

‘The Death of Music’: The Nazis’ Relationship with Jazz in World War II¹

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Soweit sie im Kulturleben überhaupt über Namen von Bedeutung verfügen [insofar as they have, in cultural life, any names of importance]’ wrote Joseph Goebbels of the USA in his article ‘Gottes eigenen Land [God’s Own Country]’ published on 9 August 1942, ‘sind sie von Europa entliehen [they are all borrowed from Europe]’; he continues:

Das Land besitzt keine eigene Sprache, keine eigene Kultur und keine eigene Bildung. Alles ist geborgt und durch Amerikanisierung meistens verdorben, niemals aber verbessert worden. Unter Amerikanisierung hat man eine Art von Verkitschung zu verstehen, die darauf hinausläuft, jedem echten Kulturwert einen amerikanischen Stempel aufzudrücken, aus einer gewachsenen Sprache einen Slang, aus einem Walzer einen Jazz und aus einem Dichtwerk eine revolverjournalistische Story zu machen (Goebbels 1942b: 1).

*[The country does not have its own language, culture or education. Everything is borrowed and usually ruined by Americanisation, but never improved. By ‘Americanisation’ we should understand a form of kitsch which amounts to putting an American stamp on everything of real cultural value, making slang of a developed language, a jazz tune from a waltz and a story of revolver-journalism from a poetic work]*²

It is ironic that Goebbels’ indictment of American culture as a vulgarised caricature of European achievements should be such an apt description of the problems Germany was to have during the War with popular music. Arguably the only contemporary popular culture at which Germany truly excelled (and which endures to this day) was the left-wing cabaret that was the indelible trademark of the Weimar era. With the advent of the Third Reich, however, the majority of Germany’s most talented cabaret artists had left the country. Those who remained were either persecuted or accommodated themselves to varying degrees with the regime. From an exciting and critical art form, cabaret was reduced to harmless kitsch, the ‘Witzlosen Spass des KdF [Kraft durch Freude] Frohsinns [humourless fun of Strength-through-Joy cheerfulness]’ (‘Das Kabarett’ 2006). This paper will explore how the Nazis attempted to fill the void by creating a new music that was exciting enough to quell the demand for jazz, whilst simultaneously being ideologically acceptable to the regime. Is it possible for a government to manufacture a truly popular culture, or is such an artificial process destined to fail from the outset, remaining at best a caricature of the genuine article?

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² Except where otherwise indicated, all translations from German are by the author.

1 The Development of Jazz in Germany

Several months before the outbreak of war, the British jazz magazine *Melody Maker* politely noted that German radio played ‘dance music of a sort,’ and that ‘for those who like their dance music to be of a military character the German transmitters will be very useful’ (Butcher 1939: 11). This was not exclusively a result of Nazi censorship;³ the American music historian J. Bradford Robinson has convincingly traced the peculiarly stunted (when compared with other European countries) growth of jazz in Germany following the end of the First World War, what might be called the nation’s jazz *Sonderweg*, back to its delayed introduction to the Weimar Republic (Robinson 1994: 5). The first American jazz band did not reach Germany until as late as 1924, first unable to visit due to the blockades placed on Germany and deterred by the inflated Reichsmark (culminating in the hyperinflation of 1923) thereafter. The extremely unstable economic situation in the early Weimar years also meant that foreign record companies refused to export their wares to the new Republic. So while other European countries were experiencing the exciting new music first-hand and on gramophone records, the majority of musicians in Germany were left guessing at how it was to be played and accordingly resorted to improvising with the limited facilities available to them.

German jazz, notes Robinson, was created:

by grafting ragtime syncopations and an uninhibited performance style onto three existing genres of commercial music inherited from Wilhelmine Germany: the military band, the salon orchestra, and the *Radaukapelle* or ‘racket band’. (Robinson 1994: 4–5)

The *Radaukapelle* integrated a raucous mix of comedy stunts, gimmicks and sound effects into its performances, and it was precisely this unmusicality which led to its being mistaken for jazz, due to its superficially rebellious attitude and disregard for musical convention. The most popular exponent of the *Radaukapelle* was the Weintraub Syncopators, a hugely successful group who, unusually, could also claim some genuine jazz credentials: according to several accounts, the Syncopators’ Jewish trumpeter Adi “Eddie” Rosner only narrowly lost a ‘cutting contest’ with the legendary Louis Armstrong,⁴ before fleeing the Third Reich for fame (and later the gulag) in the Soviet Union. (Starr 1994: 196–97).

