

Battle for Music:
Music and British Wartime Propaganda 1935-1945



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Abstract

The use of classical music as a tool of propaganda in Britain during the War can be seen to have been an effective deployment both of the German masters and of a new spirit of England in the furtherance of British values and its point of view. Several distinctions were made between various forms of propaganda and institutions of government played complementary roles during the War. Propaganda took on various guises, including the need to boost morale on the Home Front in live performances. At the outset of the War, orchestras were under threat, with the experience of the London Philharmonic exemplifying the difficulties involved in maintaining a professional standard of performance. The activities of bodies such as the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts played a role in encouraging music, as did the British Council's Music Advisory Committee, which co-operated with the BBC and the government, activities including the commissioning of new music. The BBC's policies towards music broadcasting were arrived at in reaction to public demand rather than from an ideological basis and were developed through the increasing monitoring of German broadcasts and a growing understanding of what was required for both home and overseas transmission. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony became an important part of the Victory campaign and there was even an attempt at reviving the Handel Cult of the Nineteenth Century. German music was also used in feature film but pre-eminent composers such as William Walton and Ralph Vaughan Williams contributed to the War effort by writing film music too. The outstanding example is Vaughan Williams' music for Powell and Pressburger's Ministry of Information sponsored *49th Parallel*, in which the relationship between music and politics is made in a reference to Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. Vaughan Williams' non-film output included the greatest British orchestral work to have come out of the War, his Fifth Symphony; a work that encapsulated all the values that the institutions of public life sought to promote.

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Introduction

This thesis concerns the use of classical music as a tool of propaganda by Britain during the period leading up to the Second World War and during the conflict itself. It seeks to document the activities of official bodies that had some remit for propaganda, as well as of other institutions and individuals that were involved in producing film. Drawing on the records of the National Archives and of the BBC Archives as well as primary material found in contemporary journals and newspapers, it traces the development of music as a means of conveying messages about British values, both at home and abroad. Through the deployment of the music of various composers, particularly those of British and German nationality, and in performances of live music, film, recordings and broadcasting, I show how so-called “serious” music was deliberately used to present the ideals of democratic freedom. This, however, was rarely a deliberate and concerted effort driven by official policy, nor was it based on preconceived notions or ideological certainty. Rather, it was developed on an ad-hoc basis, often in response to situations as they arose.

In coming to this view, one of the issues I have considered is the context and place of German music and the context of its place in British musical life. Despite attempts to ban German music, I have found that the canon of music of the German-Austrian tradition was, on the contrary, embraced and presented by the British as belonging to the free peoples of the world, rather than to contemporary Germany. This is particularly true of the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, whose Fifth symphony in particular expressed the idea of freedom in film, in live performance, and on the radio.

In this thesis I consider the work of various institutions, including CEMA, the BBC, the British Council, as well as various Government departments, including the Ministry of Information, the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet. Though not always in complete harmony, the work of these organisations dovetailed, and in my analysis and consideration of the institutions of public life, the use of music for propaganda purposes was expressed in a consistent message in the thread of the work that was undertaken. Unity was also found in the work of film-makers, not only in official documentaries and propaganda shorts, but in the entertainment of feature film.

This study was partly inspired by an intriguing passage written by the late John Ramsden in his book on the often-chequered relationship between Britain and Germany:

There were few calls for the BBC to stop playing German music, and a theme from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony became the 'victory anthem,' the aural equivalent of Churchill's V sign, when it was noticed that the first four notes were rhythmically the Morse signal for 'V'. A British film carried this beyond its logical conclusion as *Battle for Music*, celebrating the survival of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, abandoned by its creator Sir Thomas Beecham but rescued by its players and provincial wartime audiences. The climax comes when an air raid interrupts a concert, but the conductor breezily announces that they will finish the performance; nobody leaves for the shelters and the LPO launches headlong into the finale of Beethoven's 'Victory' symphony.¹

Although this thesis contains some analysis of film and a certain amount of musical analysis, its primary concern is the context of music in these films. I seek to expose the rich background of music in these films, without an understanding of which they lose some of their meaning. Together with the Liberal values and cultural heritage the music in these films forms a rich tapestry of British aspiration and spiritual inheritance: and it is these things that provided inspiration in those dark days. There are two important threads in my analysis: the context of German music and the roots of new British music that would not have been composed had there not been an incentive engendered by a war. In my research I have aimed to find out whether there existed a consistent written policy for music and film propaganda in Britain. While authors Robert Mackay and Jeffrey Richards have covered certain aspects, there has been no comprehensive overview such as that compiled by Robynn Stilwell and Phil Powrie in texts such as *Composing for the Screen in Germany and the USSR*.² The question of German music in the Third Reich in general has been covered extensively elsewhere but in texts that explore the Allied perspective, its use in British propaganda is a subject that is often dealt with cursorily and, though the question is often posed, it has not been answered in a comprehensive and systematic manner. This is evident in some of the artefacts of the period, with Humphrey Jennings' film *Diary for Timothy* (1946) in particular leaving the question about the use of German music deliberately unanswered.

¹ Ramsden, 2006: 204-205

² Indiana University Press, 2008

My focus is on “classical” or so-called “serious” music as there is insufficient room in this work to consider popular music such as the contributions of artists such as Vera Lynn, though it does seek to cover popular music of a classical bent, such as the Warsaw Concerto from *Dangerous Moonlight* (1942). The argument that this is not classical music at all has raged since it was released in a hurry by the film’s producers. In his memoirs Rodney Ackland recalls its initial impact:

Certainly the “Warsaw Concerto” was a hit; the public positively wallowed in it, one could scarcely walk down a street without hearing some desperate amateur thumping out the great chords on some drawing-room piano, and the gramophone record shops were besieged with demands for the record – mostly from ladies like two I encountered who listened to it, looking quite glazed with ecstasy, and cried, “Isn’t it *wonderful*? So much better than Rachmaninoff!”³

Music historiography differs from political historiography, writes Carl Dahlhaus in his volume *Foundations of Music History*, in that the “relics” it investigates “also represent an element of the present.”⁴ The “Work” and not the “event” is the cornerstone of this approach, with the later history of a work – its *Wirkungsgeschichte* – and its continuing significance to present-day listeners (or in our case, wartime), as much a part of its meaning as the audience’s original reception:

Whether an historian elects to write a history of musical works and compositional technique as opposed to a social or functional history of music does not entirely depend on his own perception of the subject matter, which is a purely personal affair, even though it, too, can be influenced by external motives... Whether and to what degree a stylistic or a social history of music or some reconciliation of the two... is appropriate to a particular fragment of musical reality will vary according to the period, field or genre studied.⁵

Thus while any music historiography – including this one – involves some research into musicological aspects – the pure analysis of music itself – it also implies an understanding of its social contexts. One is weighed against the other: in our case, the social contexts are favoured

³ Ackland, 1954: 113

⁴ Dahlhaus, 1983: 3

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9

over what Dahlhaus calls the “givens” of music itself, but we can also consider the subject within the framework of what Tim Blanning has called the “helpful metaphor” devised by M.H. Abrams, where the shift to the Romantic Movement from a “mimetic” to an expressive “aesthetic” changed art from mirror to lamp, and in so doing no longer reflected the natural world outside but shone “into the mind and heart of the creator.”⁶ Abrams’ classic 1950s text *The Mirror and the Lamp* asks where the meaning of a work resides. Can it be found in the author’s intention or in its impact on the audience? Is meaning located in the structure of the text, or in its reflection of the social world? The answer is, of course, in all of these things, especially when considering the deployment of, say, Beethoven for propagandistic purposes in Britain during the Second World War. In answering the question “what is a fact of music history,” Dahlhaus writes that when an historian adopts a theory of art which bypasses the personality of the creator – i.e. ignores intentionality – and instead considers structure alone, a conflict of principles arises in that Structuralism is hostile to history, and music history “aims wide of its target of being a science of art” as a result,⁷ for “rigorous structuralists” pay no consequence to the composer’s thought as part of the past, and discard the author’s intention as well as the temporal nature of works of art. This of course will not do when considering the inducement to write music for propaganda purposes: a purely structuralist approach cannot do justice to the context – political and musical alike – in which music was written for propaganda purposes. Abrams provides the solution, that, to some extent, a structuralist viewpoint can go so far, but we must also consider intentionality, the social world and audience impact in equal measure. Indeed, writes Dahlhaus, “it is not so much musical works, i.e. texts available for structural analysis or relevant to a particular composer, that constitute the essential musical and music-historical facts, but rather a complex of functional relationships between a text, its performance, and its reception.”⁸ He also accepts that a purely reception-based approach is inadequate because musical events cannot be reconstructed, the lack of documents forcing historians in this case to resort to stereotyped evidence of their reception.⁹

Though perhaps applying more to the analysis of music in much earlier epochs, this nevertheless must apply to some degree to the experience of music before and during the War, even though newspaper reviews and broadcasting were there to record the event. But there is also a problem of intentionality when considering the deployment of Beethoven in the Second World War: for what possible intention one hundred and fifty years later could there

⁶ Blanning, 2009: 95

⁷ Dahlhaus, 1983: 37

⁸ Ibid., 38

⁹ Ibid., 39

be in Beethoven's mind for the prerogatives of the 1940s? However, a further factor is how meaning changes permanently with its later use: "The use of a Rachmaninov piano concerto in a film score will not leave the connotations of the music untouched, and it would appear that the semantic changes or accretions to the work remain even after it has returned to the concert hall," writes Dahlhaus.¹⁰ On reflection, this seems obvious. Music used in a film certainly changes its meaning, the best example, and surely that referred to by Dahlhaus, *Brief Encounter* (1945).

To take some other filmic examples of the era, one approach to meaning clearly takes precedence over another. *49th Parallel* (1941), a textual analysis of the script and *mise-en-scène* provides the best approach (that its author could be seen to be the Ministry of Information is also significant). In *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), the impact on the audience (to shock them into understanding that this was "Total War" where anything could happen) is the best approach to finding the meaning of the film. In *The Great Mr. Handel* (1943) the author's Intention – in this case J Arthur Rank – is clearly dominant. *Millions Like Us* (1943) not only reflects the social world in the ordinary sense of its depiction of war-time factory workers, but also features Beethoven's Fifth, which by 1943 had become a symbol of the struggle and thus a cultural icon of the time, and the music appears again and again in different guises throughout the war years. For example, *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942) uses Beethoven's Fifth, in a film that contains a hefty dose of propaganda about "this blessed nation." But World War Two was not the first time the work had become a symbol of national struggle and triumph. At its first performance in Vienna in December 1808 when Napoleon was once again threatening to invade Austria, the music was used as a symbol of Austrian resistance. Ironically in 1940 it became a symbol of French resistance against German aggression.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 164

¹¹ Hazelwood, 2009: 30

Chapter One

Music in the Context of Propaganda

*God help the minister that meddles with Art*¹

Coupling music and propaganda in Britain's World War II experience seems at first a rather unlikely notion. In the customary analysis of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, on the other hand, it is a standard line of enquiry and, indeed, a familiar discourse. Soviet influence over composers and Nazi appropriation of Wagner are well-known aspects of those regimes. In contrast to the approach of the policies of the totalitarian states, one commentator has observed, however, that the attitude of the British government towards its involvement in the arts could be epitomised in the words of Lord Melbourne, speaking in 1834, who declared: "God help the minister that meddles with Art." But with the onset of the Second World War one hundred years later, writes Jörn Weingärtner, Britain's attitude "changed dramatically when 'cultural policy' became a key element of the domestic front."² In this thesis I will show that while a concerted and deliberate programme of propaganda did not necessarily exist in the musical establishment of Britain during the Thirties and Forties, there did appear a great deal of determination to harness music to the war effort. And while many others have written around the subject of music and cultural propaganda, particularly in Germany and Russia, there has not yet been a focus on music and propaganda in Britain before and during the War.

