

MUSIC AS A WEAPON OF WAR

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I DO not know to what extent the Allied governments carry on an anti-Nazi cultural program in the field of music. Nor how effective it is. What we call psychological warfare is now deputized to many agencies of the British empire, the governments-in-exile, and various departments and bureaus of the United States. The U. S. Office of War Information, with its outposts in friendly, neutral and conquered countries, presumably follows the over-all policy of the State Department. But what that may be in respect to the national cultures of the occupied and enemy territories, with which we come daily into closer contact, is not at all clear. A year ago all inquiries about the short-wave music program were met with the statement that time for music was of necessity limited, since the potential audience in hostile countries can listen only under pain of death; that being the case, the precious moments must be given over only to the most essential news. Today it is known that, even in the face of these handicaps, the Allied governments have embarked on extensive, even elaborate musical broadcasts. From the newspaper reports of these activities, and also from more specific queries addressed to me – as a former representative of what it is now called a “minority culture” (i.e. of Czechoslovakia) – I would infer that the musical program, like the program for representing the Allied political aims, is not yet clearly defined, and does not yet express a decisive objective.

Having myself been involved during the year before Munich in the conduct of psychological warfare, via music, I should like to recall some of the features of that intense, if local, experience here. Let our program speak for itself.

In 1937 the Czech state set up the Eduard Benes Station for the express purpose of conducting foreign propaganda. As director of its Music Department I took an active part in spreading democratic cultural programs, from the time of its establishment until the Munich agreement.

Of course I am aware of the fundamental differences between our situation, when the war against Nazism had just begun, and that of the Allies in 1944. But the odds all favor the present moment. Certainly Allied short-wave broadcasts find a far more willing reception today than did our German-Bohemian radio. It is true, the Nazis now threaten to kill anyone found listening to the Allied stations, but in those early days any inhabitant of the Sudeten territory who listened to the German station broadcasting from Prague was in fear of the most drastic social and economic ostracism. All German citizens of Czechoslovakia were so exposed to the terrorism of the Sudeten German party that they never dared tune in on Prague unless they sat quite alone in a locked room, safe and secure from the eavesdropping of their neighbors. But even then listeners were not too sure of indirect attempts on their lives. Every citizen of German blood had been warned to take no part in the German program of our station and the appeal was effective despite the good pay and the publicity that were offered. I had to recruit German "Aryan" artists from Switzerland in order not to have the station branded as "Czech" or "Jewish."

At that time the power of the Nazis was rising. Today it is falling. Among the Germans themselves there were only lukewarm democrats. Today the Reich contains many decided revolutionaries. We had to worm our way into the good graces of our listeners. Today the Allied short-wave stations can fight with open visors.

We also had internal difficulties to meet. The politics of the hard-pressed Czech government were then Fabian and we soft-pedaled our propaganda in order not to conflict with its delicate operations. First we endeavored to take the wind out of the Nazi sails. To win the "Province" we produced all the Sudeten composers we could find, even if they were decidedly mediocre, which was generally the case. By thorough research we disinterred a few composers who had been active in Reichenberg, Eger or Budweis in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and with their music we recited Sudeten German musical history. We "discovered" that great German composers stemmed from the Sudeten area, men like Gluck or Schubert. We emphasized the role that Germans and above all the Sudeten Germans had played in the musical history of Bohemia, and, the other way round, the role of the Czechs in the field of general musical history. Thus on the one hand we appeased local pride, on the other we stressed the international theme quite in contrast

to the purely nationalistic emphasis of stations in Germany. We laid stress on what Germans and Czechs had in common; "German and Czechs sing the same folk songs; both nations often have the same popular melodies." Or we told how Haydn, Mozart or Weber were influenced by Czech folksong, while Dvorak and Smetana were in no slight degree affected by Brahms and Wagner.

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Little by little the Sudeten German bourgeoisie grew accustomed to these programs. They found them interesting and not even Nazi terrorism dammed up that interest. Gradually we introduced ideas in sharp contrast to the Nazi philosophy. We gave a prominent place to the motto: "Durch Musik zur Humanität," to which a regular series was dedicated. We broadcast musical church services from Catholic and Protestant churches in Prague and all over Czechoslovakia. These were in direct opposition to the buncombe of the Party affairs broadcast by the Reich stations from the Berlin Sportpalast. Even today the German stations do not send out Christian services. At that time, in Central Europe, we had a kind of monopoly in the field. The performance of Mozart's *Requiem* and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* – with relevant comments – were attractions listened to by even one-hundred-percent Nazis.

Church services, especially good church music, will always make excellent anti-Nazi propaganda, particularly effective with the older and middle generations.

At that time too, the Nazis' production of classical music was also limited because they were then carrying out to the letter all the implications of their original cultural program. In the field of light music one heard the poorest trash. We countered with Offenbach's operas, and jazz and swing, which were forbidden across the border (on racial grounds, of course). Of the great number of classical works then outlawed by the Nazis, we produced *The Magic Flute*, whereby we emphasized Mozart's tolerant and humanitarian background, his *Freimaurekantaten*, his *Don Giovanni* and *Figaro*. These were forbidden in Germany because of their Jewish librettists. Of course, we featured Beethoven's *Egmont* and the *Ninth Symphony*, adding suitable comments.

In this connection let me sound a warning against even the slightest change of original German texts. The enemy knows how to capitalize on these subterfuges. Recently I received a query from an official source

as to whether it might not be advisable to change Schiller's text for the *Ninth* from "Freude schöner Gotterfunken" to "Freiheit schöner Gotterfunken." Schiller needs no such treatment and furthermore, the Germans would only laugh at the change.

Regularly we interpolated between two larger programs, short five-minute bits under the heading "Classical Testimony." Statements of great musicians and of the great German poets and philosophers were quoted. For instance, Beethoven's: "I must show the world that 'God Save the King' has brought us blessings," or from his conversations with Grillparzer: "One must go to North America in order to be safe from the censor." Or we had our chorus sing classical hymns of tolerance and freedom – *In diesen heiligen Hallen* or *Die ihr des Unermesslichen Weltalls Schöpfer ehrt*. These programs spoke for themselves. At first they were listened to in secret, later openly.

Since the Nazis had outlawed modern music, we considered it our cardinal duty to cultivate this "degenerate art." We did not hesitate to broadcast Krenek's *Charles V* shortly before the Munich agreement. That earned for us at least the reputation of being unafraid. We finally became known as the most cosmopolitan station, certainly the most progressive, in Europe.

The music programs acted as a lure for the political and cultural message. Though it was taboo, the Eduard Benes Station became the one most listened to. It gave strength and invaluable support to the Czechoslovak government in its hour of need. Unfortunately its activities came to an end with our national existence through the betrayal – or weakness – of England and France.

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I am not suggesting that our pre-Munich experience serve as a model now. *Autres temps, autres moeurs*. But I set down the story of this program as expressing a definite conviction, an approach, a goal. Without them no technic can be effective. Certainly the Allies are in need of these. What we do now, by long and short wave, will, for better or worse, anticipate our cultural post-war program. Music will play a great role then – let it be set to an effective international and humane scale now.