

The Sound of War: Entartete Musik



Broschüre zur Ausstellung (1938) Dusseldorf (Brochure for the music exhibition)

There was a blog that some of you may have seen recently on OCA entitled „The Art of War“ about Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) under the Nazi’s in Germany and the German controlled regions in the late 1930’s. The Entartete Exhibition that toured the German regions was designed to show how awful and undescribably „Degenerate“ the art of the Modernists, Jews, and Bolshevik’s was. This idea though did not just stay with the physical arts but spread throughout all the arts and culture encompassing literature and poetry and of course music. As you can see by the inflammatory poster produced for the brochure of the festival designed to create outrage at the music, the only real outrage to us today is at the image it portrays, playing on stereotypical prejudices of the period, and of course later.

But what of the actual music itself. Well, until the Nazis take over of the German state Jazz music had become synonymous with the Cabaret and Jazz halls of the big German cities, but especially Berlin and its genuinely degenerate society centred around the Cabaret clubs. Check out Christopher Isherwood's marvelous semi-autobiographical book „*Goodbye to Berlin*“ that deals with this particular era and its problems. It is also the book on which the great musical, „Cabaret“, is based.

Jazz was seen as Blackman's music, and as such, as subhuman (Unter-menschen) by the Nazis and so it swiftly became banned or controlled by the state. Movement in swing bands or any type of American or black musician movement was banned by the party. Certainly Jazz was allowed but it had to be written by white Aryan composers in a swing style that was strict and not emotional. The 'blue' notes that make Jazz and Blues what they are were subjugated and eradicated accordingly. There were signs such as below put up in many clubs of the time.



There were instances during the invasion of Germany by the allies where youths would volunteer to do air-raid look out service; not out of any kind of loyal service to the Fatherland, but because on the top of some of the larger buildings they could get a much better radio reception to illegally listen to the American broadcasting stations who were playing and airing jazz, swing, and big band music. Never mind the war, where was the best swing to be found at the time?

It was not just the Jazz and popular music that obviously suffered but music by many of the great composers of art music of the time from the German and occupied lands. Many of the composers got out of Germany or their respective countries such as Ernst Krenek, Kurt Weill, Berthold Goldschmidt, Paul Hindemith, Bela Bartok, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Egon Wellesz and of course Arnold Schoenberg and many others, mainly to the USA. Their music along with art and literature was publicly ridiculed and destroyed by the Nazis and many musicians remaining were banned from working and had to take labouring jobs. Many of the previous generations such as Mendelssohn and Gernsheim, Jarossohn etc were banned and again their music destroyed wherever it was found thus destroying much great art along the way.

In the occupied lands many composers were not fortunate enough or quick enough to escape the grasp of the Nazis and many from mainly the Czech lands perished in the Terezin Concentration camp where they were shipped off to for being Jewish and or communist. One of the greatest and most forward looking of these was Erwin Schulhoff. A German name but because he was neither Aryan or German (*Jewish, Communist and Czech*) he was marked from the very start. His music consists of five marvelously written symphonies and some concertos as well as numerous chamber works. Many of which did not go down well with the Nazi regime due to it being written by a Jew and its leftwing subject matter, its modernistic outlook and its influences of „Degenerate“ Jazz music. There were many others of course and a thorough survey of this periods Entartete music has yet to be fully researched and published.

The Decca Record label have released a series of recordings of much of this banned „Degenerate Music“ to critical acclaim and through this overview by them has instigated more research which is starting bear some fruition. More has yet to be done. Some of the finest pieces so far discovered include Schullhoff, Goldschmidt, Ullmann and Ernst Kreneks works. All of which are well worth searching out and taking great note of. They are not by second rate writers but more like first rate work that was snuffed out in its prime and so never allowed to gain its roots.

One last point is a bit of a shot in the dark, but it is an observation that I have noted over the years of looking at posters and things to do with this period. Every, or nearly every, poster that dealt with „degenerate musik“ was in the Nazi party colours of White, Red and black. May be this is a coincidence or may be it was a general policy of the Nazis Reichs Ministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda. May be someone in the art department can enlighten us on this point.

Erwin Schulhoff - Flute Sonata First Movement

http://youtu.be/i5uis35_9VI

Erwin Schulhoff - Symphony No.2

<http://youtu.be/ig5QYpd-UBw>

Berthold Goldschmidt - Passacaglia for Orchestra

http://youtu.be/LRiaR5MhU_4

Ernst Krenek - Jonny Spielt Auf

<http://youtu.be/6r2LAMHRwYg>