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Review of Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994)

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Music in the Third Reich. By Erik Levi. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Pp. xiv, 303. \$39.95.)

Erik Levi is right that his survey of Nazi policy toward music helps remedy a paucity of work on this important subject. Although National Socialist propagandists were alert to the potential this art had for drawing Germans together into a Gemeinschaft, historians have only begun to verify the instrumentality of music in efforts to construct a German national identity. Partly the abstract nature of music, but also what Levi terms a “conspiracy of silence” among scholars who contributed to the Musikpolitik of the Third Reich and remained influential ever since, have impeded disclosure that musicians and music experts collaborated with Nazi authorities. Until now persons investigating specific problems, such as use of particular compositions in party pageantry, have first had to do extensive background checks to learn how Nazis gained control of music institutions and linked works of music with Hitler's ideology. Of use in recreating the scene was just a few studies in German by brave informants like Joseph Wulf, Hanns-Werner Heister, Hans-Günter Klein, Fred K. Prieberg, Albrecht Dühmling, and Peter Girth. The best rendered introduction to this subject in English, Levi's book fixes the basis for closer inquiry into these matters.

Starting with a reprise of shrieks against modernist music in the Weimar era, Levi explains how Nazis harmonized with music conservatism, thereby gaining the confidence of those who felt threatened by atonal and jazz forms. He then traces efforts by culture-politicians such as Goebbels and Rosenberg to direct every musical activity in Germany: orchestra and opera administration, radio broadcasting, commercial recording, music publishing, music journalism, and music scholarship. In doing so, Levi argues two significant theses. First, anti-modernism, xenophobia, and racism in Nazi music rhetoric were not original to Hitler and his cronies: Levi exposes reactionary, jingoistic, and anti-Semitic references in German music discourse by the turn of the twentieth century. The point is incontestable, since broader inspections than this reveal traces of these trends at the start of the nineteenth.

Levi's second major thesis is that “even without underestimating the cruelty and intolerance of the Nazi regime, the notion that music entered a twentieth-century equivalent of the ‘Dark Ages’ during the Third Reich simply does not stand up to detailed scrutiny” (xiii). Because the Reich Music Chamber did accommodate neo-classicism, Gebrauchsmusik, jazz, and even the continued presence of some Jewish musicians, Levi is correct that Goebbels did not achieve the total nazification of music he—and especially his competitor, Rosenberg—wanted. But we should not overstate this point. While many “normal” qualities of German music life continued from the Weimar era into our own, we must not forget that Nazi efforts to eradicate music which disturbed traditional feelings of well-being were supported by important composers, performers, and listeners. To relativize this fact serves only those who have hitherto blocked investigation into it. Instead, we should use Levi's book as the starting place for detecting how the purest of arts can be drawn into the vilest affairs—often by the people who seem to love it most.

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