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Nationalistic tendencies and 20th century music – the German case –

Valentina SANDU-DEDIU
Professor PhD
National University of Music București
ROMANIA[1]

Abstract: I belong to a generation of Romanian musicologists educated during the last years of the Communist period, and the idea of balancing historiography and structuralist analysis has been on my mind a lot. I inherited from Romanian historiography clichés such as "the tension between national and universal", the "transfiguration" of the folkloric source (in avant-garde composition), the "Moldavian Orpheus" etc. Over time, I felt the need to reformulate, nuance, fight such clichés and other previously accepted ideas, and each time I encountered manifestations of nationalism in music. But these are not only characteristic of the Romanian environment, so I looked at other European cultures to learn from what was happening there: to the French with the Dreyfuss and Vincent d'Indy cases, to the Soviets with the compromises made by Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev, but also with Igor Stravinsky's "export nationalism". Other themes to explore are Béla Bartók and folklorism, Enescu and Communism.
In this article, I limit myself to the great German musical traditions and how they were handled by Nazi ideology. I will talk about the "trial of German musicology", which started after 1990 and shed light on historical aspects during the Third Reich.

1. Introduction

For us, Romanian musicologists educated during the Communist period, used to not mixing musical analysis of a composition with its placement in a context, a change of perspective after 1990 was necessary, but difficult. If Romanian historiography, including the musical one, was deeply perverted during Communism by the nationalist ideology, among others, one could find an (illusory) refuge in structuralist analysis, in dissecting the mechanisms of contemporary Romanian scores. Even there, inevitably, one could discover deeply rooted clichés, such as the "tension between the national and the universal", the "transfiguration" of the folkloric source in avant-garde

[1] dediusandu@gmail.com.

composition etc.[2]. It was only the 1990s and the opening of borders to the rest of the world that provoked reflection on the need to rediscover and reformulate Romanian musical histories.

After 2010, along with a few colleagues, I set out to investigate the similarities and differences between music written under different dictatorships in various parts of Europe. The time between circa 1930 and 1950 can still be explored – for instance, its awkward position between the modernism that took off spectacularly in the first third of the 20th century and the formation of the musical avant-gardes after 1950. Do these years, marked by growing nationalism, fascist and Communist dictatorships, racism and war, have a well-defined musical profile? Or can we speak only of steps backwards from the innovations of the 1920s, of the instrumentalisation of music for politically propagandistic purposes, or of the retreat of prominent artists into isolated niches?[3]

What we can read today, in universal musicological writings, guides us towards reformulating, nuancing, and denying some previously accepted definitions of musical nationalism in European cultured music.

2. The extensions of romantic nationalistic attitudes in the 20th century

The totalitarian regimes that have shaped recent European history use music in similar ways, however different they are in terms of doctrine. Composers who have managed to avoid or escape them take on different voices, such as Igor Stravinsky's "export nationalism". This label, proposed by Richard Taruskin, explains the fact that, although Stravinsky and the other composers of his generation tried around 1900 to distance themselves from "national sentiment" in order to become "European", widespread success still came thanks to the Russian folklore-inspired ballets commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev for his Parisian company, *Les Ballets russes*. And thus "neo-nationalism was the catalyst for Stravinsky's international modernism."[4] Sometime later, the same Diaghilev would ask Sergei Prokofiev (who was still living in Paris) for a ballet

[2] See Valentina Sandu-Dediu and Nicolae Gheorghiță (ed.) (2020), *Noi istorii ale muzicilor românești*, two volumes, Editura Muzicală, București.

[3] See Valentina Sandu-Dediu (ed.) (2016) *Music in Dark Times. Europe East and West, 1930-1950*, Editura UNMB, București.