The salon orchestra, however, had the greatest influence on the format of the German jazz band. Indeed, Robinson points out that the most popular early jazz groups (such as Dajos

³ Indeed, as will be shown, this was applied inconsistently and often with an ignorance of musical subtleties, thus allowing some ‘jazz-like music’ on the air.

⁴ A head-to-head musical contest between two musicians, common during the swing era.

Béla, Barnabas von Geczy, Marek Weber and Bernard Etté) were simply salon orchestras which had been rechristened as jazz bands whilst essentially retaining the same structure under the leadership of a *Stehgeiger* [lead violinist]. A manual was even issued in 1928 providing instructions on how to convert a salon orchestra into a jazz band (Robinson 1994:5). In fact, this model never really changed in the German musical imagination and was to persist as the dominant format of the jazz band right up to the end of the Third Reich. Such ‘legitimate’ American jazz as did finally reach Germany after the economic stabilisation under Stresemann remained an extremely niche market and never exercised any degree of influence on patterns of commercial supply and demand or the greater development German jazz.

Nonetheless, the Nazis despised jazz and shared the conservative essayist Friedrich Hussong’s conclusion that the jazz band represented ‘the death of music [...], the rot of a decaying society’ (Kater 1992: 29).⁵ ‘It was in jazz, more than in any other style of music, that the Nazis could achieve a true integration between their ideology of racism and their aesthetic opposition to modernism,’ notes the musicologist Erik Levi (1994: 120). This involved a synthesis of hostility towards jazz’s African-American and Jewish roots with a rejection of allegedly ‘un-German’ modernist musical elements such as the syncopation and the emphasis on the rhythm rather than the melody of a piece. On a deeper level, moreover, the idea of personal freedom implied by the (at least theoretical) spirit of improvisation and spontaneity was the antithesis of the *Führerprinzip*. The lingering threat of persecution and the obligatory membership of the *Reichsmusikkammer* (RMK) [Reich Chamber of Music] meant that even those musicians who were technically able to play ‘hot’ jazz largely refrained from doing so, exercising a degree of self-censorship everywhere except at the most secret of late-night jam sessions.⁶

2 A Jazz Ban

Jazz, however, proved impossible to eradicate. Levi repeats the common misconception that jazz was officially banned on German radio (1994: 120), which was not, in fact, the case. Indeed, by 1941 Nazi radio officials were still suggesting the term ‘*Jazzmusik* [jazz music]’ be replaced on the air with ‘*Tanzmusik* [dance music]’, as mentioned in the minutes of the *Rundfunksitzung* [Radio Committee meeting] of 2 December 1941 (RFS 9141). What actually

⁵ Translation by Kater, who does not quote the original German text.

⁶ Rare audio evidence of the lively secret jam sessions at Berlin’s Delphi theatre, featuring members of Fud Candrix’s group and the Frankfurt Hot Club can be heard on *Swing under the Nazis (the Clandestine Recordings of the Frankfurt Hot Club; 1941 – 1944)*.

occurred was a vicious but decentralised campaign against jazz and its practitioners, a clumsy patchwork of regional edicts and media denunciations rather than a blanket ban. Here Levi rightly points to Goebbels' pragmatism as a decisive factor; even in the pre-war years he was acutely aware of public opinion and did not wish to alienate listeners by removing this popular music from the airwaves altogether (1994: 121). The driving forces behind the RMK's public controls and persecution of jazz musicians were predominantly anti-Semitism and xenophobia (Kater 1992: 32–46), and the 'King of Swing' Benny Goodman's music was only banned in 1938 when his Jewish heritage was belatedly ascertained (Zwerin 2000: 49).

In fact, the American historian Theodore S. Hamerow's division of the Propaganda Ministry into opposing factions of 'ideologues' and 'realists' can also be applied to the Nazi cultural apparatus; jazz was attacked with religious fervour by some sections of the Party and tolerated as a regrettable but necessary concession to listeners' tastes by others. This inconsistent and decentralised approach meant that what bans were brought into force remained purely regional, such as the jazz ban which was instigated by the Reich Governor Martin Mutschmann in the state of Saxony in July 1943. A notice in the *Zschopauer Tagblatt* on 5 July 1943 announced that:

Das Spielen aller amerikanisierenden Jazzweisen oder ähnlicher, dem deutschen Kulturempfinden widerstrebenden 'Musik', wie alle Entartungen musikalischer Darbietungen durch körperverrenkende Untermalung, dekadenter Refraingesang u. ähnliche Effekthascherei, ist grundsätzlich verboten. (*Zschopauer Tagblatt*, 1943).