While this study is concerned with the music of our greatest composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, who led the movement away from the influence of German music in the early 20th Century, it is necessarily obliged to consider British music against the backdrop of the continued ubiquity of German music in 1930s/40s Britain, a context that allowed it to be used in propaganda, even in Gainsborough melodramas like *Love Story* (1944).³ German music was what was being played in concert halls and on the radio; and it is the context of German music in Britain which made its use not only unavoidable, but also deliberate. In this thesis I will attempt to find out *how* deliberate by asking whether its use was intentional and what, if any, expressions of opinion existed about the use of German music, and I will trace any policies and decision-making as well as responses to any objections that may have arisen. I will also

¹ Lord Melbourne, speaking in 1834

² Weingärtner, 2006 (accessed online)

³ The opening scene, set at a National Gallery concert, features a speech concerning the important "war work" as a pianist of Felicity Crighton (the stage name of Margaret Lockwood's character Lissa).

consider the use of music for purposes of morale boosting as well as more direct forms of propaganda.

Music in Britain

Just as “classical” music to today’s mass audience means “Classic FM” rather than Radio 3, in the 1940s it often meant the *Warsaw Concerto*, but the war also saw an increasing appetite for “serious” music. In 1942, for example, Mass-Observation asked its National Panel of Observers, “people in all kinds of jobs with all kinds of interests and beliefs,” what effects, if any, the war had had on their musical tastes, and on the amount of time they spent playing or listening to music. “About a sixth” considered that their tastes had developed “or that their appreciation for music has increased because of the war.”⁴ Significantly the report points out that most respondents did not include jazz in their definition of music and thus this observation would appear to apply to “serious” music only. Men in the armed forces especially complained about the “lack of facilities for hearing serious music,” and did not consider music broadcasts “an adequate substitute for the real thing.” Mass-Observation’s report concludes by commenting that since the start of the War the demand for music had increased, with “The main lines of change... towards a greater appreciation of ‘classical’ music or a decreased appreciation of dance music.”

A handful of ideas, personalities, names and other icons emerging from the very early years of the war remain as symbols of when Britain faced its “darkest hour.” The barrage balloon, searchlights and sandbags are among these symbols; as too are images of Princess Elizabeth in ATS uniform, and the King and Queen surveying the East End during the Blitz or appearing on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. The image of St Paul’s amid the smoke and ruins of bomb damage, a Spitfire flying over the white cliffs of Dover, an air-raid shelter, the uniform of the Home Guard and the white helmet of an ARP warden also make up this visual iconography of the War. The “V” for Victory campaign and posters proclaiming that “careless talk costs lives” are part of this war-time heritage, too. The recent discovery of the unused “Keep Calm and Carry On” poster with its particular tone and typography can be seen to belong to the same set of visual icons and even the year 1940 makes an abstract icon in our minds. It was, of course, “Britain’s Finest Hour.” But there are also auditory symbols – what I would like to call “aural icons” – that are peculiar to the time. Churchill’s speeches, Hitler’s hysterical ranting, the

⁴ MO File Report #1138

sound of a BBC announcer, an air-raid siren and the “all clear” are the obvious items in this catalogue.

These cultural symbols are preserved in the imagination because they represent the spirit of the time as a kind of distillation. There are many other aural icons of the Home Front, among them the voice of J.B. Priestley, the sound of a blackout warden shouting “Put out that light!” the noise of an approaching doodle bug and, worse, the terrifying V2 rocket with its delayed sound-effects. Contributing to this soundscape is music: not only Vera Lynn singing “We’ll Meet Again,” but also so-called “serious” music, too, Beethoven’s Fifth in particular. Together, these aural icons form a huge contrast to the sounds of Nazi Germany – its music in particular – where classification of the “degenerate” in art (*Entartete Kunst*), resulted in the banning of the music of contemporary Jewish composers as well as that of Mendelssohn and even Vaughan Williams. As Leon Botstein has observed, both Hitler and Stalin “believed in the power of music in personal and political life and considered themselves aficionados. They intervened personally in an effort to utilise music on behalf of the state, so that music could deepen the enthusiasm for and loyalty to the regime.”⁵ In Germany, he writes, there were three main foci. Firstly the appropriation of music history on behalf of Nazi ideology, which claimed Mozart, Beethoven, Bruckner (Hitler’s favourite composer), Brahms and of course Wagner as “spiritual allies.” Secondly, the Nazis attempted to create an Aryan theology or liturgy which could match “traditional Christian religious ecstasy and devotion” through the support of new music such as Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana* and the performance of Bruckner, for example, in darkened concert halls, the latter linked to Wagner’s introduction of the practise at Bayreuth. “The hallowed traditions of musical culture could become effective allies to the Nazis’ innovative uses of mass cultural propaganda techniques that included rallies, radio transmission, and the sound film,” writes Botstein, and music thus became a “cherished component” of the “theatre of Nazism.”⁶ Finally, the deployment of the musical professional, with the conductor as spiritual dictator, completes this trilogy of political intervention in music. In addition, the Nazis hated technology-induced consumerist passivity and actively encouraged music-making at home. “The ideal Nazi subject was an obedient and loyal servant of the state who sang in a choir and played string quartets or the piano at home with friends,” if for very different ends in Germany, in Botstein’s word, “The joy of music making made the subordination by the state and the absence of political freedom tolerable.”⁷

⁵ Botstein, 2005: 491

⁶ Ibid., 491-2

⁷ Ibid., 493

The Nazi attitude towards music in the home is noteworthy because it is echoed in Britain, particularly in Vaughan Williams' views on the subject. His idea, explained in Humphrey Jennings' 1948 film *Dim Little Island* was that the creation of music by amateur musicians was simply the bottom layer of the whole structure of music-making – it was a natural fact of how music performance manifested in England. But given the well-documented Nazi case, the question arises of whether the British government had as strong an attitude and policy toward music in wartime. As a contribution to music historiography of the Second World War, this thesis will demonstrate that it did, though via less direct methods of propaganda but nevertheless with the full co-operation of the institutions of musical public life.

Music as Propaganda

In this thesis I am concerned with the primary use of music *as* propaganda, for example in the work of the British Council, and in the commissions of the BBC. As it matured, I will show how the British Council Music Advisory Committee slowly formulated an informal policy towards “cultural propaganda,” and I will attempt to trace the development of a formal policy at the BBC towards music broadcasting and to commissioned works. I am also interested in the secondary use of music *in* propaganda, for example in *Colonel Blimp*, *49th Parallel* (where the subtle use of certain kinds of music to emphasise a point, providing a musical subtext to the film) and *Millions Like Us*, where either the deployment of music or express references to music constituted pure political propaganda, used to promote British values – even using Beethoven for this purpose. Finally, I consider music as the subject *of* propaganda in films like *The Great Mr. Handel* and Humphrey Jennings' *Heart of Britain* (1941). Given that a film or any other text can only be understood in the context of its time, *The Great Mr. Handel* can be seen to be a cultural expression of *British* music history and as a reminder to audiences that, after all, here is a composer who, despite his German birth, is a *British* culture hero.⁸

German music, as I have said, was ubiquitous in Britain. Furthermore, England was still widely regarded, in the words of Adolf Hermann Schmitz in 1904, as the “land without music.” In her 2005 survey of German music in England, “Bach and Beethoven... are *Gods*’ : The Role of the German Composer in English Music Appreciation 1919-1939,” Megan Pricor shows the role that technology – broadcasting, the gramophone and player piano – played after the First World War in attempts to improve the musical tastes of British listeners. It was not native composers, who had enjoyed recent successes in the revival of music in England, who were the

⁸ A full analysis of *The Great Mr. Handel* is discussed with other films that feature “German” music in Chapter 6.

focus of this appreciation, which was newly available through the medium of radio and elsewhere. “Instead of Elgar and Vaughan Williams,” she writes, “Austro-German composers from Bach to Wagner were given prominence.”⁹ Key to the domination of Bach, Beethoven and other German composers in this movement was that they were “imbued with cultural values which either transcended nationality, or which rendered them honorary English.”¹⁰ To some extent the deployment of Austro-German composers was designed to counter the growing taste for Jazz, newly imported from America and, between the wars, an all-pervasive influence. In addition, England was a centre for “continental modernism” in “serious” music after World War One with performances of Schoenberg, Bartók, Berg, Stravinsky and Prokofiev more frequent in London than in any European or American city. The result was a conservative backlash, with a focus on Austro-German art music “from Bach to Brahms.”¹¹

Throughout the 1930s the BBC actively pursued a policy of German music so that the masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “reigned” at the corporation, and not only for purely musical reasons. In a society that valued “temperance, diligence, respectability and moral fortitude,”¹² J.S. Bach in particular was not only exemplified as “an ideal musical *and* personal model,”¹³ but also as a specifically Anglo-Saxon one: “sober, industrious, respectable, domestic, Protestant [and] peace-loving.”¹⁴ Beethoven, no less important, “was similarly conscripted to the English nationalist cause,” regarded as “the Shakespeare of music” and even “upheld as a Christ-like figure, who triumphed over personal suffering and whose music elevates its listeners to a new awareness.”¹⁵ Both Bach and Beethoven were identified as “godlike, transcendent”¹⁶ and it is in this context that the continued deployment of German music following the outbreak of War must be understood.

Thus in the minds of ordinary listeners, by 1939 there was no question that the music of Bach, Beethoven and a host of other composers of the Austro-German tradition belonged to England and this attitude was further entrenched during the War with the deliberate use of German music for propaganda purposes, as we shall see. At some point the continued deployment of Beethoven in particular did provoke some questions of appropriateness. But as Prictor shows, for twenty years musical efforts in Britain had already effectively appropriated the composer

⁹ Brüstle & Heldt (eds.), 2005: 17

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20

¹² *Ibid.*, 27. I discuss the BBC in chapter 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, emphasis mine

¹⁴ Prictor quotes Robert Shadley and Merion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance 1860-1940: Construction and Deconstruction*, op. cit. p.122, London: 1993

¹⁵ Brüstle & Heldt (eds.), 2005: 28

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31

to the conservative cause and Beethoven, by 1939, was already “British” in this sense. Despite the inevitable backlash that war with Germany would have on common attitudes to German music, in the event the opposite line was taken.¹⁷ By 1941 Beethoven had become a symbol of freedom; and the values accorded him the property and aspirations of all freedom-loving people. How could it be otherwise for a figure considered the “Christ-like” Shakespeare of music?¹⁸

The famous “fate knocking at the door” phrase of the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth was the theme of Radio London. The Belgian section of the BBC launched its “V” campaign in January 1941. The idea was subsequently adopted by Jacques Duchesne for the radio programme “Les Français parlent aux Français” (French Speak to the French), with the actual theme used for the first time in June. The deployment of Beethoven’s Fifth, particularly the “V” motif found many expressions throughout the war.¹⁹ As Esteban Buch writes in his political history of Beethoven’s *Choral* Symphony, Goebbels “did all he could” to keep hold of the theme, but its association with the Allied cause, the French Resistance and with anti-Nazis was firm, the latter having always heard in Beethoven “the expression of their own yearnings for freedom.”²⁰ Indeed, on Nazi claims for German music, notes a columnist in a war-time edition of *The Musical Times*, “They, the Nazis, claimed for themselves the glory of Germany’s cultural past. They discovered the German classics, they discovered Bach, Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and, of course, Wagner, whose music roused the hysterical Führer into a frenzy in which he was capable of anything.”²¹ Of course there is much taken for granted when considering Hitler’s musical tastes, as well as attitudes to music in the Third Reich. According to Traudl Junge, one of Hitler’s secretaries who was present in the Berlin bunker, Hitler’s real view of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (the overture of which was said to be his favourite piece of music) is quite different to received opinion:

It’s just my luck that I can never say I like something without finding that I’m stuck listening exclusively to one piece of music or hearing one particular

¹⁷ One has only to think of the cruelty shown to the harmless dachshund during the First World War.

