

THE NAZIS DRAFT MUSIC FOR TOTAL WAR

x-1941

I LEFT Vienna in July 1941, having made it my home since early in 1938. During that period I visited Berlin five times, staying always from three weeks to a month. Long familiarity with conditions in both cities gives me the background, I believe, to report on musical life in these two centers of the Third Reich as it has been affected by the second World War.

To begin then, with the most important factor, the musical repertory. The choice of works in Germany today is determined by the birthplace of composers. Are they native or are they foreign? (I omit of course the widely known and indispensable qualification of Aryan ancestry.)

Selection of "foreign" works is made according to the following considerations: (1) Is the composer in question the native of a state friendly to Germany, neutral, or hostile? (2) Is that state at war with Germany? (3) Has it been conquered by Germany?

Naturally enough, after the conclusion of the Molotoff-Ribbentrop agreement in August 1939, "cultural" relations with Russia were fostered. To help make the unexpected alliance palatable to the German people Tchaikowsky, Rachmaninoff, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Moussorgsky appeared on all the programs. There were even, I seem to recall, performances of Shostakovitch's *Lady Macbeth of Mtzensk* in Czecho-Slovakia during the 1939-40 season. But in June 1941 when Hitler turned on Stalin he also turned on the Russian composers and blitzed them from every hall. If any of their works still won a hearing it was strictly through error. Thus the plan to stage *Boris Godounoff* at the Vienna Opera where, shamefully, it had never been produced, was abandoned.

France, curiously enough, suffered only the briefest period of neglect. From September 1939, when war was declared, to May 1940, a number of French composers were continuously presented throughout the Reich — Bizet, Debussy, Ravel very extensively, Dukas; no Saens-Saens, no Massenet, no Charpentier. It was only during May and June of 1940 when Hitler was giving the French a thorough "workout" with tanks and Stukas

that French names disappeared altogether from the programs. And as soon as friendship was sealed with Vichy they bobbed up again.

Hungary has come off very well under this program of performances awarded for good behavior. I remember hearing Zoltan Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus* and seeing a ballet by him at the Vienna State Opera. A number of works by Bela Bartok have also been put on from time to time. Rumanians received their accolade with concerts led by Georges Enesco, borrowed for the purpose from the Bucharest Philharmonic. Enesco's works of course were included. A great number of Yugoslav composers whose names I do not recall now, dotted the programs and Yugoslav singers too were engaged by the Vienna Opera. Then came the fantastic alliance with the Zwetkovitch regime and, shortly after that, the war. Result, no more musical Yugoslavs.

Italy of course is continually honored, even with performances of Casella. Respighi's *La Fiamma* has been produced at the Vienna Opera and his *Pini di Roma* in concerts. Spain is represented chiefly by De Falla, and Switzerland by Ottomar Schöck whose *Massimilla Doni* was performed in Dresden without a repetition.

One discovery has been made under the present regime and that is a real and unusual talent from Slovakia. Eugen Suchon, a twenty-eight year old composer, is a find of the present director of Vienna's *Universal Edition*. His orchestral works have been successfully produced under Carl Böhm of Dresden, who also gave one in Vienna; the title escapes me, but I was impressed by the young composer's polyphonic gift, his flowing melody and his use of color.

I have left the question of those native composers who still remain in Germany to the last. It is indeed difficult to recall the names of the many "one-day wonders" whom the Nazis unearth from time to time, and whose follow-up productions are so sporadic. A number of composers, whom I shall mention later, work in the opera field. The qualifications of all these new men seem to be rated according to party number, political direction and influential connections. The Reich is still fortunate in counting among the living, those veterans of the pre-Hitler era, Richard Strauss and Hans Pfitzner.

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And now for a survey of general concert life in the blacked-out Reich. It is true that, whatever may be the reasons – and a multitude could probably be adduced – all musical programs are well attended. The Reich still

retains the great advantage of the continued presence of gifted conductors. Though Bruno Walter, Hermann Scherchen, Otto Klemperer are gone, the following remain: Böhm of Dresden, Hans Knappertsbusch of Vienna, Wilhelm Furtwängler of Berlin and Vienna; Eugen Jochum of Hamburg; Herbert von Karajan of Berlin; Clemens Krauss of Munich.

The Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestras still rank high in the world. Noteworthy in the routine orchestral repertory of the present regime, is the marked attention given by all these conductors to the works of Anton Bruckner. This, in its way, is as significant as the complete exclusion of all Gustav Mahler. Both gestures are direct expressions of the official viewpoint on matters musical. The campaign against Mahler has been carried out with the most complete thoroughness, even to changing the name of the street in Vienna which previously honored him to "Meistersinger Strasse." Since, however, folk-ways are difficult to uproot, it is now locally referred to as "Gustav Meistersinger Strasse."

Musical life has of course suffered serious losses through the exodus of some of the greatest singers to America. As for the pianists, only Walter Gieseking, Wilhelm Backhaus and Edwin Fischer remain. Of the violinists, Vasa Prihoda and Gustave Kulenkamp. The rest are insignificant.