[4] Richard Taruskin, *Nationalism*, in "Grove Online", published 2001, at: https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.50846.
Taruskin defines the meaning of nationalism in general as the doctrine or theory according to which the determining factor in human character and destiny, as well as the fundamental object of social and political allegiance, is the nation to which an individual belongs. Nationalism has been a factor in the European cultural ideology since the late 18th century, recognised as such by historians and sociologists, and a dominant factor in geopolitics since the late 19th century.

reflecting Soviet realities, so another example of exotic nationalism was born with the *Steel Step.*

As for people's interest in folklore, continuing the romantic ideal launched by Herder, Belá Bartók remains both its most brilliant and its most controversial representative, because of the two equally intolerant ideologies, born of the East-West polarity, which claim him: radical non-nationalistic modernism on the one hand, and socialist folkloric realism on the other. Bartók finds himself tragically caught in this trap, as the Communist bloc appreciates those works in which folklorism seems to predominate (supposedly at the expense of modernism), while the Western avant-garde emphasises precisely the innovation in those pieces banned in the Soviet zone that seem to not have been (at least visibly) touched by the folk spirit.

Globalisation and postmodernism at the end of the 20th century will bring new, flexible, permissive perspectives, and will sometimes exaggerate diversity. In the case of folklore, its filtering into 'academic' or 'cultured' music will shift the focus from nation to ethnicity.

3. The handling of music in totalitarian regimes

Both Hitler and Stalin "believed in the power of music over personal and political life and considered themselves music lovers. They personally intervened in the efforts to use music to benefit the state in the sense that music could deepen enthusiasm for and loyalty to the regime."[5] Hitler made a point of recasting episodes of music history in terms of Nazi ideology, highlighting the great German classical tradition and declaring his preference for Richard Wagner (easily associated with racist theories) or Anton Bruckner (and his grandiose sound, real fodder for the dictator's megalomania). Music – whether sacred or not – becomes the direct competitor of religion, and must produce a spiritual experience in its reception. This is why the theatre and the concert hall must be shrouded in darkness, so that music can become a mystical collective experience, an Aryan liturgy. The success of Carl Orff's *Carmina burana* was also due to this "orgiastic expression of enthusiastic Aryan solidarity".[6] The Nazi regime is generally concerned with deploying the forces of professional music, with building the image of great conductors (a symbol of the spiritual dictator), but also with developing the local musical infrastructure through educational institutions or amateur ensembles: "music becomes privileged not only as a compensatory sphere of personal, individualistic expression, but also as a component of the racially and culturally homogeneous community."[7]

[5] Leon Botstein (2005), *Art and the State: The Case of Music*, in "The Musical Quarterly", Vol. 88, No. 4, Winter Edition, pp. 491-492.
[6] *Idem,* p. 492.
[7] Leon Botstein, *op. cit.,* p. 493.

In turn, Stalin placed much more importance on new music, commissioned or conducted to reflect the new realities of Soviet Communism. Perhaps herein lies the essential difference between one totalitarian regime and the other, in terms of repertoire: the Germans have a vast and generous tradition of masterpieces at their disposal, which they manipulate for contemporary audiences; the Soviets aim to create a new body of masterpieces (and we are not talking about choruses, marches or odes dedicated to Stalin). This is why more 'Soviet' music survives the regime, if we are to think only of the scores of Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, compared to the Nazi 'legacy', left mainly by opponents of the regime (Karl Amadeus Hartmann), its victims (Viktor Ullmann and Erwin Schulhoff), exiles and émigrés.

4. The trial of German musicology

For any budding musicologist, German literature offers unavoidable landmarks. Moreover, it is in Germany that the features of this discipline, in its modern sense, have been formed and developed since the 18th century. The soundness of historical, aesthetic and analytical thinking in the writings of the 19th and especially the 20th centuries give German musicology a well-founded position, even if the political fog of National Socialism has had a decisive impact on it. Just like musical creation, performance and reception, the scientific discourse on music is also influenced by fashions, but it is easier to censor and to manipulate through ideological pressure, since it works with words about sounds rather than with sounds.

After 1990, the trial of German musicology during the Third Reich was initiated by some American scholars and continued by Germans, generating debates and criticism between generations, the more or less vehement demolition of iconic names, as well as the relativisation of the perspective on established values. Keeping proportions, we can then apply the same measure of evaluation to Romanian musicology, only to reformulate and to shed light on distorted aspects of the history of Romanian music.