¹⁸ The link, albeit a spiritual one, between Beethoven and Shakespeare was not only claimed in England. Arnold Schering, professor at the University of Berlin, claimed in a book published in 1936 that Beethoven’s music was linked to literary models, including Schiller and Shakespeare. The book caused a scandal among Nazi authorities and brought down the wrath of many (Buch, 2003: 208).

¹⁹ On July 19th 1940, the “V for Victory campaign was inaugurated by Winston Churchill, who had been in office as Prime Minister for just ten weeks. The BBC used the opening bar of the work, which coincidentally forms the pattern of the Morse code for the letter V, in its overseas transmissions.

²⁰ Buch, 2003: 215. The context of the “universality” that allowed Beethoven’s music to be deployed must also be seen in the light of Nietzsche’s “My Beethoven is not your Beethoven.” Buch’s analysis is concerned with Beethoven’s 9th but its relevance to this case is clear.

²¹ Aber, 1944: 179

opera. I once said that *Meistersinger* is really one of Richard Wagner's finest operas, so since then it's supposed to be my favourite opera and I don't get to hear anything else.²²

The Nazi Attitude

Indeed, Pamela Potter has unearthed what she has called a "silent debate" over the existence of a distinctly Nazi aesthetic that has emerged since the 1990s. Among the subjects of this debate are the "many long-held myths about Hitler's complete infatuation only with Wagner, the supposed links between the plots of Wagner's operas and Hitler's politics."²³ It has been shown, for example, that from a number of Germans in exile, among them Thomas Mann and Theodor Adorno, come the claims about Wagner's influence on Hitler, and that he was "much more enraptured by the emotional strains of *Tristan and Isolde* than by the nationalist messages of *Die Meistersinger*," but also that Hitler's refusal to "micromanage" resulted in a chaotic policy towards music.²⁴ Further evidence of this chaotic attitude towards music in Nazi Germany is evidenced in that, despite the banning of French works from 1939 onwards, productions of *Carmen* actually continued simply because they were "too successful."²⁵ We are, however, concerned with music in Britain. W.R. Anderson's "Of This and That" column in the *Musical Times* of October 1940 comments on an article in a recent edition of *Sound Wave* in which the writer questioned the continued use of Beethoven's music in Britain:

The Germans would welcome our constant use of Beethoven's music. It would line up with the rest of their propaganda. It would suggest to them a 'softness' among us, a soft spot in our hearts for something of German origin. That is what they aim at in all their propaganda – a weakening, in any and every way, of our resolve.²⁶

Not so, writes Anderson, who recalls J.B. Priestley's words (whose weekly *Postscript* broadcasts had just finished) to answer any charges of "softness" on the part of the British people:

²² Junge, 2002: 81 (Hitler is quoted in 1943)

²³ Potter, 2006: 593

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Heinrich, 2007:198

²⁶ Anderson, October 1940 [1]: 407

This war is a fight to the finish between two opposed ways of life, and, as a free creation of the human mind, music is one of the things for which we are fighting.

The word “free” is key, as Anderson reminds *Sound Wave*, whose original article asked whether playing Beethoven constituted a kind of “trading with the enemy”:

The argument is sometimes raised that the music of Beethoven must be above such considerations. It belongs to the world. But he would be a super-being who could honestly separate the country which produced Beethoven from the country that is conducting this bestial war against civilization.

If German music, centuries old, played here, merely suggests that there was something good that once came out of Germany, that is what they would like to see. It is but such a short step from the past tense to the present tense.²⁷

Anderson’s retort is two-fold. Firstly, something good did come out of Germany’s past – “nothing less than a large proportion of the world’s finest music” – and, secondly, that comparing a Germany to which the world owes much musically to its present aberration as the “enemy of civilization,” rather than weakening the resolve of the free nations, would surely rather strengthen it. Also refuting *Sound Wave*’s idea of adopting the enemy’s “total” methods of war by banning “all music of enemy origin or association,” just as British music was excluded from Germany, Anderson understood that perhaps applied to contemporary German composition, musicians could possibly agree with this argument, but “to give up German and Italian classics would be to cut off our nose to spite our face.”²⁸ As for the continued use of Wagner, Anderson wittily reports of an organist engaged to play the *Lohengrin* bridal march at a Lancashire wedding, who refused on the grounds that Hitler liked Wagner. “(Alas, then, for yet another war-sacrifice; bang must go my pickled onions; I hear Hitler dotes on them.) The soldier-bridegroom is reported to have agreed, saying that to play that music at a wedding would be an insult; or words to some such witless effect.”²⁹ Meanwhile, Anderson also offers some explanation of why the “rhapsodical, romantic, backward-gazing” in music was making a come-back in the works of British composers. The return to romance “seems to our native way of reaffirming, translating, re-living the things that we admire, cherish, and mean to cling to,”

²⁷ Anderson, October 1940 [2]: 421

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Anderson, October 1940 [1]: 407

he writes. "If so, the outlook for extremism, never rosy here, grows greyer and grimmer."³⁰ But German music was certainly not going to be rejected out of hand. Anderson's final argument takes the form of a question:

'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' Was the poet right? Or does it cease to be a joy when the nation of its origin relapses into barbarism? Those of us to whom the classics mean as much as they ever did – even more, our need of them greater – have no doubt as to the answer.³¹

The Desire for Music

Even in POW camps, there was a demand for music. Sgt. Gordon Barnes, writing to *The Musical Times* from Stalag Luft 6 in Germany in February 1944 reports how a musical society was formed in the camp, chiefly using recorded music (with 400 records received from the BBC), but also consisting of a camp orchestra of thirty, "with a present repertory of tolerable standard," and which had recently performed Beethoven, Smetana, Mozart, Weber, Haydn, Bach and Bizet, as well as the works of some English composers. An appeal in particular for the records of Walton, Vaughan Williams, Britten and Prokofiev from readers of the *Musical Times* was put forward to the journal in May.³² *The Musical Times* did not necessarily reach a wide audience, but the *Daily Telegraph* music pages were widely regarded and *The Times* devoted many column inches to questions of music throughout the entire War. Its music critic was Henry Colles, a member of the British Council's Music Advisory Committee and, consequently, it remains an excellent record of concerts and music reviews as a useful source to understand the musical establishment in London and as a barometer of musical opinion.

Early into the War many correspondents were conscious of the power of the arts. A letter from a reader in Gloucestershire is typical: visual artists can, like music, poetry and drama "stimulate and refresh the spirit of a people," the emphasis on the collective being the essence of the potential of various forms of cultural expression to engage and unite a whole community, or even the nation.³³ These "various forms" of course included the whole question of propaganda, about which there had been much debate before the War. Opening a House of

³⁰ Ibid., 408. The same could be observed in the work of visual artists and writers of the period, "who turned their back on international modernism in the face of the threat of war." ("Landscape Artist: Films and music echo the later writer W.G. Sebald's exploration of place." Ariane Bankes, in the *Financial Times*, 5/6 February 2011, p.15)

³¹ Anderson, October 1940 [2]: 422

³² Barnes, May 1944: 152

³³ *The Times*, 18 September 1939

Commons Debate on the subject in early 1938, John Lees-Jones (MP for Blackley) contrasted the contemporary approach to political and cultural propaganda with Britain's pre-First World War view:

Up to 1914, we in this country were somewhat indifferent to the opinions of other nations and peoples, with the result that we took very few steps to advertise ourselves.³⁴

Instead, he continued, it was a time when our actions and views could "speak for themselves". But the world of 1938 was very different and given that other countries – Germany and Italy in particular – were spending up to ten or twenty times the amount than Britain on various forms of propaganda, it was time to consider the alternatives that could be used to counteract it. Lees-Jones identified four media – film, "methods of cultural propaganda", wireless, and newspapers and journals. Coupling film together with cultural propaganda, both sought to "bring the places and the beauty and culture of this country before the peoples of other nations... our mode of life, our character, our aims, our hopes and our attainments." But a more concerted effort was needed to promote British values, the objects of which were several: to explain and support British policy and action, to refute charges against, and criticisms of, British policy and action, to establish and extend our influence on the side of world peace, to further the interests of British trade and commerce, to make more extensively known the beauty and charm of the country, to propagate the principles of British culture, and finally to tell the world what we are like as human beings. During the debate, it was pointed out that even the word "propaganda" was by now "one of the most significant in the languages of the world," and that to counteract the mischievous aims of German and Italian, and to some extent Russian, propaganda, Britain should begin a "campaign of truth and plain-speaking, so that the name of Great Britain will stand for truth, good will and peace."³⁵

The House was united in the need to formalise propaganda efforts, and also the approach that needed to be taken. For example "news" must be kept distinct from "views and culture." Later, Herbert Morrison agreed that "we do not want the British Broadcasting Corporation to be made a mere engine of propaganda of any sort." Somewhat blimpish attitudes were expressed, however, with the presentation of news in preference to propaganda to be

³⁴ HC Hansard, Vol.331 Col. 1909

³⁵ And even of the methods employed. An example cited by MP Lieut.-Commander Fletcher, concerns broadcasting in the US: "As soon as the British news bulletin is finished, Germany follows it up on a wavelength that it just a hair's breadth away... and as an ingenious infringement they employ announcers with an Oxford accent to give these bulletins."

favoured “as there is enough propaganda poisoning the air already.” Harold Nicolson was concerned that not only merely abusing the “other side” was not to be favoured, but also “imitating [their] methods” was suspect, summing up his position in three words – “not by retaliation.” Warning that propaganda by nature is based on over-statement, it was unlikely to sit comfortably with the national temperament. His solution was to “put across something very sedative, very quiet, very calm—always seeing the other person's point of view and prepared to give way to it when it is right; never being angry; seldom ironical; and always sympathetic. That is British culture, the capacity of being sympathetic. And we must get it across.” The problem, however, was that “intellectual forms of culture are more difficult,” and it was no good to send the “second-rate” abroad if first-rate artists, able to give the right impression, were unavailable.