[*The playing of all American forms of jazz or similar 'music' that conflicts with German cultural sensibilities, as well as all manifestations of degeneration in musical performances through an undercurrent of syncopation, the decadent singing of choruses and like gimmicks, is strictly forbidden.*]

The Nazis' problems in dealing with jazz are conveniently summarised by a telling and drawn-out exchange of letters relating to this ban. A retired Viennese music publisher and vehement enemy of jazz named Norbert Salb contacted Peter Raabe, the head of the RMK, asking for the ban on jazz in Saxony to be imposed on a national level. In his reply to Salb dated 15 July, Raabe pointed out that an effective battle against jazz music was impossible as long as it was being played on the radio and the RMK was in no way responsible for the radio programming; Salb should address his concerns to Hans Hinkel of the Propaganda Ministry and *Reichskulturkammer* (RKK) [Reich Chamber of Culture], who was head of radio entertainment (Raabe 1943). Salb accordingly contacted Hinkel on 18 July, quoting Raabe and arguing:

Die Jazzmusik ist eine jüdische-amerikanische Erfindung, so zu sagen der Bolschewismus in der Musik. Gegen den Bolschewismus in jeder Form müssen wir uns aber bis zum äussersten

[sic] wehren! [...] Wenn aber die Absage an den jüdische-amerikanischen Musikbolschewismus wirklich wirksam sein soll, muss sie reichseinheitlich, in erster Linie für den Rundfunk, erlassen werden (Salb 1943).

[Jazz music is a Judaeo-American invention, musical bolshevism so to speak. We must be on our guard against all forms of bolshevism! [...] But if the rejection of Judaeo-American musical bolshevism is to be truly effective, it must be consistent across the Reich, above all on the radio.]

After being prompted by Salb on 28 October for a reply to his unanswered letter, an irate Hinkel wrote to Raabe on 15 November accusing him of prolonging the ‘fruitless discussion’ about jazz music and pointing out:

Im übrigen darf ich darauf hinweisen, dass sowohl Autoren als auch Bearbeiter oder Kapellen, die etwa ‘Jazz’- oder jazzähnliche Musik schreiben oder verbreiten, ordentliche Mitglieder der Reichs-Musikkammer sind, sodass für Sie als Präsident unser Kammer die Möglichkeit bestünde, entweder solche Komponisten aus der Reichsmusikkammer auszuschliessen [sic] oder aber einzelne Kompositionen [...] zu verbieten bzw. die Drucklegung unmöglich zu machen. Es ist selbstverständlich, dass derartige Verbote dann auch durch den Rundfunk strikte beachtet würden (Hinkel 1943a).

[Moreover I have to advise you that the authors, as much as the musicians or bands who write or distribute ‘jazz’ or jazz-like music, are regular members of the Reich Chamber of Music, so that you as President of our Chamber have the possibility either to expel such composers from the RMK [...] or to ban the individual compositions or to make their publication impossible, as the case may be. It goes without saying that such bans would then also be strictly adhered to by radio.]

Hinkel proceeded to ask Salb for a ‘musikalisch *eindeutige* Definition des Begriffes “Jazz”, so wie Sie ihn empfinden und ablehnen [*an unambiguous definition in musical terms of the expression ‘jazz’ as you perceive and reject it*], and also for examples of the offending compositions and their precise broadcast dates and times (Hinkel 1943b: added emphasis), which he had also asked Raabe to provide (Hinkel 1943a) — one might wonder whether Hinkel seriously expected an ardent opponent of jazz to sit down next to his radio set and take careful notes of each transgression. This letter to Salb, dated 19 November 1943, is the last record of the correspondence on the topic saved in the German archives. It would appear, therefore, that late as November 1943, two senior Nazi cultural figures, Hinkel and Raabe, were both unable to say what was or was not jazz, and neither would accept responsibility for taking consequential action against it.

