

## **‘The Death of Music’: The Nazis’ Relationship with Jazz in World War II**

Will Studdert

*University of Kent*

### **Abstract**

The jazz band represents ‘the death of music [...], the rot of a decaying society’, wrote the conservative essayist Friedrich Hussong early in the Third Reich, and his view was shared by the Nazis. The article examines the NSDAP’s complicated wartime relationship with jazz music, illustrating the heavy demand for the music among members of the armed forces and discussing the inconsistent jazz policies and bans in this light. How did the Nazis seek to balance a racist and anti-modernist cultural agenda with the conflicting needs of the armed forces?

Using material from the German Federal Archives, it traces the Nazis’ wartime shift towards cultural compromise, as well as the attempts to foster a ‘new German dance music’ with projects such as the German Dance- and Entertainment Orchestra, which offered a watered-down version of American jazz and was intended to keep soldiers from tuning in to enemy stations in order to find the music they wanted to hear. The article also argues that in spite of Goebbels’ relaxation of radio scheduling regulations during wartime, attempts at genuinely pragmatic policymaking were hampered by racial and cultural prejudice. The millstone of the Nazis’ ideology rendered them ill-equipped to meet the challenge posed by jazz music, and they were ultimately left resorting to clumsy caricature in the search for a suitably “German” alternative to authentic popular music.

**Keywords:** Jazz, swing, dance music, German Dance- and Entertainment Orchestra, Germany, Goebbels, BBC, RMK, propaganda.