

Chapter 30: Music and Totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, Italy, and Germany: 1920–45

- I. Introduction
 - A. Within a decade, the government of the Soviet Union assumed complete control over the arts, promoting the doctrine of Socialist Realism.
 - B. In Italy, dictator Benito Mussolini was less inclined to censor the arts.
 - C. In Nazi Germany, artistic censorship took on a racial component, with Modernist art condemned as “degenerate.”
- II. Totalitarianism and music
 - A. Totalitarianism is the concentration of political power in the ruling elite.
 1. In some cases, it is in the hands of a single ruler.
 2. Three totalitarian regimes arose in Europe at about the same time and played key roles in World War II: the Soviet Union (Stalin), Fascist Italy (Mussolini), and Nazi Germany (Hitler).
- III. The rise of the Soviet Union
 - A. When the Bolsheviks took control of Russian in 1917, they established themselves as “Soviets” under Lenin.
 1. They adopted an anticapitalist stance as proscribed by Karl Marx known as communism.
 2. Stalin took over when Lenin died.
 3. Stalin began sending millions of “dissident” Soviet citizens to labor camps in the 1930s, an act known as the “Great Purge.”
 4. The state controlled the arts.
 - B. Music in the Soviet Union
 1. Initially, avant-garde art worked with government to promote Soviet propaganda.
 2. Two professional associations for Russian musicians organized in 1923.
 - C. The rise of Socialist Realism
 1. The Soviet government tightly controlled the arts.
 2. The official doctrine for the arts was called Socialist Realism: “a creative method based on the truthful, historical concrete artistic reflection of reality in its revolutionary development” (defined in numerous dictionaries).
 3. Zhdanov used these terms to describe Socialist Realism: orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality, in addition to *ideynost* (full of ideas) and *partiynost*.
- IV. Dmitry Shostakovich’s troubled life and career
 - A. The biography of Shostakovich is the best way to demonstrate Socialist Realism in practice.
 1. He was the only composer who grew up in this environment to achieve worldwide fame.
 2. His work was used to validate Socialist Realism.
 3. He became famous with his first symphony, at age nineteen.
 4. Shostakovich had a gift for the dramatic, which he cultivated while playing piano for silent films.

5. His Second and Third Symphonies also paid tribute to his expectations of communism.
6. In 1923 he premiered *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as part of a new restructuring of the arts.
7. At first the opera enjoyed great success, until Stalin (accompanied by Zhdanov) attended a performance in January 1917.
8. The next few pieces by Shostakovich received unfavorable reviews, and *Lady Macbeth* was banned (until 1963).
9. That Shostakovich, the best composer in the Soviet Union, could be treated so harshly is a testament to governmental control of the arts.

B. Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony: capitulation or hidden critique?

1. As a result of these attacks, Shostakovich was unsure how to go forward. The Fourth Symphony was withdrawn and would not be heard until twenty-five years later.
2. He quickly wrote the Fifth Symphony, and it is structured rather traditionally.
3. The "grotesque and satirical" aspects that characterized his earlier pieces are missing here.
4. The symphony was well received by the establishment, and Shostakovich moved back into their good graces.
5. The symphony was seen as a formal retraction by the composer, and he seemed to support that belief.
6. At least one critic found the slow movement to be too pessimistic, but noted that the finale lifted the symphony above the despair suggested in the earlier part.
7. This attitude opened the door for alternative readings of the symphony—especially one that finds the glory in the earlier movements and the tragedy in the final one.
8. This is indeed the case with instrumental music: we do not know exactly what the composer intended,

V. Sergey Prokofiev's return to his homeland

A. Prokofiev left the Soviet Union and traveled in the United States and Europe, becoming acquainted with Western trends.

1. He returned to the USSR in 1936, the same year Shostakovich had been denounced in *Pravda* and Stalin's purges grew more obvious.
2. Once he returned, he turned to ballet and opera, exploiting his gift for melody.
3. His last major triumph was his Fifth Symphony, premiering just before the victory over the Germans in 1945. Prokofiev suffered a stroke soon thereafter and his health declined. He died in 1953 just an hour before Stalin.

VI. Italian Fascism

A. Under the uncertain climate of the 1920s, Italy moved toward totalitarianism under Mussolini and his Fascist party in 1922.

1. Fascism maintained a social hierarchy and placed the elite in charge of the government.

2. There was not so much control of the arts, and Mussolini's advanced views on art were praised.
3. The most prominent Italian composer of this period was Respighi, whose programmatic suites for orchestra showed him to be a brilliant orchestrator.
4. The next generation of Italian composers included Dallapiccola, who can be classified as a serialist.

B. Arturo Toscanini and music making in the new Italy

1. When Mussolini came to power, the most famous Italian musicians were not composers but performers: Caruso and Toscanini.
2. Mussolini praised orchestras, who represented collective group discipline.
3. Toscanini enjoyed an international reputation with particularly illustrious points.
4. He and Mussolini parted ways in the 1920s, and Toscanini led many musical efforts for the Allies during World War II.
5. The conductor approached the orchestra and his position much like a dictator.

C. Music in Nazi Germany

1. Hitler's rise to power must be seen against the backdrop of German humiliation at losing World War I and the growing threat of the German Communist Party (and the thought that it could do to Germany what the Soviets had done to Russia).
2. Hitler and his politics were abusive to a number of groups: minorities, Jews, Romani, homosexuals, and the disabled.
3. Arts censorship followed these lines and condemned whatever it deemed "degenerate."
4. A list of degenerate music appeared in 1938. The names of the banned Jews included Glazunov, Ravel, Satie, Saint-Saëns, and Krenek. Some were made "honorary" Jews.
5. Many musicians died in the concentration camps.

D. The flight to freedom

1. Many prominent German and Austrian musicians left Germany in the mid-1930s.
2. Bartók was anti-Fascist, anti-Nazi. He struggled financially in the United States before succumbing to leukemia.
3. Koussevitsky commissioned him for the Concerto for Orchestra for the Boston Symphony Orchestra.
4. Stravinsky's move to the United States was more commercial, and he became a citizen in 1945.
5. Hindemith had begun a personal isolation before he moved to the United States.

E. Carl Orff and youth culture

1. The official Nazi attitude toward music was that it be understandable to the average listener, which is what Hindemith's music was; however, the music of Carl Orff also promoted this view.

2. Orff was the only German composer under the Nazis to achieve international fame and whose work remains in the repertory today.
3. His *Carmina Burana* (1936) uses texts by Medieval German clerics and students.
4. Despite obvious sexual innuendos, the rousing music won approval as an official display piece for Nazi youth culture.
5. That the audience could bond with the work fulfilled ideas of Nazi aesthetics.
6. *Carmina Burana*'s association with the Nazi youth movement raises questions as to how we should receive it now.

F. Shades of gray: Hartmann, Webern, and Strauss

1. Karl Amadeus Hartmann is the most honorable case of inner emigration among composers remaining in Germany during World War II.
2. By the beginning of the war, he had become somewhat famous, but between 1933 and 1945 he did not allow his music to be heard in Germany.
3. Hartmann studied with Webern in 1942, but did not adopt twelve-tone technique.
4. Webern expressed approval of Hitler and the Nazi program.
5. During the 1940s Strauss remained in Germany.
6. Strauss's last works were beautiful Lieder for soprano (his wife was a soprano) and orchestra.