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Review of Pamela M. Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998)

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Pamela M. Potter. *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. Pp. xx, 364. Cloth \$40.00.

With the passing of George L. Mosse, we reflect upon his lasting influence across the range of German Studies. While he insisted that a “Mossean School” was neither intended nor desirable, his impact—direct and indirect—on several generations of scholars in German history, literature, art history, and even music history is a pronounced feature of late twentieth-century scholarship in these areas. Central to his legacy is our increased concentration on the cultural components of what he termed the “new politics” of mass society in the post-Enlightenment West. In his own writings, Mosse maintained that at least since the French Revolution and culminating in the ritual and pageantry of the Third Reich, poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and song were all incorporated into symbolic systems that conveyed political ideologies from the extreme left to the extreme right in more sensual and ultimately attractive ways than the “rational discourse” of Liberalism. Responding in part to his suggestions, scholars working within and across these disciplines have added detail and nuance to Mosse’s foundation for understanding the “liturgical” aspects of modern political—especially fascist—cultures which enhanced them with “Romantic” qualities of spirituality, wholeness, and sublimity.

In recent years, a number of us have been probing the functions music had in the framework of “Nazi culture” as Mosse identified it. Building on early but incomplete studies by Joseph Wulf and Fred K. Prieberg, books by Michael Meyer, Erik Levi, and Michael Kater have intensified awareness of the pivotal role that music played in the formulation of a “German identity” in general, and in the aesthetic appeal of Nazism in particular. By virtue of these and other studies, the record of how German music, musical institutions, and musicians came to serve as propaganda instruments for National Socialism is becoming clearer. A sign that this field approaches maturity is the most recent contribution, Pamela M. Potter’s *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich*.

For the most part, previous studies of music in the Third Reich have specified which institutions and individuals were responsible for implementing music policy in the interests of Hitler’s regime, including the administration of performance, education, recording, broadcasting, and—to some extent—composition. Potter’s book complements this scholarship by comprehensively detailing the role that professional musicologists had in formulating and disseminating interpretations of music that corresponded with party *Weltanschauungen*. As she relates, it was trained musicologists who “had the

ability to imbue the language of music, especially untexted absolute music, with imagined manifestations of Germanness that could cross language barriers” (xiii), and therefore they who ostensibly could convince listeners to associate musical experiences with National Socialist ideals and illusions.

To “uncover the relationship musicology cultivated with the state, the party, and the German people” (xv), Potter has painstakingly traced the evolution of music studies in Germany from the end of the First World War through the 1940s, and beyond. It is impossible to do justice to the breadth and depth of her analysis here. Overall, the book is comprised of four major phases. The first chapter, a condensed summary of the primacy of music in the cultural affairs of both Weimar and Nazi Germany, highlights assumptions that mass engagement with the German music tradition (however defined) could mitigate the more disturbing effects of modernity and restore a sense of community lost in the bourgeois era. The next four chapters detail the institutional and social history of German musicology, running in each case from 1918 through 1945. Among the many issues treated here are efforts to justify musicology’s continued existence in the post-war economy, the creation of new musicological institutions and journals, financial support from the Nazi regime, musicology in German universities, and the development of non-academic career opportunities for musicologists, especially in Nazi or Nazified cultural organizations.

Potter’s third major stage consists of one chapter on “The Shaping of New Methodologies” (including racial studies of “the Jewish Question in musicology” and German folk music) and another on “Attempts to Define ‘Germanness’ in Music” (which culminates in a case study of the “Germanicization” and “de-Anglicization” of Händel). It was with delight that I turned to these sections where Potter treats evidence of how actual writing about music changed (or in some ways, did not) as a result of conditions in the Nazi era. The first half of this book could stand alone as a social history of musicology as a discipline, but this subsequent part shows us why the economic and institutional background is worth studying at all: because of its impact, real and imagined, on scholarship and on perceptions of music as a whole.

Potter’s last chapter deals with the state of music studies in 1945, the utterly inconsistent processes of “denazifying” the field, and the ongoing influence of exiles from Germany on musicology in the United States. In these sections and a closing commentary on the value of “Nazi musicology” as a historiographical construct, Potter underscores two important theses. First, in her words: “Attractive as it may be to isolate and dismiss [musicology of] the Nazi era, such treatment underestimates the deep roots of intellectual trends that found correspondence with aspects of Nazi ideology. . . . German

musicology in the Third Reich was never really nazified per se, but was following a course set long before 1933. . . . It did not start spontaneously during Hitler's rise, nor could it be drastically rerouted after his fall but continued in some form after 1945" (262). Second: that "American musicology has inherited a Germanocentric concept of music history without understanding its immediate political relevance for the times in which it was originally formed. . . ." (261). Potter's courageous positing and effective documentation of these controversial points are what places her book in line with George Mosse's finest teachings: that Nazi culture was by no means an anomaly in the German tradition; and that to comprehend it we must confront not just the aesthetic prejudices of its perpetrators, but our own.

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