The work of the British Council, however, was unanimously applauded during the debate. Mr W. Astor spoke of the literature, “the art of fine printing,” book production, and music that “has a world contribution to make to world civilisation,” singling out the London Philharmonic Orchestra’s visits to Berlin and Paris in 1936 and 1937. Earl Winterton, the Chancellor, agreed that British literature was a “golden storehouse,” but was at pains to ensure that Britain could not believe in propaganda “in the bad sense.” Miss Rathbone, in the only speech that was slightly out of keeping with the unified tone of the debate, pointed out that the British Council’s work, despite being “on the right lines,” was on an “infinitesimal scale.”³⁶ Everything Britain was doing, in fact, was a “drop in the ocean as compared with what fascist countries [were] doing,” which she called a “hideous din.” The house resolved, however, to pass the motion:

That, having regard to the increasing activity of certain foreign Governments in the field of propaganda, political and cultural, by means of the Press, broadcasting, and films, this House being of opinion that the evil effects of State propaganda of a tendentious or misleading character can best be countered, not by retaliation, but by the widespread dissemination of straightforward information and news based upon an enlightened and honest public policy, urges the Government to give the full weight of its moral and financial support to schemes to further the wider and more effective presentation of British news, views, and culture abroad.

³⁶ I discuss the work of the British Council in Chapters 3 and 4.

Distinctions between Cultural and Political Propaganda

This debate shows that a distinction between propaganda types was already being drawn, at least among MPs. It establishes already a classification of propaganda in theory that later was to become the practice of the various government departments mandated with “publicity.” The notion that there was a difference between various types of dissemination of information was later described as “white” and “black” propaganda, the simplest distinction between the two, as Nicholas Rankin observes, being one of origin, “between the labels on the tins, as it were, rather than between their contents,” which may or may not be the actual “truth”, white broadcasting being the straight up broadcasting of news on the BBC and black, “the pretence broadcasting marked for its unauthorised sound.”³⁷ Further distinctions were made after the War had begun, but by July 1939 the Cabinet Office was already clear, as the Foreign Office memorandum, “A Survey of our Foreign Publicity” reveals. It begins “Our propaganda should be regarded from two points of view:” whether short- or long-term, i.e. used for “some immediate political objective” or whether it aims to build up a “solid foundation and understanding of this country.”³⁸ As the former is built on the latter the memo acknowledges that the work of the British Council since its inception had been the mainstay of the work “on the understanding that our cultural and educational propaganda abroad has been accepted as a permanent feature of our national activities.” Recognised and acknowledged for its work, up to September 1939, the British Council’s attempts were outlined in a brief survey of what it had so far achieved. As for its role, the memo makes clear the limitations of British Council’s work: “each foreign country is being studied as a separate problem and insofar as special forms of publicity are not suitable for the British Council to undertake, the Foreign Office will take action direct.”

After the War had begun, a period of consolidation in the various ministries took place. As a result, the work of the council’s Music Committee, for example, tapered off, but began again in earnest after the Blitz, as we shall see. However, much was in disarray at other departments. The ministry itself was lampooned as “1099 and all that,” a reference to the number of staff it employed and to its continuing disarray.³⁹ There were no less than four Ministers of Information during the War, beginning with Lord Macmillan, whose tenure lasted until the New Year. Sir John Reith took over for the first three months of 1940, with Alfred Duff Cooper taking the role on as Churchill became Prime Minister. Brendan Bracken held the post for the

³⁷ Rankin, 2008: 302

³⁸ Cabinet Papers. Foreign Publicity, 10 July 1939 (TNA CAB24/288/0/0003)

³⁹ *1099 and all that* was the title of a satirical volume which criticized the department and its disorganization.

longest period, taking up the position in July 1941 and remaining for what was effectively the rest of the War until May 1945. The Foreign Secretary summarises the message that propaganda efforts needed to get across in the final words of his memorandum to the Cabinet Office:

The main object of our propaganda should be to present a picture of this country to the outside world which will be intelligible, convincing and definite, so that the world may know that a distinctively British point of view exists and understand what it is.⁴⁰

The Foreign Office Department of Publicity in Enemy Countries' analysis of German propaganda for the first half of April 1940 included a rough translation of the words of "Bomben auf Engelland," a song from the recent propaganda film *Feuertaufe* (Baptism of Fire):

In the windy heights of heaven
The eagle's joy we find.
To the sun's high door
Our engines roar:
We leave the earth behind.

Chorus. Comrade! Comrade!
 All the girls must part!
 The order's here to start!
 Comrade! Comrade!
 The answer's in our hand;
 On at the foe! On at the foe!
 Bombs on Engelland!

We flew to the Warthe and Weichsel,
Far over the Polish land.
The hardest blow
We struck the foe
With bolt and bomb and brand.
 Comrade! Comrade! &c.

Then the youngest of our arms
Was baptised in the fiery rain.
From Rhine to Moor
The birds of war
Prepare to fly again.
 Comrade! Comrade! &c.

⁴⁰ Cabinet Papers. Foreign Publicity, 10 July 1939 (TNA CAB24/288/0/0003)

We'll strike the British Lion
The last decisive blow.
Our sentence spoken is,
An Empire broken is
- The proudest day we know!
Comrade! Comrade! &c.

Hear the motors singing!
On at the foe!
In your ears a'ringing:
On at the foe!
Bombs! Bombs! Bombs on Engelland!⁴¹

Reference in the song to a baptism of “fiery rain” was to the bombing of Warsaw, and the words “We'll strike the British Lion,” were also not without their context – to the early Korda RAF film *The Lion has Wings* (1939). After Churchill had seen *Baptism of Fire*, he considered that a shortened version with an English commentary would make “very good propaganda.” The resulting short film *The Biter Bit* (1943), also produced by Alexander Korda, opens with the screening of the “notorious” *Baptism of Fire* at the German embassy in Oslo. For added emphasis, the film also borrows from another Korda production: images of the bombing of German cities were underscored with Arthur Bliss's march from *Things to Come* (1936). This was not perhaps accidental. The film script of *Things to Come*, prepared by H.G. Wells from his own novel, was “full of foreboding:”

An international war was imminent. This would last for thirty years, causing the ultimate disintegration of society. This disaster would be followed by a pandemic – a walking sickness – which would eliminate most of the earth's population. The remaining earthlings would be forced to live in underground city bunkers.⁴²

Now that war had come – indeed was already into its fourth year – Britain had taken the gloves off and, in one of the few examples of “retributive propaganda,” justified the bombing of German cities “on the grounds that the Germans had done it first.” The score, “full of magnificent menace,” was more successful than the film in which it originally appeared and which at the time of its release was appreciated by neither the critics nor audiences. Decca

⁴¹ TNA CAB/68/6/128 – 23 April 1940: “Translation of new German popular song”

⁴² Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 55

released the music on 78s and its reappearance in *The Biter Bit* would have lent a certain familiarity to audiences.

By May 1940 the 8th Report on Propaganda submitted to the War Cabinet by the Minister of Information, for April, added a new dimension to the standard commentary on broadcasting and other media. While the policy of the Religious Division “varied with the audience,” four themes had emerged, namely that Christian civilization was in danger, that the German Government was Anti-religious, that the “Christian Churches” in Britain were unanimously behind the prosecution of the war, and that promotion of friendship through the Churches was to be desired.⁴³ This important aspect of propaganda was also to feature in the efforts of film makers and also of the musicians and the composers to whom they referred. As we have seen, the virtues of Bach and, to some extent, Beethoven, as well as those of Handel were key aspects of the idea that the war was in defence of “Christian Civilization.” Handel’s virtues, for example, matched to the King, and were to be deployed again in support of the British (Christian) ideal, with the idea that Providence would continue to favour the British nation, as we shall see. Furthermore, the circulation and transference of John Bunyan in propaganda was to reappear time and again, especially in the work of Vaughan Williams. Although Vaughan Williams considered himself a Christian Agnostic, it can be said that he wrote music for the human spirit, drawing on a universal vision and concern for human suffering. The presence of Bunyan in his work, particularly in his Fifth Symphony, which was first performed at the Proms in 1943, is of particular significance in this regard. Vaughan Williams returned to Bunyan repeatedly. Among his other works that draw on Bunyan, the motet *Valiant for Truth* was written in 1940. He also wrote incidental music for Edward Sackville-West’s adaptation for radio of Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1942.⁴⁴

Bunyan was also important to film makers Powell and Pressburger. Ian Christie’s *Arrows of Desire* provides contextual background to the development of Powell and Pressburger’s output; not least the potential for propaganda: “Powell and Pressburger were among the first to argue for the vast propaganda potential of *fiction* films, rather than documentary, and to carry their case to the Ministry of Information.”⁴⁵ The result of their efforts, *49th Parallel*, is also the film that marks Vaughan Williams’ first foray into film music, and, as we shall see, a sequence in the film references music through a tiny keyhole that on closer inspection reveals a remarkable aspect to the whole question of music and politics. Although Christie considers

⁴³ TNA CAB 68/6/23 – 11 May 1940

⁴⁴ Contemporary novelist Joyce Cary’s *To be a Pilgrim*, the third book of his first Trilogy which includes *The Horse’s Mouth*, was written in the same year.

⁴⁵ Christie, 1994: 34

this segment to be the weakest element of the film, he accepts that seen as a whole, it was the “first considerable fiction film of the war: good propaganda *and* good entertainment,” despite the sequence which Christie regards as being “overloaded with cultural references.”⁴⁶ Both *A Canterbury Tale* (Powell and Pressburger’s film from 1944) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) evoke “the figure of the pilgrim,” according to Christie.⁴⁷

Early propaganda in World War Two was aimed at the United States when, in reality, Britain stood alone against Germany. In his 1994 biography of Winston Churchill, Clive Ponting provides the context for persuading Americans that the Nazis were as equal a threat to them, and the United States needed to join the war:

Although opinion polls showed Americans as sympathetic to Britain’s plight and a majority in favour of giving Britain extensive aid, over eighty per cent did not want to enter the war... it was impossible for Roosevelt to ignore such a strong body of opinion.⁴⁸

49th Parallel was the first attempt at persuading the Americans, but of course it was Pearl Harbor that finally dragged the U.S. into the War. Frank Capra’s documentary series *Why We Fight* can be seen to take up where, perhaps, *49th Parallel* leaves off. The US had by now been convinced, and Frank Capra’s films spoke directly to the need for American involvement, though they were not made until 1944 when the fortunes of war had already turned in the Allies’ favour. *Divide and Conquer* tells the story of Germany’s subjugation of Western Europe starting with Denmark and ending with the fall of France. Thirty-two minutes into the film, which uses much music as well as the sound effects of firebombing, dive bombers and machine-gun fire, the slow movement of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony is used in the depiction of Belgian refugees. However, here the music is used for its solemnity rather than as a direct reference to Beethoven, though this aspect cannot be ignored. Thus Beethoven’s music is used in two senses – for its effects, and for its cultural reference: at the very end of the film as the *Marseillaise* plays, an image of the Liberty Bell is superimposed with the “V” sign and the first

⁴⁶ Ibid., 38. Following *49th Parallel* (which I discuss in full in Chapter Seven) Powell and Pressburger had a scheme for a film about Sir Malcolm Sargent and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1942. It came to nothing, but in 1943 another film, this one about the London Philharmonic, emerged. Featuring Sargent, I discuss this significant film in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 116. Vaughan Williams was writing the Fifth Symphony at the time of *49th Parallel*. The 5th uses themes from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Vaughan Williams’ life-long operatic project which was finally staged as a “Morality” at Covent Garden in 1951.

⁴⁸ Ponting, 1994: 506

four notes of Beethoven's Fifth are heard, which by this time was a common aural icon which sat naturally with the familiar visual symbols of freedom.