3 The Audience

Especially problematic for the Nazis was the fact that, during wartime, many soldiers wanted to listen to the hottest jazz possible in their precious hours of relaxation. Moreover, the contemporary jazz aficionado Hans Bluthner’s later assertion that ‘anybody who liked jazz could never be a Nazi’ (Zwerin 2000: 24) simply does not stand up to the hard evidence. Indeed, a BBC report on the German audiences for British programming dated 25 August

1942 quotes an American journalist who had recently departed Berlin as saying that ‘young people, even fanatical Nazis, would go to considerable lengths [...] to listen to our light musical programmes, particularly jazz’ (NA FO 898/41).

The Germans’ research had similar findings. In 1941 active troops were asked what they would like to hear on the *Soldatensender* [Soldiers’ Stations] (Propagandaministerium 1941b).⁷ In the Crimea 70% said modern dance and entertainment music; in the Ukraine, those with a rank of battalion commander and lower said they preferred modern rhythmic music; the Luftwaffe emphasised that programmes on *Soldatensender Zentral* [Soldiers’ Radio Central] ‘können nicht “heiss [*sic*]” genug sein [*could not be hot enough*]’, while infrequent listeners asked almost without exception for jazz music ‘zum “Aufpulvern [*sic*]” [*to liven themselves up*]’; in Lapland almost all respondents requested plenty of light music, stating: ‘Je verrückter, je lieber [*the crazier, the better*]’ (Propagandaministerium 1941b).

This does not give the full picture, as troops elsewhere preferred sentimental pieces and officers tended to request ‘heavier’ music. In spite of the officers’ predilection for the classics, however, the relationship between social class and musical taste was far less pronounced than in Britain, where the BBC producer and presenter of the wartime jazz programme *Radio Rhythm Club* Charles Chilton remembers the class-based divide between lovers of jazz and classical music as being ‘almost a racial thing’.⁸ The evidence of the blurring of the boundaries in German can be found in the elite Luftwaffe’s notorious taste for hot jazz (see below), which is confirmed by the survey. The demand for hot jazz and rhythmic dance music was widespread among considerable sections of Germany’s fighting forces and across all class divides. Moreover, the soldiers’ impatience increased as the Nazi war effort faltered, and what one American commentator called ‘the turning of the psychological tide’ began to take its toll.⁹ A memo from Hans Hinkel to Goebbels in February 1944 noted that *Soldatensender Belgrad* (Soldiers’ Radio Belgrade) was popular because it played ‘die heißeste Tanzmusik [the hottest dance music]’, and that as the situation at the front deteriorated the complaints were increasing about programmes that were considered ‘schmalzig [slushy/schmaltzy]’ and ‘unmännlich [unmanly]’ (Hinkel 1944).

Goebbels, therefore, was well aware of the problem. As early as June 1941, the same month as Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union, he published an essay in the weekly newspaper *Das Reich* entitled ‘Auflockerung des Rundfunkprogramms im Kriege [*The*

⁷ Those in the Ukraine filled out a questionnaire. It is not stated how the other groups expressed their opinions.

⁸ Conversation between the author and Charles Chilton, West Hampstead, 16 June 2012.

⁹ The phrase belongs to the American radio commentator Morgan Beatty (NARA RG208 Box 6).

Relaxation of Radio Scheduling during Wartime’ (Goebbels 1941). The minutes of the Ministry of Propaganda’s evening press conference on 15 June paraphrases his argument:

Die einen wollen nur Opern hören, die anderen Symphonien, andere wieder Märsche oder Tanzmusik usw. Die Front — das is ja da Wesentliche — braucht Entspannung, siw will leichte, heitere Musik hören. (Propagandaministerium 1941a)

[*Some listeners only want to listen to operas, some want symphonies, and some want marches or dance music etc. The front — and that is of course the most important thing — needs relaxation, it wants to listen to light, lively music.*]

Further evidence of this clear shift towards wartime pragmatism can be found in the minutes of a conference dedicated to music on Greater German Radio that was held on 2 and 3 October 1941,¹⁰ the minutes of which records the following exchanges:

Wir müssen verhindern, daß unsere Soldaten, die nach Entspannung verlangen, fremde Sender einzustellen gezwungen sind und somit auch den englischen Nachrichtendienst über sich ergehen lassen[, so Hans Hinkel]. Herr Reichsintendant Dr. Glasmeier [...] führte an erlebten Beispielen vor Augen, daß der Soldat unserer Zeit die Musik bekommen muß, die er haben will, auch wenn es gegen das Innere mancher Musikschaffenden im Großdeutschen Rundfunk geht. Der Herr Reichsintendant [...] nannte die moderne, rhythmische Musik das Schwarzbrot unserer Zeit, das den Hauptteil unserer Tagesprogramme ausmachen soll. Die klassische Musik sei der Kuchen, der selten [...] serviert werden soll. [...] Das Ziel aller Rundfunkgestaltenden muß sein, daß der deutsche Soldat, wie der größte Teil unseres Volkes überhaupt, sagt: ‘Einen besseren Rundfunk wie den deutschen gibt es nicht’ (RRG 1941).