The crisis of German musicology after the First World War starts, on the one hand, from the generally valid question about the relevance of the discipline: should it serve the general public, or remain in its ivory tower? Should it deal with the needs of practicing musicians, thus leaving the refuge of the past to discuss the hot topics of the present? Many musicologists are beginning to show their interest in public life (education, music policy, the youth movement – the famous *Jugendbewegung* – or the amateur movement – *Hausmusik*) in articles published in periodicals. The younger generation is more oriented towards radio, film, the recording industry, where doctoral studies are not required, so the need for the academic discipline of musicology can be questioned. On the other hand, nationalistic impulses are also driving musicological orientations. After the war,

research funding institutions encourage German scholars to investigate German music, resulting in a significant increase in the number of publications on German topics.[8]

The creation of the Ministry of Propaganda aims, among other things, to encourage young people by creating new jobs for cultural experts, opening up new prospects for those studying musicology – in theatres, concert agencies, the recording industry or instrument sales. The research itself moves intentionally towards the importance of racial studies, the definition of German nationality through music, the preservation of folk culture (as a symbol of national authenticity, folklore is manipulated in similar ways by all totalitarian regimes).

Between 1937 and 1945, research directions are shaped by various political interests: Heinrich Himmler aims at a comprehensive understanding of the German race in that scientific branch of his massive organisation, the *SS-Ahnenerbe*, and is particularly interested in Germanic influences on the Gregorian chant. In this example, as in many others, we recognise samples of the protochronism that characterises nationalistic tendencies everywhere. (I am inevitably reminded of the 'Daco-Roman music', a subject dear to the Romanian Communists.) Joseph Goebbels, who was responsible for propaganda, was particularly keen on creating collections of folk songs for the party and for schools. In the Ministry he heads, Alfred Rosenberg (an ideologist of National Socialism and Goebbels' rival) has his own music department, whose director, Alfred Gerigk, is the author of a *Lexicon of Jews in Music*, and ensured ideological correctness in musicology, involving it in the creation of policies in the territories under German occupation[9]. This is the only way musicologists prove useful: when they find cultural and historical arguments for the advantages of German expansion in certain geographical areas. They show, for example, how Austria (annexed in 1938) shares the same musical heritage, and how the classical style is characterised as a purely German phenomenon, with no trace of Bohemian influences (which goes hand in hand with the pressure on Czechoslovakia in 1938 to cede German-populated territories). Propaganda musicology literature also follows other events, reinforcing connections with the allies Japan and Italy:

> In his book *Deutschland und Italien in ihren musikgeschichtlichen Beziehungen* [Germany and Italy in their historical and musical relations], Hans Engel tried to emphasize the notion of mutual respect (citing the Italians' attraction to the German "Northern depth" and Germany's attraction to Italian "euphony", and even claimed to demonstrate racial

[8] Pamela M. Potter (1996), *Musicology under Hitler: New Sources in Context*, in "Journal of the American Musicological Society", Vol. 49, No. 1, Spring Edition, p. 75 of pp. 70-113.
[9] *Idem*, p. 84.

> affinities that could explain similarities in the musical styles of the inhabitants of Southern Germany and Northern Italy.[10]

The examples could continue with the criticism of Germany's enemies, England and the USA, the ambiguous attitude towards the USSR (conditioned by the fluctuations in political relations and the course of the war), or the emphasis on the various influences of German music on the musical culture of its neighbours. Demonstrating the superiority of German music is not a new idea – there are writings attesting to it as far back as the 19th century, and nationalism is evident in histories of music written after the First World War, including by Alfred Einstein (whose Jewish origins would otherwise lead him to emigrate to the USA). Those musicologists involved in propaganda demonstrations collaborated with the regime for a variety of reasons (career or financial), but also out of a typical researcher's desire to have access to rare, hard-to-access musicological archives and resources that the censors did not make available to everyone. The individual situations are complex and reveal, as expected, multiple faces of compromise and opportunism.

Germany's defeat in World War II prompted German scholars to distance themselves from declarative nationalism or any trace of racist sentiment; however, certain elements of Germanocentrism are ingrained and migrate to the U.S. with the victims of National Socialism (alongside Einstein, Karl Geiringer or Leo Schrade can be named here). As a result, post-war American musicology finds its resources in German concepts, especially in the fundamental, methodological ones, and in time takes the leading position within the discipline.