Towards the end of the War, one official at the British legation in Sweden noticed how Germany, too, was now exploiting cultural aspects of propaganda:

For several months past the German propaganda machine has been switching over to an increasing extent from politics to culture, and from the facts of war to the values of peace. Dr. Goebbels has decided that it now pays better to assume the role of the apostle of European Civilization than to play the part of the Paladin of Teutonic frightfulness. Popular illustrated papers like 'Signal' and 'Das Reich', which some months back were full of drawings of young toughs throwing hand grenades at Russian tanks are now increasingly given over to idyllic glimpses of the German countryside or rehearsals of ballets to music by Haydn in the Vienna Redoutensaal.

To us of course it is ridiculous that the persecutors of Einstein and Thomas Mann and Freud should pose as the apostles of European culture. But to them it is relevant to enquire what the Bolsheviks and the Yankees (they are more reticent about ourselves) have contributed to the European heritage. It is easy for the Germans to point out that much of the material destruction of the irreplaceable cultural monuments of Europe is the work of English and American bombs.⁴⁹

In view of the massive bombing raids that were to take place on Dresden only a few weeks later, this admission becomes rather stark, suggesting that the destruction of the "Venice of the North" was carried out despite a consciousness of its cultural importance. Thus, even before what is perhaps the most notorious of all allied actions, during the latter part of the War the Foreign Office was well aware of the danger of destroying symbols of Western Civilization which contradicted the earlier self-image of Britain as its defender. The note continues:

⁴⁹ TNA FO 924/208. File Note addressed to the Foreign Office dated 21 January 1945

If at the end of the war it is the Allies who are found to have destroyed the greater part of Europe, they will not soon be forgiven for destroying those European values which the German oppressor, on the whole, had spared.⁵⁰

The Russians and Americans had “no valid reply” to German appropriation of German culture. On the other hand, and despite not being able to compete materially with either the Soviet Union or the United States, in respect of cultural values, Britain “need feel no sense of inferiority.” A unique opportunity existed, therefore, for Britain to “play a decisive part in the intellectual reconstruction of the continent,” now that the War was drawing to an end. The British Council was to play a major part in this effort and, ironically, the recommendation in this paper was to unite again the Political and Cultural aspects of propaganda together in a single effort that would counter the idea that Britain did not take her culture “seriously.” The report is not blind to the short-term tactical nature of Political propaganda designed to gain immediate results, as opposed to cultural propaganda, which it calls a strategic and long-term activity designed to “build up a favourable picture of the society from which it originates” with lasting benefits.

Thus the theory of propaganda remains, but at this late stage in the War, it was recognised that the methods by which both were to be undertaken were, actually, part of a more sophisticated approach to the whole question of foreign “publicity”. This new approach recognised the role that the Foreign Office, alongside the British Council, could play in Cultural Propaganda projects, those “which mature over a number of years.” No other department was better suited for this than the Foreign Office, the memo argues, in a statement that reflects the continuing debate about demarcation between government departments over propaganda, which had begun at the beginning of the war. The most immediate problem, however, was the reconstruction of cultural life in Germany in which the British Council “may one day find its most important task upon the continent.” Because the practice of propaganda had been subdivided between various departments, this important acknowledgement took some considerable time to bear out and the distribution of roles took several more months to find agreement. At the end of 1945 the Foreign Office could report that the British Council had been asked to be prepared to start work (that is, the work of reintroducing books as well as music, art and drama etc.) as soon as circumstances permitted in every country *except* Germany. So, to begin with, the British Council was actually prevented from any activity in Germany at all and this did not change until well after the war had ended.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The Power of Music Propaganda

It is useful to consider the background against which comments such as these were made. The German notion that the mind could be reached through the senses – particularly through sound, and music in particular – is opposite to traditional British restraint. Tim Blanning comments that at a time when all Europe was in danger of being overwhelmed by revolutionary change, Schiller’s argument (writing in the early 19th century) that “The way to the head is through the heart,” and that only through culture could humankind achieve liberty without license, that it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom, “might,” writes Blanning, “have a quaint, if not sinister, resonance for Anglophone ears, but it proved to be hugely and enduringly influential in German-speaking Europe.”⁵¹ It is the conception of the contrast between the Anglophone ear and the German that is important here. Such arguments were not lost on Britain’s most important musical minds. Vaughan Williams’s own thoughts on the “Composer in Wartime,” published in *The Listener* in 1940, provide us with a useful preamble to his wartime work, which began with *49th Parallel*. At first, he is doubtful as to the propaganda possibilities of music: “I have up to now taken it for granted that music is not ‘useful’,” explaining that while poets can be used for propaganda, music “can be put to no practical use.” Should music be reserved and kept “out of the struggle?” he asks. But, on the other hand, can the composer, while being true to himself, serve his fellow man by using his skill and knowledge and sense of beauty? He also takes a lesson from the “enemy”; German composers writing music for ordinary people to be played at home: music that in Britain would supplement the “BBC ration of one symphony a week.” In his article, Vaughan Williams argued the case for how even in Britain, the composer could contribute to the war effort:

Poets can be used for propaganda, painters for camouflage, architects for machine-gun posts, but music is purely of the spirit and seems to have no place in the world of alarms and excursions. Would it not indeed be better for music to keep out of the struggle and reserve for us a place where sanity can again find a home when she returns to her own?

Are there not ways in which the composer without derogating from his art, without being untrue to himself, but still without that entire disregard for his

⁵¹ Blanning, 2008: 98

fellows which characterises the artist in his supreme moments, use his skill, his knowledge, his sense of beauty in the service of his fellow men?⁵²

In response to Vaughan Williams' article, a correspondent to the *Musical Times*, points out that Elgar, Holst, Vaughan Williams himself, Ireland and Walton together "preserve the sense of reality, of first things first, which from the earliest folk-song has continually illuminated the English tradition."⁵³ "Of all the images of the composer in wartime," writes Robert Mackay in his essay "Safe and Sound: New Music in Wartime Britain", "none is better known or more compelling than that of the half-starved Dmitri Shostakovich sitting in his unheated room in Leningrad writing his Seventh Symphony, while the Germans pounded the besieged city. An image of Ralph Vaughan Williams, at that very time completing his fifth symphony in the relative peace and comfort of his Dorking home, somehow does not have the same heroic drama. And yet there is an underlying similarity in the situation of the two men. Neither could ignore the war; this was total war, after all. Nor did they want to ignore it: as creative artists both willingly placed their art at the service of the nation at war."⁵⁴ In *National Music*, Vaughan Williams had written that "The art of music above all the other arts is the expression of the soul of the nation,"⁵⁵ and for "most composers" during the War "those who chose to remain composers, it meant accepting commissions from official or quasi-official sources to write music that would help sustain the war effort."⁵⁶ For Vaughan Williams, this meant many things besides his first major effort – the sophisticated music for *49th Parallel*. He was chairman of the Home Office committee to oversee the release of refugees, and despite his acceptance of an honour from a German university in 1937 (easing his conscience by criticizing German politics), this work is often cited as a reason for his music being banned by the Nazi authorities. He was also involved in the broader national musical life of the country and instrumental in the BBC's Third Programme, the Arts Council and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. When the BBC tried to ban music written by conscientious objectors, or "conchies" such as Michael Tippett, Vaughan Williams defended their right to their opinions, even if he did not agree with them. Indeed, he informed the BBC that if it banned Tippett's music, then he would not allow his to be played either. In a strong case for the continuance of music "in the roughest of storm as well as in the greatest of calm," the argument that music offers a "stimulus and relevance" in its own sphere, even in war-time, Vaughan Williams' position is supported by several examples;

⁵² Vaughan Williams, 1940

⁵³ Dickinson, December 1940: 481

⁵⁴ Hayes & Hill (eds.), 1999: 179

⁵⁵ Vaughan Williams, 1996: 68

⁵⁶ Hayes & Hill (eds.), 1999: 179

Handel could match the revived Isaiah spirit which preached hope in the wilderness because he was not only a very experienced dramatic composer, but was himself a lonely soul, flinging serious music at an 'audience' who had come for an afternoon's sport.⁵⁷

Bach, Brahms, Schubert, Mozart (besides the sea-shanties of England, Byrd masses and even "Calling All Workers") all too had their place, but there is one composer in particular who is singled out:

When the music rises above the facile brilliance of a hackneyed performance, it testifies to Beethoven's exceptional awareness (in reactionary Vienna) of a new spirit at work in Europe, a spirit which none can ignore today and no treachery in high places can utterly crush.⁵⁸

The function of culture, or one of the functions, is "to accumulate the treasures of many nations and races and to distribute them without prejudice to those who will have them," and thus the people of Britain may "renew their spirit" not only in the music of home-grown composers but also in Beethoven, and even Wagner, in whose "fugitive-but-unbowed" Dutchman and his "ardent rescuer" they may remind themselves that even "in the present struggle there are bridges no high-explosive or hostile bluster can uproot."⁵⁹ That music offers stimulus is to counter the argument that somehow music is an escape; that it is superfluous, and that musicians could be better employed on "useful" work, their contributions no more than "mental luxury."

It will be clear by now that politics and musical life in Britain were as intertwined as in Germany and the USSR. By 1943, this was undisputed. The effects of music cultural propaganda in Malta are a case in point, as *The Times* reports:

Partnership in war is teaching us a good deal about the peaceful arts of our friends and conversely we are taking some pains, mainly through the agency of the British Council and the BBC, to make our arts known to them. We

⁵⁷ Dickinson, December 1940: 480

⁵⁸ Ibid. This spirit is the one claimed for the free peoples, according to the same rights in which Beethoven himself believed. Had he been a witness to the events of the 1930s he, too, would have sided with the democratic nations.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.481

cannot reproach ourselves for lack of an international outlook upon the art of music any time during the last 300 years.⁶⁰

Exchanges of music with the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia are also noted for their contribution to an improvement in relations with Britain, but it is the story of English music in Malta that illustrates the significance of “musical interchanges” between countries, where “There was a time no more than five years ago when no music but that of Italy was considered to be worth attention.” The “finer nuances” of English works performed during 1942-43, including the *Enigma Variations*, Vaughan Williams’ *A London Symphony* and Walton’s *Sinfonia Concertante*, “were sometimes lost in the alien sounds of dive-bombers,” but concerts arranged by the British Institute in Valetta nevertheless went ahead despite the danger of air raids, with “a growing love on the part of the people and garrison of the island for music in general and for English music in particular,” which had ranged from Purcell to Benjamin Britten.⁶¹ Earlier in 1943, Sir Arnold Bax’s score of his music to the film *Malta GC* was presented to the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Malta, Lord Gort, after a screening of the film at the Ministry of Information. Here was a symbolic gesture which was accepted by Lord Gort “on behalf of the brave people of the island.” Malta, of course, was awarded the George Cross for its loyalty and bravery: “Not in the darkest hours, when the British Empire stood alone and they had to endure the worst of the air raids, did the Maltese people or their trusted leader, Sir William Dobbie, ever doubt that Britain would triumph once again. George Cross Malta was fighting on with pride and confidence,” said Lord Gort at the ceremony.⁶²

As the War progressed, music became increasingly important. But to return to the very beginning of hostilities, the BBC’s decision to revise the published line-up excluded “one of the few programmes scheduled for 3 September [1939] to go out as planned,”⁶³ J.B. Priestley’s reading from his not-yet-published volume “Let the People Sing.” The programme was long-planned as a curtain-raiser to the 1939 autumn broadcast season. By 1940 Priestley had caught the mood of Britain in his series of broadcasts, *Postscripts*, and in the same year went on an all-out effort to save one of London’s major cultural institutions. And it is the subject of music and its deployment for the purposes of morale-boosting at home to which we turn next.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 9 July 1943