[[*Hans Hinkel said that*] we must prevent our soldiers who are looking for relaxation being forced to tune into foreign stations and therefore being exposed to English news broadcasts. Reichsintendant Dr. Glasmeier [...] cited his own experience that the soldier of our time must get the music he wants, even if it goes against the instincts of some musical producers in Greater German Radio. [...] The Reichsintendant [...] called modern rhythmic music the brown bread of our time which should comprise the majority of our daily schedule. Classical music is the cake that should be served only seldom [...]. [...]. The goal of all radio schedulers must be that the German soldier, like the greater part of our people, says: ‘There is no better radio than German radio!’]

4 Towards a New German Dance Music

It is telling that the first reference to the *Deutsches Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchester* [German Dance- and Entertainment Orchestra] is made on 29 September 1941, five days after the last mention in the archives of the short-lived variety show *Frohe Stunde am Nachmittag* [Happy Hour in the Afternoon].¹¹ *Happy Hour in the Afternoon* was intended to promote the development of ‘new German dance music’ but was roundly condemned as a failure by radio officials due to technical difficulties and ‘second rate bands’ (Bartholdy 1941a). Indeed, the programme does not seem to have survived more than a month after a meeting which concluded that:

¹⁰ The term ‘Großdeutschland’ was coined in the nineteenth century to signify a unified nation state of peoples who shared a common ethnicity and language. The term ‘Großdeutsches Reich’ was used after the *Anschluß* [annexation] of Austria on 13 March 1938.

¹¹ The programme seems to have run from 9 July until 24 September 1941.

Das gemeinsame Abhören der Wachsaufnahmen von der letzten ‘Frohe Stunde am Nachmittag’ am 13.8. (...) hat ergeben, dass eine Sendung dieser Aufnahmen von der Veranstaltung nur den Eindruck einer gewissen Minderwertigkeit vermitteln würde. (Bartholdy 1941b)

[*A collective listening to the wax recordings of the last ‘Happy Hour in the Afternoon’ on 13 August [...] resulted in the decision that a broadcast of these recordings from the event would only give the impression of a certain lack of quality.*]

However, the need to develop an officially acceptable dance music that was suitably exciting for soldiers at the front remained a pressing one, and the problem was exacerbated by the fact that the British were well aware of the German forces’ enthusiasm for jazz and sought to exploit it. The Nazis were justifiably worried about the numbers of soldiers and civilians who continued to listen to British stations in spite of the increasingly draconian punishments, and Hans Fritzsche suggested in the evening press conference of 21 September 1941:

Wir werden im kommenden Winter mit nichts peinlicheren zu rechnen haben, als mit der fortgesetzten Einwirkung engl. Rundfunksendungen in deutscher Sprache (Fritzsche 1941).

[*In the coming winter, we will be expecting nothing worse than the continued effects of English German-language programmes*]

He was to be proved right. The Nazis had to worry not only about the BBC, which in spite of British jazz aficionados’ complaints (Jackson 1941 and Jackson 1942) still offered authentic American jazz from the likes of Benny Goodman and Muggsy Spanier, and had its own acclaimed house jazz band in Harry Parry and the Rhythm Club Sextet; the ‘black propaganda’ radio stations such as *Soldatensender Calais* (Soldiers’ Radio Calais) and *Kurzwellensender Atlantik* (Short-Wave Station Atlantic) set up under the stewardship of former Daily Express journalist Sefton Delmer and specially targeted at the German military also freely utilised the latest jazz and dance band recordings, including specially-recorded German-language versions of jazz hits, to attract soldiers to their subtle blend of genuine news items and misinformation (Newcourt-Nowordowski 2005: 94). Goebbels, indeed, noted in his diary on 28 November 1943:

Soldiers’ Radio Calais [...] gave us something to worry about [tonight]. The station does a very clever job of propaganda [...] (Delmer 1962: 110).¹²