Hans-Joachim Moser and his complex relationship with the regime. We learn more about this from the musicologist Anselm Gerhard in his incisive writings, launched at a propitious moment for historical revelations from within Germany: in 2000, the *Gesellschaft für Musikforschung* proposed a broad conference theme on German musicology in the Third Reich, basically touching on that area carefully avoided after 1990. In Gerhard's description, Moser appears as the prolific musicologist disseminating fanatically nationalistic ideas. A party member since 1936, starting with 1940 he was General Secretary of the Reich's music department in Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda, where he was responsible, for example, for the careful "cleansing" of the texts of Georg Friedrich Händel's *Oratories* of Jewish traces of the *Old Testament*, as well as poetic expressions from Schumann's *Lieder* based on the Jew Heinrich Heine's poems. In the three volumes of *Geschichte der deutschen Musik,* published in 1920 and with numerous successive editions, Moser's views are decidedly nationalistic, more precisely *völkisch.*[11]

[10] Pamela M. Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
[11] Anselm Gerhard (2001), *Musicology in the 'Third Reich': A Preliminary Report*, "The Journal of Musicology", Vol. 18, No. 4, Fall Edition, p. 530 ff.

This difficult-to-translate term (obviously derived from the root *Volk* – people) expresses a specific type of nationalism, and appears more and more often in German literature after 1875, when it is used to replace the Latin-based term "national".[12] Towards the end of the 19th century, and especially in the first decades of the 20th century, *völkisch* becomes so charged with racial and anti-Semitic meanings that the 1926 *Staatslexikon* describes it as incompatible with *Judentum*, and as an antonym for international (in the eternal opposition between national and universal). It becomes a racist political concept, far removed from its original, cultural meaning.

As far as music and abstract art are concerned, the concepts of race and *völkisch* could not be fully assimilated, given the difficulty of explaining the history of European music in accordance with the National Socialist studies of race.[13]

5. Is there such a thing as Nazi music?

Ultimately, we are marked by the times in which we live even when we look (allegedly with maximum objectivity) at the past. Today's analyses of musical life during the Third Reich and of the attitudes of musicians (then and since) attempt to bring to public light facts and documents that are still unknown; their interpretation is inevitably marked by the subjectivity of the authors of the present, as well as by the trend to which they belong. Precisely because the "new musicology" (launched in the USA in the mid-1980s, and influenced by structural anthropology) began by criticising composer-centred methodology (and therefore the cult of the genius), it will also shape the configuration of the "Nazi music" concept through the sum of individual histories that can reveal flexible boundaries between the guilt and innocence of a particular musician.

A study by Pamela Potter illustrates this trend[14] , focusing on the various histories of reception, the de-nazification process, and reactions in the post-war era, reaching the inescapable conclusion that one cannot define a Nazi style in music. During the time of the National Socialist regime, there was no talk of "Nazi" music (or art in general), but of the "German" one. Subsequent analyses of musical works produced at that time have failed to find arguments and evidence for the existence of a coherent Nazi musical aesthetic. Defining it with the help of party songs is not enough, because the same attributes (melodic simplicity, marching rhythm, mobilising lyrics) characterise the militaristic-

[12] The proposal was made by the linguist Hermann von Pfister-Schwaighusen, a campaigner for the purification of German language and culture from foreign influences. See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Völkisch, accessed 07.08.2017.
[13] Anselm Gerhard, *op. cit*., p. 538.
[14] See Pamela M. Potter (2005), *What Is "Nazi Music"?*, "The Musical Quarterly", Vol. 88, No. 3, Fall Edition, pp. 428-455.

patriotic allure of all propaganda songs, regardless of regime (fascist or Communist). There is no corpus of works with explicitly Nazi symbolism or themes, and censorship did not work very effectively in terms of music. Musical life in the Third Reich still reveals many contradictions: despite pro-Wagner propaganda, the young composers of the 1920s and 1930s do not continue this style; despite the accusations against atonality and jazz, jazz is more popular than during the Weimar Republic; repertoire lists of concert institutions and radio show that those composers who were Jewish or whose music had been labelled degenerate (including Felix Mendelssohn, Alexander von Zemlinski, and Alban Berg) are still being played. Studies of the 1990s show that the regime did not actually have totalitarian control over musical life; music (to a greater extent than other arts) was too decentralised to be brought under party or state control; the few blacklists that did exist were not always enforced, and Hitler's interventions in music were greatly exaggerated.[15] (It seems that the ideology of socialist realism, by contrast, had a much more controlled coherence, at least if we think of the Romanian case.)