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *The Times*, 20 February 1943

⁶³ Nicholas, 1995: 254

Chapter Two

Morale on the Home Front: Live Classical Performance

*The business of the concert-room is to bring, and keep, forward the best from wherever it comes, no matter its origin, country or date*¹

The business of music-making was one of the first casualties of War. A letter to the editor of *The Times* written in late October 1939 by Thomas Beecham in his capacity as President of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, Past-President Robert J. Forbes and President-Elect Hugh P. Allen, bemoaned the “ruthless disorganization inflicted by our new bureaucracy” on the educational world and equated it with the change in “normal” broadcasting, particularly as far as music was concerned: “Since the end of the last War Great Britain has created for itself an outstanding position among the musical nations of the world,” which was now in danger of “serious setback or defeat,” they wrote. Furthermore, it was “common knowledge” that “no section of the community has been harder hit than the professional musician,” with the country needing to “stand fast in this time of stress” to ensure that “when peace is restored to us, the great estate of our musical life and culture will have been found to remain intact.” Given the fate of the London Philharmonic, this, as we shall see, seems rather ironic, but the sentiments expressed in the letter are at least well meant. Closing with an exhortation to uphold what was “really important,” it ends:

Not least of the pretensions of a free and democratic people should be its capacity to maintain its best institutions during the testing time of war, so that whatever may be the nature of the ordeal the higher and more enduring possessions of mind and spirit are neither endangered nor destroyed.²

In reply A.P. Herbert M.P. wrote to support Beecham’s argument and to report on the Prime Minister’s response to a written question, viz. whether he would consider the institution of a Department of Arts in order to ensure that “the arts do not suffer unduly through the war.” The Prime Minister replied that the Board of Education would continue to encourage art education “despite the difficulties inevitably created by the war,” and the recent establishment of the Central Institute of Art and Design did not necessitate the creation of a new department. Herbert was not satisfied, however, feeling that neither would create the

¹ *The Times*, 2 January 1942

² *The Times*, 26 October 1939

necessary “bridge-head” in Whitehall.³ On the same letters page of *The Times*’ 28 October edition, there was an advertisement for the Musicians’ Benevolent Fund, which further emphasised the plight of the professional musician. It read:

War aggravates an already distressing problem. Thousands of musicians who have given the best part of their lives to entertaining the public are now in dire distress. Help us to alleviate their plight.

A leader, on the same page, gave a response, too, to Beecham’s letter. Pointing out the difference between importance and urgency, it agreed with the sentiment to “stand fast,” but argued that a show of “adaptability and ingenuity in meeting a new and intensely difficult situation” would aid the artists “to help themselves.” It is this spirit of self-help that becomes an important cue, and that provides the focus for the story of the survival of one of London’s major orchestras, a story retold in *Battle for Music*, an unusual film made in 1943 which provides this study with its title.⁴ Taking up the subject in its November issue, *The Musical Times* explored the broader question of whether the BBC’s playing of gramophone records was an adequate substitution for the broadcasting of live music performance, quoting a letter written to the journal by Leslie Boosey: “Gramophone records, however good, are not enough. We want live orchestras and bands, both of which give employment to many who are themselves composers. And *we want new works*,⁵ which we shall never get if we shut down on rational entertainment ‘for the duration,’” with the “first consideration” naturally going to the performer.⁶

Myra Hess

From the very beginning of hostilities, the spiritual importance of music and thus the necessity to support its continuing performance was acknowledged in many different ways. For example, the Dean of St. Paul’s (W.R. Matthews) wrote to *The Times* within weeks of the outbreak of war to publicise short lunchtime organ recitals three times a week for the benefit of City workers, and not merely for their entertainment: “In these days many feel the healing power of music,”⁷ he wrote. By far the most successful and, consequently, famous of these morale-boosting concerts were, of course, the lunchtime recitals at the National Gallery organized by Myra Hess which were to continue throughout the entire duration of the war.

³ *The Times*, 28 October 1939

⁴ A detailed analysis of the film appears later in this chapter

⁵ Emphasis in the original

⁶ Anderson, November 1939: 773

⁷ *The Times*, 18 September 1939

From the first concert on 10 October 1939 a National Gallery concert was held five days a week until April 1946. Although *The Times*' review of music in 1939 acknowledged that the outbreak of war had caused "the cancellation of important autumn festivals and completely disorganized the musical machine in London," Myra Hess's National Gallery concerts had been "most successful."⁸ By November 1939 – just a month after their inception – the concerts had "already proved the most successful musical venture of the war period" as the *Musical Times* acknowledged. By the end of 1940 no fewer than 170,000 people had benefited and such was the extraordinary prominence of the concerts that Myra Hess, recognised for her outstanding contribution to the war effort, was made a Dame in 1941. Originally for the benefit of the Musician's Benevolent Fund they quickly became an institution, after beginning as "what seemed like at first but a daring experiment."⁹ Sometimes during the worst air-raids they were moved to a room underneath the National Gallery. As an official biography of Myra Hess tells us, "all the time Myra Hess continued to be the main inspiration of the enterprise, making many personal appearances. It has been truly said that she did not for one moment allow the very highest standards to be relaxed either in her own playing, or in the choice of the artists who appeared in the platform."¹⁰ The same 1946 biography gives some indication of Myra Hess's maturation:

Dame Myra Hess had a deep sense of her responsibility to the public. She believes it to be the paramount task of an artist to maintain and present those 'permanent values without which' as she has said 'a country must suffer spiritual disintegration and decay. This is a vital function at any time,' she declared and war increased rather than diminished its importance.' It is with whole-hearted devotion that she served her country during the war by her tireless work in 'maintaining through beauty our faith in the greatness of the human spirit.'

Music knows no frontiers, and she is convinced of its value in helping to create links of friendship between peoples of different nations. The difficulties she has had to face and conquer in her life have given her a deep understanding of the problems of human beings; and her mission is not only to interpret the work of great composers to those who can appreciate it, but also to make contact with beauty by learning to love the finest in music.¹¹

⁸ *The Times*, 1 January 1940

⁹ Anderson (ed.), November 1939: 775

¹⁰ TNA INF 6/29

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Small wonder that the British Council's Music Committee favoured her (a discussion of the Committee's work with Myra Hess is contained in Chapters Three and Four), and that she was the doyenne of the British music scene during the war, her performances immortalised in the Humphrey Jennings 1945 film that bore her name (as well as in countless other recordings).

German Music in Live Performance

What is remarkable about the National Gallery concerts is the extent to which they featured music of the German canon, even at the height of hostilities. For example, in October 1940, at the height of the blitz, when London had suffered consistent nightly bombing for a month, three Mozart concerts, four Beethoven concerts (the series including all the Beethoven quartets) and two Bach concerts took place.¹² Hess's inspiration may have been significant in other ways, too. Most musical activity ceased abruptly after the outbreak of war, largely due to the ban on large public gatherings and the closure of theatres and other entertainment venues. But by November, the *Musical Times* was able to report that the Capital was being "well provided with weekend music."¹³ The London Symphony Orchestra's concert on 7 October 1939, conducted by Charles Hambourg, included a performance of Beethoven's 4th Piano Concerto, with Myra Hess as soloist, and Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony. As a Sunday "pops" concert – the first in a series – the choice of music is noteworthy. Beethoven's name will appear many times during the course of this study, but it is also the presence of Tchaikovsky's at this, the LSO's first war-time concert, that deserves comment. For just as Beethoven was important to the Nazi musical establishment, Tchaikovsky's final symphony, too, was of particular significance as a tool of German cultural propaganda.

In his study of the work, Timothy L. Jackson writes that many prominent conductors active in the Third Reich, among them Herbert von Karajan, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Willem Mengelberg and Richard Strauss "were as deeply involved in Nazi cultural propaganda efforts as it was possible to be, and used – or 'misused' – Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* for political and ideological purposes."¹⁴ For example, under the baton of the conductors mentioned, Jackson writes that in the late Thirties and Forties recordings of the symphony's March (*Allegro Molto Vivace*) became "an emblem of resurgent Germany's spiritual-political 'rebirth' and apparently limitless capacity for conquest and expansion," with the final movement (*Adagio Lamentoso, Andante*) according "perfectly with the Nazi cult of the fallen hero."¹⁵ Coupling the March with

¹² Anderson (ed.), November 1940: 464

¹³ Anderson (ed.), November 1939: 775

¹⁴ Jackson, Timothy L., 1999: 100

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the *Alla Marcia* in Beethoven's Ninth ("Choral") Symphony, both, in the Nazi context, "become metaphors for world-dominating male virility, homosexual bonding, politically reactionary revolution, and chauvinistic militarism," with recordings of the Tchaikovsky in particular released "because of their tremendous propagandistic significance for the Reich's larger political-cultural ambitions."¹⁶ Jackson identifies these ambitions as "the rise of Nazi Germany from the ashes of Weimar, and the re-emergence of Teutonic/Nordic ancient Greek heroism and 'true' European – i.e. Russian-German – musical culture from the political and social chaos and artistic 'degeneracy' of Weimar."¹⁷ In readings of the March, furthermore, the listener "confronts the musical realization of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and the struggle to victory."¹⁸

But where does that leave the LSO's first war-time performance of the work? *The Times'* review of the concert, which began with the overture to *Die Meistersinger* no less (said to be Hitler's favourite music), and which included Brahms' Haydn variations, observed that although popular, not even the Tchaikovsky had recently been "so overplayed as to sound hackneyed," and the performance made the audience at least "feel the lyrical urge that is behind this symphony."¹⁹ In his history of the LSO, Richard Morrison writes that the concert was a "statement of intent in more ways than one:"

Unlike 1914, there was no perceptible objection to hearing "the enemy's music." It was as if the musical community had taken a tacit decision that the devil should not be allowed to claim the best tunes as his private property.²⁰

Morrison remarks that the sound of Beethoven in particular "was to become a remarkable anti-Nazi rallying cry as the war progressed" and that Myra Hess, too "came to represent the flaming torch of civilization: inextinguishable and inspirational."²¹ It is impossible to gauge whether British conductors shared the associations the conductors of the Third Reich held with the *Pathétique*, and it seems inconceivable to imagine that the performance was in any way designed to express the determination of a domestic cultural propaganda machine to inspire a "spiritual-political" rebirth, or to emphasise any similar dimension that might apply in Britain. Such an idea was, surely, not the preoccupation of "civilized people" and, in the words of the British official stationed at the British Embassy in Stockholm was, surely, mere "Teutonic

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.103

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.104

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.105. Leni Riefenstahl's 1934 film can be seen as a kind of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* which presents Hitler as a *Lohengrin*-like figure who emerges from the ether at the time of Germany's greatest need.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 9 October 1939

²⁰ Morrison, 2004: 89

²¹ *Ibid.*

frightfulness.” In London, suffice it to say, the main preoccupation was simply to ensure that any kind of music continued to be performed, and the “battle for music,” whilst also being raged on the abstract level, was also a matter of ordinary survival for London’s musicians, whose livelihoods were in question in the face of the threat of bombing raids. The 1939 Prom season at the Queen’s Hall had been abruptly curtailed following the outbreak of war; the last concert to have been performed was cut in half, with the BBC withdrawing its orchestra from London. Ironically, it was to have been an all-Beethoven programme. Further ironies were to come. The concert for Monday 4 September 1939, the day after War was declared, was to have consisted largely of the performance of excerpts from *Die Meistersinger*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tristan & Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* and *Die Walküre*, with Eugene Goossens’ *Three Pictures*, Op.55, receiving its British premiere and “Mercury,” “Saturn” and “Jupiter” from Holst’s *The Planets* making up the rest of the programme. The BBC’s support for the Proms was suspended henceforth, but the concerts continued nevertheless in the Queen’s Hall until it was destroyed in May 1941. Moving to the Royal Albert Hall, the BBC backed them again from 1942.