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In the opera world Berlin has now taken precedence over Vienna. This is due, in part, to the energy of the Berlin director, Heinz Tietjen, a political and artistic diplomat. From the singers who remain he has gathered together an excellent corps. Heroic tenors, Max Lorenz and Franz Völker; heroic baritones, Rudolf Bockelmann and Jaro Prohaska; sopranos, Maria Müller and Tiana Lemnitz. The conductors at the opera have included Furtwängler, Tietjen, von Karajan, Robert Hager, Werner Egk, and Johannes Schüller. New works persistently sponsored by the Nazis have appeared in the repertory of the Berlin house — *Die Zauberflöte* and *Peer Gynt* by Werner Egk; *Die Bürger von Calais* and *Johanna Balk* by Rudolf Wagner-Regeny. The latter's *Günstling*, about which much has been written, has become more or less a fixture; but there is no indication that without the aggressive support of the State these works would make popular headway.

The decline of the Vienna opera may be set down largely to the treatment given the city by the Nazis, who regard it as a step-child. From their point of view, the Viennese have not behaved altogether well. Vienna now lacks heroic tenors and baritones, since the incomparable Friederich Schorr,

the indispensable Emanuel List and Alexander Kipnis have left. To fill the gap Vienna frequently borrows from Berlin. The soprano parts are mainly supported by Anny and Hilde Konetzni and Maria Reining. It is not necessary to go back to the Mahler period to measure the deterioration of the general ensemble at the Vienna Opera. This must be attributed largely to the lack of a significant director or orchestral leader. Knapertsbusch, noteworthy as a Strauss conductor and a man of wide human sympathies appears only on the guest list, as do Furtwängler, Rudolf Moralt and Leopold Ludwig. Otherwise only mediocrities conduct in a city where the unusual gifts of Professor Josef Krips are still available (Krips being of mixed blood is permitted neither to work nor to leave the country). No one knows who the director really is though it is believed that Erwin Kerber, a strictly non-professional dilettant completely unfamiliar with theatre routine, is in control.

The repertory is altogether without interest and Wagner is done to death. There is a saying in Vienna "if Richard Wagner survives the infatuation of the Nazis he is indeed a great genius." Recent Richard Strauss performances have included *Daphne*, to the book of Josef Gregor, which did not have much of a success but did better elsewhere; *Der Friedenstag* (also Gregor); and those staples, *Rosenkavalier*, *Salome* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The rule has been not to list proscribed librettists (for instance Rodolf Lothar of *Tiefland*.) So far however Hugo von Hofmannstahl seems to have escaped the ban for he is still named, in Vienna at any rate.

Two other opera theatres in Berlin, the Charlottenburger and the Volksoper, need be mentioned only in passing. Their performances and productions are insignificant. As for the Volksoper in Vienna where the fame of Maria Jeritzka and Josef Schwarz began, it has fallen from its former high level.

But good or bad the performances at all the Berlin and Vienna opera houses are well attended. Berlin often sells out weeks in advance. Here as at the other houses, and indeed at all theatres in the Reich, popularity may be ascribed in a large degree to the blackouts. The public of these large cities no longer knows what to do and where to go at night to forget the days of tension, to solace its depressed spirit. When the conductor Weisbach of Vienna had the bright idea of throwing his concert hall into darkness, his patrons immediately deluged him with the suggestion that if he wanted a real sensation he should for one night flood the auditorium with the most brilliant illumination. The Vienna public – and this is perhaps

one reason why the Nazis continue to regard the city with a fair degree of suspicion – remains more recalcitrant and perhaps a little more sophisticated than the audience of Berlin. The premiere of the Wagner-Regeny opera, *Johanna Balk*, created a near riot in the capital of former Austria. There was indeed so much whistling and noise that the curtain had to be lowered during the performance. The police made a few perfunctory arrests but the opera was finally taken off. Then Baldur von Schirach, the Reich's Youth Leader, known familiarly as the "Pompadour of Vienna," intervened. Declaring the public must be educated to appreciate this music, he ordered the work repeated and it was given two more performances, but since the public still refused to be "educated" the house was forthwith packed with Hitler-Jugend, the Bund Deutscher Mädchen, the S. A. and the S. S.

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The operetta, once perhaps Vienna's greatest export, has fallen upon sad days indeed. It was a firm tenet of the Nazis that Jewish librettists and composers had so monopolized this market that no Aryan creator could find an outlet here. Today there is a clear field at last, yet so far the only figure to emerge has been Alexander Steinbrecher, a man with a pleasing talent for musicals, but no capacity to write a single note of his own. And since no one has appeared among the new aspirants to replace Oscar Straus, Emmerich Kalman, Bruno Granichstädten, Robert Stolz, Ralph Benatzky, it devolves upon Franz Lehár to satisfy the needs of all the opera-theatres.