress and recovery, a mandate like this left only one choice for professional musicians in Germany. Either join the Nazi party or give up their professional career. Eventually the RMK was able to provide musicians with a very lucrative socio-economic relationship.³²

Goebbels understood the ability to use the RMK as a cultural vehicle for propaganda would have been seriously compromised without maintaining distance. At Goebbels’ request, Richard Strauss was installed as the first president of the RMK. Strauss was also chosen to head the composers sub agency simultaneously.³³ Of course, Goebbels, (and by association Hitler) no doubt chose Strauss for his fame. Strauss would prove to be a wonderful tool for Hitler to widen his field of influence. Moreover, Hitler and Strauss shared a common goal: to educate the population. To Hitler, this education came in the form of control of the dissemination of information and ideological indoctrination of the youth. Strauss, on the other hand was referring to the hierarchy of musical taste to promote “high culture” and bring about a return to the *Grand Style*.

³⁰ Celia Applegate and Pamela Maxine Potter. *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23–25.

³¹ Michael H. Kater. *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich*. Ney (York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

³² Celia Applegate and Pamela Maxine Potter. *Music and German National Identity* 23–25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

Musical events like the Wagnerian festival at Bayreuth served both agendas.³⁴ To that end, Strauss's agenda included raising the musical competency of the public, and promoting the creation of new "serious" music by establishing profit sharing and extending copyright periods for "serious" composers.³⁵

During his presidency of the RMK, Strauss also made policies of conscripting musicians, instituting musical competency testing and collecting dues from members.³⁶ Moreover, he was also able to control musicians' travel schedules and stipends and limit the number of non-German instrumentalists from entering the country.³⁷ To Strauss, these policies were aimed at fostering the highest level of musicianship and German style. But they also served the function of consolidating and reinforcing Goebbels' power to use the RMK as an extension of the Nazi propaganda machine.

After Goebbels forced Strauss to resign his presidency of the RMK in 1935, he installed Peter Raabe.³⁸ Raabe was, for all intents and purposes, considered Goebbels' "puppet." Through Raabe, Goebbels was able to consolidate the power structure even further, instituting closer scrutiny of concert programming and blacklisting all Jewish and foreigner's music.³⁹ Over the next decade, Goebbels, through puppets like Raabe, was able to refine the Nazi propaganda machine and gain systematic control of the German music scene.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this account. Nations can be formed by political or religious agencies through manipulation of information and resources. Hitler

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

³⁵ Michael H. Kater. *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich*. Ney (York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*,

and the Nazi party manipulated the German people into accepting their beliefs through brute force, subversive propaganda and the controlled access to resources. At the same time, Strauss used Hitler and the Nazi party to promote his musical ideologies. Of course any information coming out of Germany at the time would undoubtedly have been controlled by Hitler and the Nazi Party, especially during WWII.

Music can be used as a tool to influence decisions made by individuals and groups. Music may be used to unite people in a similar cause, as was the case in *fin-de-siècle* France, or isolate others, as was the case in Nazi Germany. Everything we do is in some way related to our identities, which are directly determined by our belief systems. Belief systems that are a product of the knowledge we gain from our experiences, both individual and communal. Social facets such as heritage, region, ethnicity, national identity, race, and social class are only a few examples of the communal identities we all wear. What lessons can we learn from our quest to differentiate ourselves *from* and bond ourselves *to* others? As a symbol of our identity, Nations can form out of necessity or manipulation.

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