The music of German composers, Mendelssohn included, continued to dominate the London concert room. A review of the closing London orchestral season in *The Times* of 23 March 1940 lamented the inability of any 20th Century music – apart from that of Sibelius – to attract audiences, with the music of native composers, old and new, generating no interest at all.²² The British Council had recently released a survey of British music performed since the outbreak of war, both at home and abroad. Eleven European countries are mentioned, as well as Peru, Japan, Palestine and South Africa, “the only Dominion of the Empire named, which means that the list makes no claim to completeness, since British orchestral music had a constant currency throughout the Empire where there are orchestras capable of performing modern music at all.” As well as Delius and Elgar, performances of music by British composers “alive today” included, “among the younger composers,” the music of Benjamin Britten, his work music “the most widely diffused.” John Ireland, Constant Lambert, Arthur Bliss, Ralph Vaughan Williams and William Walton are also mentioned, the latter’s Violin Concerto still yet to receive its first performance in the Capital. In preparation for the next London season *The Times* hoped that “programme arrangers who presumably are making their plans now will take into account the British Council’s evidence of what goes well with audiences abroad,” which included several of Gordon Jacobs’ orchestral arrangements of Williams Byrd’s Virginal Pieces conducted by John Barbirolli in the U.S., where contemporary British music received the greatest number of hearings.

²² *The Times*, 23 March 1940

The London Philharmonic and *Battle for Music*

Given Sir Thomas Beecham's impassioned letter to *The Times* only a few weeks before, it is also ironic that his departure for the United States left an important orchestra adrift. Established in 1932, the London Philharmonic Orchestra was created by Beecham to rival the LSO, which throughout the Thirties struggled to survive itself during extremely tough economic conditions, "until it was bankrupted and then abandoned by the whimsical Sir Thomas."²³ The "first-class" LPO rivalled the BBC Orchestra for quality, the latter enjoying the advantage of being heavily-subsidised, but Beecham had also led an extremely successful London Philharmonic Orchestra throughout the Thirties. Not uncontroversially, this included a number of high-profile engagements abroad, among them a tour to Berlin in 1936 to play for Hitler at a concert from which Von Ribbentrop requested dropping Mendelssohn because of the composer's Jewish heritage and to which the orchestra "spinelessly agreed."²⁴ Wilhelm Furtwängler's former private secretary Berta Geissmar recalled that Beecham's first suggestion for programmes included Mendelssohn's *Scottish* Symphony. "No sooner had Ribbentrop received the draft than his ADC arrived at my office, somewhat embarrassed," she wrote:

'The programmes are excellent,' he said, 'but do you think you could tactfully suggest to Sir Thomas that it might be advisable to leave out the Mendelssohn?' I informed Sir Thomas – not, I am afraid, tactfully, but frankly (as was always my way with him) that this work seemed hardly to be desired on the German programmes. 'Why not,' flashed Sir Thomas – although perfectly aware of the implication – 'it was a favourite piece of Queen Victoria's!' However, having accepted the invitation to go to Nazi Germany, he decided not to make the point a *casus belli*, and so the symphony was dropped.²⁵

But now that Beecham had left for the United States, the London Philharmonic, like many other orchestras, found itself without an effective leader and bankrupt. What were the players to do? With the BBC Orchestra no longer performing, the LPO and LSO together with the Boyd Noel Orchestra were the only remaining performers in London. By July 1940, the domestic music scene had reached crisis point. Despite the continuation of the National Gallery concerts, the future of the LPO was in doubt. J.B. Priestley, whose contribution to radio in the

²³ Morrison, 2004: 81

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Taken from Berta Geissmar's *The Baton and the Jackboot* (1944) and quoted in "Music and Politics in the Third Reich," (Aber, 1944: 180). Geissmar fled Germany in 1935, becoming Sir Thomas Beecham's secretary after a short spell in the United States.

Britain Speaks series of talks were being broadcast three times a week on shortwave, with his “Postscripts” currently being broadcast after the news on Sunday evenings, can be credited with averting another crisis for the LPO which managed through his efforts as well as those of Jack Hylton and others to gain a stay of execution.²⁶

In an article discussing the London Philharmonic’s predicament, *The Times* asked “What about the needs of that increasingly large public to whom a Bach concerto or a Tchaikovsky Symphony is a most inspiring experience?”²⁷ It was all very well for ENSA (the Entertainment National Services Association, run by Basil Dean), to organize concerts for munitions workers, but must “the great orchestras of the country” be left to appeal to charity for their existence?²⁸ “Other countries, including enemy countries, have found a satisfactory answer to that question. It cannot be beyond our capacity to find our own,” claimed *The Times*. A campaign to rescue the orchestra began with a concert at the Queen’s Hall in July at which Sir Adrian Boult, Basil Cameron, and Malcolm Sargent conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra in turn, with Eileen Joyce at the keyboard for a performance of Grieg’s Piano Concerto. At the concert, J.B. Priestley addressed the audience, telling them what the orchestra meant to him and that rather than a mere concert, this occasion constituted what he called a Musical Manifesto. “That was the right name for it,” said *The Times’* report of the event, “because it was to make manifest what the orchestra is that all these artists gave their services.”²⁹ In his speech J.B. Priestley pointed out that the LPO was London’s only permanent orchestra. Giving weight to this claim, *The Times* asked whether “the older and excellent” LSO could also be called a permanent orchestra, having proved itself a permanent organization through many changes over the forty years of its existence. The difference between the two was that the London Philharmonic was a “single team of picked players trained to work together and pledged to do so,” without reverting to the Deputy System, whereby orchestra players could find a last-minute substitute were they to be called to play elsewhere. Now that the War had come, however, and with Beecham departed and Covent Garden closing its doors, everyone knew “the extent to which the other concert-giving societies were able to carry out their plans last winter,” and the LPO faced the prospect of disbanding. Priestley’s manifesto claimed that as the LPO was one of the few permanent musical institutions, it was worth “the only sort of protection which is appropriate to music,” and he hoped that a “higher authority” would “take notice of the fact.” While the permanent problem of the orchestra’s long-term existence could be solved by “a far-reaching collaboration of interests,” he said, its temporary

²⁶ A discussion of Priestley’s 1940s broadcast work follows in chapter 5.

²⁷ *The Times*, 27 July 1940

²⁸ ENSA was lampooned as “every night something awful” (Morrison, 2004: 91)

²⁹ *The Times*, 20 July 1940

problem “could be settled quite easily and at once by the guarantee of concerts” to be given between August and October.” Richard Tauber, no less, was to conduct the LPO at The Queens Hall on the following Friday, 2 August to further publicise the appeal and a Scottish donor sent a cheque for £1000 to J.B. Priestley on account of his appeal “as a little help towards building the new world about which you spoke.”³⁰

By the end of August *The Times* was assuring readers that the exclusion of Wagner in the closing opera season at Sadler’s Wells was due “to no futile war-time prejudice,” but rather that the length of his music dramas prevented their being performed between the hours of 7 and 10pm. Furthermore, the operas, especially the “later and greater” works, were written for people with ample leisure to enjoy them,” (who could spare the four consecutive evenings required for *The Ring* with all the war work to do?) and the expense of a large orchestra and the difficulty in casting prevented any performance of Wagner, except for “Monday night selections at the Queen’s Hall, whether we want [Wagner’s] music dramas or not.”³¹ Though “devotees of Covent Garden” had in recent times got into the habit “of thinking of Wagner as the alpha and omega of opera,” the operas of Verdi, Puccini, Rimsky-Korsakov and even British composers such as Ethel Smyth and Vaughan Williams proved that it was also possible to get “a well-diversified repertory without drawing on Wagner.” In the same article, *The Times* presents a review of Robert Rayners new guide to *Die Meistersinger*, which it calls “that wholly delightful work.” No mention of the Nazi taste for this opera appears in the review – testament, surely, to a fastidious editorial approach to music.

Nowhere is the continuing presence of Wagner’s music in the London concert room more noticeable than in the Promenade concerts. Between 1939 and 1945, 255 performances of Wagner’s works were scheduled for performance (though many concerts were cancelled, of course, because of the danger posed to concert-goers during bombing raids). The inclusion of Wagner’s works in concerts staged even in the early part of the war, however, must be seen in the light of the prominence given the composer’s works in the London concert room and throughout the history of the Proms. In the fifty years between their inception in 1895 and 1945 no less than 5310 performances of Wagner’s works took place at the Proms.³² This is a remarkable statistic given that the number is three times greater than performances of music by the next most frequently-performed composer: Beethoven. In fact, for the full fifty years, Wagner’s music (mainly the overtures, it must be said) were among nine out of ten of the most-performed works. The only other works displacing them were Beethoven’s Fourth Piano

³⁰ *The Times*, 30 July 1940

³¹ *The Times*, 31 August 1940

³² A database of Proms performances was released by the BBC in July 2010 giving details of every work performed since 1895

Concerto and his Fifth Symphony, and this only after the War had begun. Analysis of these Prom performances also reveals that of the latter work in particular, at least one performance took place every year (sometimes even three – for example in 1941 and 1942 when the “V” campaign was at its height) until 1977. Of course, the number and popularity of Wagner’s overtures may account for the overwhelmingly high proportion of performance of his music at the Proms. In contrast, just 364 performances of Vaughan Williams’ works were featured at the proms in the same period, with only ten performances of *A London Symphony* taking place. This helps to further contextualise the performance of Wagner’s music in Britain during the War. Even at the start of the 1940 season, the first half of the second concert featured Wagner’s music exclusively, a further quirk of fate given that most of the season was to be cancelled because of the danger to audiences with intensified nightly air-raids on London when the Blitz, the Nazis’ first attack on non-military targets, began on “black Saturday,” September 7th 1940 with a bombing raid of 1000 planes of the Luftwaffe.³³ In a week “which of necessity there has been very little practical music making in London,” *The Times* instead reviewed the publication of several new scores, among them Vaughan Williams’ *Concerto Academica* and Constant Lambert’s *The Rio Grande*, with particular notice taken of Benjamin Britten’s song cycle “*Les Illuminations*.”³⁴

It is against this backdrop that *Battle for Music* (dir. Donald Taylor, 1943) must be seen. Though not ostensibly a propaganda film, it tacitly presents a number of messages both of the morale-boosting kind and of the broader claims of civilization. The single opening title (over which we hear the first eight notes of Beethoven’s Fifth) cuts to a shot of a live performance of *Tristan and Isolde* (the *Liebestod*). Extensive credits begin with the context of the film: “the story of the London Philharmonic as told and played by members of the orchestra,” and it is this factor that gives the film its highly original tone. Most of the cast – including Sir Adrian Boult, J.B. Priestley, pianists Eileen Joyce and Moiseiwitsch, and members of the LPO Committee – played themselves, with Hay Petrie leading the actors. The credits continue, “Covent Garden, Opera House, London 1939: the last night of a brilliant opera season. The curtain is falling on a world threatened by Nazi aggression. But the audience forgets the tragedy of Europe in the magic of great music.”