Unwilling and unable to play genuine jazz music to the German fighting forces, he ordered the creation of the *Deutsches Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchester* (DTU) [German Dance and Entertainment Orchestra], an all-star outfit which contained some fine musicians who were also capable of playing jazz. A letter from Leopold Gutterer, Goebbels’ state

¹² Translation by Delmer, who does not quote the original German.

secretary and the Vice-President of the RKK, to Hans Hinkel and his colleagues dated 29 September 1941 announced:

Wir haben das Philharmonische Orchester mit ausreichenden Mitteln ausgestattet und haben in derselben Zeit aber für die Pflege der Unterhaltungsmusik recht wenig getan. [...] Es ist nicht zu übersehen, dass die Pflege erstklassiger Unterhaltungsmusik und damit eines dazu geeigneten erstklassigen Orchesters eine Aufgabe des Reiches ist (Staatsekretär 1941).

[*We have equipped the Philharmonic Orchestra with sufficient means and at the same time done precious little for cultivating entertainment music. [...] It cannot be ignored that the cultivation of first-class entertainment music and with it a first-class orchestra is a duty of the Reich.*]

In reality, it was more of a necessary chore than a duty. The Canadian historian Michael H. Kater has pointed out that not only did 50% of members of the armed forces approve of modern rhythmic dance music before the war but that Luftwaffe pilots were particularly susceptible to British propaganda due to their contact with the enemy and ‘because of their urbanity, their knowledge of English, and their legendary penchant for swing music’. The young fighter ace Werner Molders, greatly admired by Goebbels, was particularly famous for his passion for jazz and frequented Berlin’s few bona fide jazz venues when on leave in the capital (Kater 1992: 126). This view of the Luftwaffe’s ‘degenerate’ musical proclivities was seconded by the similarly urbane and Anglophone journalist Wolf Mittler (who was initially responsible for English-language Nazi propaganda broadcasts) in a 1989 television documentary (*Propaganda Swing* 1989).

The new orchestra was intended to settle the matter once and for all. A list of the first-rate musicians required for the project, most of whom were under contract to various entertainment venues and film studios in Berlin, was drawn up. Talented musicians were now extremely scarce, since most German nationals had now received what the arranger Friedrich Meyer called their ‘Death-on-the-Field-of-Honour summons’ (Bergmeier and Lotz 1997: 153).¹³ Those selected for the orchestra were informed that they were released with immediate effect from their existing contracts in order to join Goebbels’ new creation, often to howls of indignation from their employers. The director of the *Theater des Volkes* protested in a letter to the Propaganda Ministry on 9 April 1942 that without the two musicians who were leaving for the orchestra he would have to close the theatre down (Theater des Volkes 1942). However, as Goebbels wrote in a note to Hinkel on 10 March 1942:

Von der auf meine Weisung erfolgten Gründung des Deutschen Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchesters habe ich Kenntnis genommen. Ich bitte, dafür Sorge zu tragen, dass die für dieses Orchester vorgesehenen Musiker zum 1. April d.J. *ausnahmslos* zur Verfügung stehen. Sofern sich die derzeit bestehenden Arbeitsverhältnisse dieser Musiker über den 1.

¹³ Term as quoted by Bergmeier and Lotz.

April erstrecken, ersuche ich, an ihre Betriebsführer mit der Bitte um Freigabe zu diesem Termin heranzutreten. Dabei ist zweckmäßig auf die dem Orchester obliegenden besonderen kulturellen, propagandistischen und repräsentativen Aufgaben hinzuweisen (Goebbels 1942a; added emphasis).

[I have acknowledged the foundation, upon my orders, of the German Dance- and Entertainment Orchestra. I ask you ensure that the musicians chosen for this orchestra are available without exception by 1 April of this year. Insofar as the conditions of their current employment are such that it extends beyond 1 April, I request that you approach the managers of these musicians and ask that they be to be released for this date. In this you should stress the orchestra's special cultural, propagandistic and representative tasks, which are obligatory.]

When the managers continued to complain to Hinkel, Joseph Goebbels intervened personally. In the words of the pro forma letter sent by Leopold Gutterer to the musicians' employers:

Die mit dem Orchester verfolgten Ziele lassen sich nur erreichen, wenn alle Stimmen mit den besten Kräften besetzt sind. [...] Gegenüber den Notwendigkeiten des Deutschen Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchester müssen aber andere Interessen mit Rücksicht auf die dargelegten Bestrebungen und vor allem die Wünsche des Herrn Reichsministers zurückgestellt werden (Gutterer 1942).