Most research into the nature of Nazi music has started from its declared opposition to modernism. Consequently, in post-war West Germany, composers and music critics resolutely chose the path of an autonomous music, based as far as possible on scientific principles (mathematical, linguistic, electronic, astronomical etc.), avoiding any extra-musical meaning, and therefore impossible to subscribe to any political ideology, precisely in order to distance themselves from the idea of music becoming an instrument of propaganda under Nazism. The younger generations of German musicians take up the notion of *Stunde Null* – Zero Hour[16] (which becomes highly controversial later on, however) to symbolise the total repudiation of the Nazi past and to justify new horizons, untouched by such a tradition. Precisely those composers who had been banned for their modernism now become models, and musical languages propose abstract, complicated, innovative, elitist models. This was the justification for the establishment in 1946 of the famous Darmstadt courses (*Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik*), a bastion of avant-garde music in the 1950s. Adorno's idea - modernists are (left-wing) progressives, and musical conservatism reflects (right-wing) political conservatism – rules the new music policies, which are in turn intolerant (but that's another story).

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[15] Pamela M. Potter, *What Is "Nazi Music"?*, pp. 438-440.

[16] Ulrich Dibelius (1966, 1988, 1998), in one of the first histories of postwar modernism, *Moderne Musik nach 1945*, Piper Verlag, Munich, pp. 23-25, begins his presentation of the musical situation with a sub-chapter called *1945 – das Jahr Null der modernen Musik* [1945 – year zero of modern music]. For a more recent perspective on the "zero hour" in German musicology see Volker Scherliess (ed.), "Stunde Null" *– zur Musik um 1945* (Bärenreiter Verlag, Kassel, 2014), a volume resulting from a symposium of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung at the Musikhochschule Lübeck, September 2003.

Is it enough for a musician to be a member of the party in order to qualify as a Nazi? How do you then deal with sympathisers who have not joined the party? The situations are confusing, created also by the volatile boundaries between ethical and aesthetic value in the case of a particular musician, and the de-nazification process has shown just such difficulties.

> From the 1950s onwards, it was not difficult for stars such as Herbert von Karajan, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Carl Orff to repudiate their Nazi affiliations, as people wanted to believe that musicians lived in the elevated space of art and would never descend into the underworld of politics.[17]

In the context of the new musicological directions of the 1980s, various projects were launched to research the music of exile, "degenerate" or "suppressed" music. The resulting publications, exhibitions and recordings have brought to light a wealth of documents that add to the picture of music during the Nazi era. Inevitably, some categorical, black-and-white commentaries emerged, for example, placing those who left Germany on the side of morality and classifying all those who remained as suspects. Other investigations delve into the complexities of shades of grey, the case of Paul Hindemith perhaps being one of the most notorious. A representative of modernist German music, married to a Jewish woman, friend and collaborator with left-wing artists, Hindemith's relationship with the Nazi regime is full of paradoxes and inconsistencies. He is admired by several prominent politicians (including Goebbels), then his music (more precisely, *Mathis der Maler*) is banned; he endures in these troubled times by means of an apolitical attitude and various compromises, finally deciding to emigrate when he is included on the list of "degenerate" music in 1938. After the war, Hindemith's music occupies an undisputed place among the rare examples untouched by Nazi influence.

6. Conclusions

Finally, the review of the history of music created during the Third Reich has not come to an end. The framework needs to be broadened with information from all over Europe, as the interwar period is marked by nationalism, racism, ethnic and class conflict not only in totalitarian regimes. As far as the composers of those times are concerned, their inclusion and exclusion from the canon will undergo further changes, due to their relations with the Nazi regime, but also to other factors in our contemporary world.

[17] Pamela M. Potter, *What Is "Nazi Music"?*, p. 431.

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