[The goals the orchestra has to pursue can only be achieved if all positions are occupied by the strongest talents. [...] In the face of the German Dance- and Entertainment Orchestra's needs, however, other interests must, in consideration of this, be subordinated to the tasks expounded [above] and, above all, to the wishes of the Reichsminister [i.e. Dr. Goebbels].]

However, like the ersatz coffee that had become the norm on the home front, the results were a weak and unsatisfying imitation of the real thing. Propaganda Ministry guidelines insisted that the violins in the orchestra carry the melody (Bergmeier and Lotz, 1997: 148) – giving a distinctly tame and saccharine feel to the arrangements — and the genuine jazz fans in Germany were inevitably left unimpressed (Kater 1992: 129). Meanwhile, the enemies of jazz complained bitterly that the cursed degenerate music was still clogging up the airwaves. In a letter to the RKK dated 10 July 1943, Bruno Veith of Dresden wrote:

[Denn] was sich der Rundfunkhörer täglich an jüdisch-verniggerter Musik durch die sogenannten Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchester bieten lassen muss, ist den schlimmsten Auswüchsen in der Systemzeit gleichzusetzen. [...] Sie zersetzt den deutschen Geist und vergiftet vor allen Dingen unsere Jugend, die unter Tanzmusik heute nur noch diese jüdischen Geist atmenden Machwerke kennen lernt (Veith 1943).

[This Jewish- 'niggerised' music that is being offered to radio listeners on a daily basis by the so-called Dance- and Entertainment Orchestra is comparable to the worst excesses of the Weimar Republic. [...] It corrupts the German spirit and poisons above all our youth, who today only know dance music in the form of these miserable efforts that breathe the Jewish spirit.]

In truth, although the band's original conductor Georg Haentzschel occasionally managed to sneak in a few bars of genuine jazz breaks into the scores (Kater 1992: 129), the 'worst excesses of the Weimar Republic' were never reached. Their activities were weighed down by Nazi rules and regulations, and listening to the recordings today gives the impression of a

competent but tame salon orchestra, with any potential excitement killed by the string section and plodding rhythms.

It is interesting to compare these recordings to those of the post-war *Radio Berlin Tanzorchester* (Radio Berlin Dance Orchestra), formed in the Eastern Occupied Zone in 1946, which was led by the DTU stalwart Horst Kudritzki and contained many of the same musicians as the band put together by Goebbels (Lange 1996: 120).¹⁴ Their recording of Walter Jenson's composition 'Amiga Swing' features bold trombone and trumpet solos, hot drum interludes and what sound like some genuine passages of improvisation within the chord progression. The result is good quality swing in the style of contemporary American big bands such as the groups of Dizzy Gillespie and Stan Kenton. The Radio Berlin Dance Orchestra therefore offers audible proof that Goebbels' musicians were actually capable of playing the music the soldiers wanted to hear, and one wonders whether he could have compromised more on this point in order to prevent soldiers from tuning into foreign stations, since, in any case, even the lacklustre offerings of the DTU provoked a barrage of angry letters from listeners such as Veith. Ironically, the Radio Berlin Dance Orchestra were themselves to fall victim to reactionary Soviet cultural policy in 1950, as the political climate froze into a Cold War and American jazz again became *musica non grata* in East Berlin.

5 Conclusion

The inherent weakness of the notion of truly 'German' entertainment music is, ultimately, revealed in the muddled and fanciful language used by its champions. For all the talk about a truly indigenous art form, what was essentially being asked for on a practical level was a modern form of dance music that was *purged* of all non-German influence rather than created from scratch. In an essay for the journal *Unterhaltungsmusik* entitled 'Die Unterhaltungsmusik im Rahmen der Neugestaltung des deutschen Musiklebens [*Entertainment Music in the Framework of the Restructuring of German Musical Life*]', Wolfgang Helmuth Koch, the head of the RMK of Lower Saxony stated early in the War:

Wenn wir vom Standpunkt der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung aus [...] den Musikbetrieb in Gaststätten, Kaffeehäusern und ähnlichen Unterhaltungs- und Vergnügungsorten betrachten, so müssen wir feststellen, daß das meiste, was auf diesem Gebiete geboten wird, wenig oder gar nichts mit Kultur zu tun hat; es erweckt vielmehr den Eindruck, als ob sich hier jüdische bzw. bolschewistische Kunstauffassungen nach wie vor Geltung zu verschaffen suchen [...]. Es gibt aber auch eine Kunst, die nichts anderes will, als da zu sein, sich ihrer edlen Form, ihres Wohlklanges, ihrer Unbeschwertheit zu erfreuen und in

¹⁴ Compare, for example, *Deutsches Tanz- und Unterhaltungsortchester: Originalaufnahmen aus den Jahren 1942 und 1943* with *Till the End of Time/Zwei Minuten in Harlem and Jazz auf Amiga 1947-1962 Vol.1*, which feature the Radio Berlin Tanzorchester.

sich selber ruhend als statische Kunst nur den Gesetzen der Schönheit zu folgen und so der Entspannung zu dienen [...]; es ist die Kunst, die, gleichsam von selbst zum Hörer kommend, ihn spielend und unterhaltend dem Alltag entrückt, dahin, wo Freiheit und Frohmüt ihr Heimatrecht genießen (Koch 1942).

[If one considers the music performed in bars, coffee houses and other such leisure venues from the perspective of the National Socialist worldview [...], one is forced to realise that most of what is on offer in these places has little or absolutely nothing to do with culture; it instead gives the impression that Jewish and Bolshevistic artistic forms are still trying to achieve validity. [...] But there is another form of art which wants nothing more than to exist, to rejoice in its pure form, its happy sound, its carelessness and rest in itself as a static art that follows only the laws of beauty and therefore serves relaxation [...] it is the art that almost comes from itself to the listener, playfully and entertainingly taking him from everyday life to a place where freedom and happiness make their home.]

The vagueness of this pseudo-mystical terminology in fact only serves to highlight the lack of ideas in the German musical establishment. This essay, written by a senior RMK official, offers merely verbal flights of fancy and not one single serious musicological suggestion. The suggestion that this art would ‘come from itself to the listener’ also has an air of wishful thinking to it — it was his organisation’s task to foster and develop this art, and they were clearly failing to do so.

The Nazis’ half-hearted persecution of jazz, as this paper has shown, was itself an acknowledgement of the lack of a credible ‘German’ alternative, and the likes of Norbert Salb were right at least in arguing that regional bans alone would not be enough eradicate this ‘entartete Kunst [‘degenerate’ art form]’. A ban across the Reich, as well as a strict anti-jazz policy on German radio, would be required were anything at all to be achieved. But Goebbels could not afford to disregard the tastes of the German armed forces to such a degree, and so the result was a middle ground that pleased neither jazz’s supporters nor its detractors.

The British historian David Welch writes:

Public opinion as we understand it cannot exist in a totalitarian police state; its place is taken by an official image of the world expressed through the media of mass communications. The total impact of Nazi propaganda was to create a picture of reality shaped according to the underlying themes of the movement (Welch 2001: 80).

The problem for the Nazis in this case was not only that the underlying themes of their movement simply did not translate into progressive, exciting modern music but also that the democratic nature of the radio dial gave German listeners the opportunity to decide whether or not they wanted to accept to the imposed ‘reality’ of National Socialist dance music. For all the increasingly harsh punishments, there were many who were willing to take the risk in order to listen to the far superior enemy offerings.

A secret British post-war report on the Political Warfare Executive (responsible for ‘black propaganda’ to Germany) completed in 1947 notes:

The success of [the dance music programme on] Atlantik [i.e. *Kurzwellensender Atlantik*] [...] forced the German Propaganda Ministry to provide an imitation entertainment programme, but it was not able to compete successfully and Atlantik remained the favourite entertainment of the German forces. (Garnett 2002: 208)

At the Federal Archive in Berlin there are countless memoranda, conference minutes, letters and programme guidelines on the creation of this imitation; but genuinely popular culture by definition comes from the people, not the government. New German dance music represented a laboured attempt on the part of an authoritarian regime to replace jazz music with a state-sanctioned dance music and amounted to, at best, a weak and unconvincing caricature of the real thing.

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¹⁵ The newspaper articles in the archive are all cuttings and only the date of the issue in question is provided; there is no page number.

¹⁶ The works by Butcher and Jackson are held at National Jazz Archive, Loughton (abbr. NJA)

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