In the first sequence – a re-enactment – members of the orchestra lament the demise of “the finest orchestra in the country,” now in liquidation but which could be saved if it stuck together and gave the people the chance to hear it. A statement prepared by committee member Charles Gregory is abandoned in favour of an impassioned ad hoc plea: “What I think

³³ Ironically, the final concert in 1940 featured a performance of Beethoven’s Fifth

³⁴ *The Times*, 14 September 1940

we all ought to remember is that this orchestra is one of the country's finest assets. And if it breaks up and disperses now, then to my mind orchestral music is finished in the country. And it just can't happen like this." In a thinly-veiled attack on Sir Thomas Beecham and financiers Courtaulds Ltd., a second speaker remarks that half the trouble had been unreliable "rich enthusiasts," whose love of music is "like their love of caviar: it looks good and it looks good to be seen eating it." Much of this dialogue echoes *The Times* original review of the concert, and in answer to *The Times*' exhortation to "help themselves" the speech ends with a statement of intent:

After all, we are the orchestra and must stand on our own feet; but we have to find new audiences. And I believe they are the people of this country. They can't come to us, so we must go to them.

The first task was to find those audiences, as "giving concerts in London is hopeless: everyone's left." A short tour to Cardiff, Swansea, Cheltenham and Southampton where concerts might be arranged at cinema venues at "popular prices" takes place. In a packed house in Cardiff Constant Lambert conducts the LPO beginning with what becomes a sort of abridged version of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture. Popular works were included in order to ensure the success of the first tour. Several minutes of music with shots of the cinema, orchestra – in close-up as well as long-shot – and conductor follow. Although successful in its first tour, the orchestra still struggles financially. A series of "patriotic concerts" is suggested, including one sponsored by the French government and a rehearsal of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* follows. During a break, the imminent fall of France is the subject of conversation between some of the players:

'It looks pretty bad in France now; do hope they hold out.'

'Well, it's just about the end if they don't.'

'We won't be able to hear ourselves play for the noise of bombs pretty soon. We were fools to try and carry on in wartime.'

'That's plain defeatism. Why, it's people who lose their faith in their work and what they're living and fighting for, will really lose the war for us.'

'I'm not losing my faith in anything. But there are more important things to do at the present time than play music. Beat Jerry first and *then* listen to music.'

‘Yes, but how many years does it take to create an orchestra like this? Five, ten, fifteen? It’s more than just a collection of individual musicians who may or may not be better employed in the Army. It’s something irreplaceable: it belongs to the nation.’

‘Yes, and you might just as well do without books or schools...’

This dialogue demonstrates another aspect of the subtle place of music in the national consciousness and its importance to morale. A similar case existed for ensuring that the BBC Orchestra remained intact. “A factory scrapped may take months to get going again; an orchestra of quality would task years,” writes a British Council member (probably Arthur Bliss) in a BBC file note written in early 1942. “One of Germany’s strongest propagandist points is that the democracies are barbarians who care nothing for art. The cultural propaganda put over in the way of music, opera and drama is incessant and prodigious,” he writes. “The first result of disbanding the BBC Orchestra will be a loud crow from Goebbels. Such a thing could not be kept a secret, and it would be used against us.”³⁵ A radio broadcast of what is obviously one of Lord Haw-Haw’s propaganda pieces follows as the players sit and listen. And here again is the contrasting viewpoint found in the German attitude towards its musical heritage, as well as the contempt it has for Britain’s approach to culture:

A further illustration of how the British are fighting, so they say, for world culture, is that the London Philharmonic Orchestra is now bankrupt and disbanded. Having had to rely on financiers and rich supporters who have fled to the security of their private air-raid shelters in the country, this national orchestra no longer exists. What a different state of affairs in Germany, where the arts and culture are supported by the nation. It would seem inconceivable that a sick man in England has to rely on charitably supported hospitals which are forced publicly to beg for funds to cure him. But if that is true then, of course, why bother with music or any of the finer things of life?

³⁵ Undated File note, probably January 1942: “The Consequences of Disbanding the BBC Orchestra.” BBC WAC R27/245/1. The second result to be expected was the lessening of morale. The orchestra’s disbanding would “beget an increased listlessness,” with “half the appeal to the average listener” that musicians were taking the trouble to play and that it was not just a “machine at work.” Another point made was that the BBC music department was widely seen as one of the few organisations seen not to be government run. “Cut it out, and the BBC will lose a large territory ion the realm of the spirit.”

The broadcast ends with an invitation to British listeners wanting to hear some “real music” to tune in to hear the Vienna Philharmonic, “that masterpiece of orchestral perfection maintained by the Third Reich.” Haw-Haw’s words may well be prescient: the French concerts are cancelled, and one more chance – a tour to Brighton – comes to nothing. And then, just as the committee is about to give up, J.B. Priestley enters, making a number of suggestions including publishing an article in the *New Statesman* and booking the Queen’s Hall: not for a concert as such, but for a “Musical Manifesto.”³⁶ A cut to Eileen Joyce at the piano (playing the Grieg concerto, and thus true to the original concert) follows, in an extended sequence that features the entire finale, to rapturous applause. The piano lid is closed and Sir Adrian Boult introduces J.B. Priestley to the stage, who begins his “manifesto”:

Ladies and Gentlemen. The London Philharmonic Orchestra, one of the great orchestras of the world, is now in grave danger of being disbanded. It’s London’s only real permanent orchestra. That is, the only single team of picked players who have been trained to work together and are pledged to work together.³⁷ It’s also the only symphonic orchestra that I know that is entirely self-governing, a democratic institution. It’s an essential part of our national culture, what we’re fighting to preserve.

A cut to the audience provides visual support for the collective nature of the endeavour. The Government’s efforts or, rather, the lack of them, come in for criticism next, to the amusement of the audience, but Priestley ends his speech with an impassioned plea:

There’s much too much talk already about somebody doing something about something. This is one job that we must do ourselves. You and I must save this orchestra and we must start doing it tonight. That’s why you’ll find those slips in your programmes. They’re for you to fill up. There’ll be dark days and dangerous nights ahead of us. Soon, we may be fighting for our lives; and that’s all the more reason why we should have all the courage and inspiration, the noble refreshment of the spirit that music can give us and, in short, why we must save the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

In another extended sequence, Priestley reintroduces Sir Adrian Boult back onto the stage to conduct a performance of Elgar’s *Cockaigne* overture. The campaign gives the orchestra a

³⁶ Priestley’s left-wing position is revealed by this suggestion. Considered too controversial for the BBC, they were to factor in the curtailing of his 1940 *Postscript* broadcasts, which I discuss in chapter 5.

³⁷ The practice in most orchestras was that players could move to another orchestra at short notice, as long as a substitute was provided. This often resulted in mediocre performances and discontinuity among the ranks of players.

fresh chance and together with dance-band leader Jack Hylton's sponsorship, it can now "play to the people" in music halls up and down the country. Moiseiwitsch, in the first, plays the second Rachmaninov Piano Concerto under Constant Lambert and the concert tours the entire country. With the coup of having Moiseiwitsch perform, the Concerto – or rather extended passages from it – becomes one of the film's emotional climaxes.³⁸ Another speech, addressed to schoolchildren in Birmingham, conductor Malcolm Sargent extols the significance of music:

Boys and girls, it is interesting to realise that here is England in the midst of a war and yet in this hall are some two thousand of you children listening happily to an orchestral concert. You know, too many people have said that England is not a musical nation. Now, this war has proved, as I've always maintained, that we English do love music. Why, here are we, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and I, touring up and down the country from town to town giving concerts almost every night, and hundreds, thousands of war workers and members of the forces have found in music the best recreation for their tired minds and bodies. Well you've just been listening to the great music of Beethoven: the overture to *Leonore* – probably the most complete expression in music of heroism.

Sargent then goes on to introduce *La Calinda* by Frederick Delius, "one of our fellow countrymen."³⁹ But the film's climax begins in Newcastle. An air-raid siren is sounding as two men look at the billboard advertising the LPO concert, Beethoven's Fifth begins, in one final extended musical sequence in which a full five minutes or more of the first movement is heard. However, the performance is interrupted by an air-raid, and a building nearby is on fire. Sargent speaks again to inform the audience:

You know it's just struck me that Hitler may blow this hall sky high: you, me, everybody. But there's one thing here he cannot touch. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. This music will live long after Hitler and the Nazi regime is

³⁸ This emotional sequence combines the music performances with a speeding train, in a montage that is oddly prescient of the film that was to immortalise the Concerto just two years later: *Brief Encounter* (1945).

³⁹ A letter to the BBC dated 25 March 1941 from publishers Boosey & Hawkes (BBC WAC R27/3/1) talks of the pointlessness of banning certain composers whose names were a the list of banned composers, as they were of no interest to the Nazis (see Chapter 5). This included Delius' name, possibly as his parents were German from Bielefeld. Robert Mackay has noted that when the BBC's Listener Music Panel was asked which composers they wanted more of, "Wagner was cited most, and of composers they wanted to hear less, that supposedly quintessentially 'English' composer Delius headed the list" (Mackay, 2000 [1]: 520). Thus Sargent's comment can be seen to be ensuring Delius' place in the canon of British composition.

completely forgotten. So I think there is nothing better we can do than to continue to play it; nothing better you can do to remain and hear it...⁴⁰

And here is a useful cue to the final movement of the Symphony in a triumphant end to the film. At the very end, an end-title sequence scrolls up the screen as the final bars of the Symphony are played:

An orchestra is like a country. It has its triumphs, its disasters and despairs. Only with unity and faith can it become great.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra has these qualities. These musicians played on during our darkest days and blazed the trail for our other fine orchestras.

They showed how musicians themselves can organise their own lives and their own art. This spirit, which inspired this orchestra to struggle against adversity to adapt their lives courageously to changing conditions, cannot be defeated.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra has become a treasured possession of the British people.

These final credits equate the LPO's conduct with an ideal model for the nation itself. There is much speechifying in this film; but each address spells out for us the essence of the message of music that the director wishes to be relayed: the use and revered place of German music, the universality of German culture, how the music expresses heroism, defiance against Hitler, music as an expression of freedom and civilized values, the importance of democratic ideals, and the absolute assurance that the values thus represented are unassailable and will result in the eventual defeat of the enemy and victory over tyranny.⁴¹

⁴⁰ With regard to air raid warnings, it was common policy to inform the audience, and invite them to leave for air-raid shelters, with the concert to continue thereafter. "It is a pity that this arrangement involves a definite and immediate interruption of the programme," wrote the manager of the Royal Albert Hall to the BBC in June 1942 at the beginning of the BBC's renewed involvement in the Proms. "We shall have to devise some signal to warn the conductor" (BBC WAC R27/245/1).

⁴¹ A German film made in the following year, *Philharmoniker* (1944), directed by Paul Verhoeven, and something of a parallel to *Battle for Music*, uses footage of the Berlin Philharmonic on tour in Spain and Portugal during 1944. Misha Aster has called the film "an artwork of artwork – a propaganda film made of propaganda," which captures "the unique and terrifying semiotics of the moment" (Aster, 2010: 214). It is essentially a love story and contains original music by Alois Melichar. The Berlin Philharmonic, under the direction of Eugen Jochum, Karl Böhm and Hans Knappertsbusch play excerpts from Beethoven and Bruckner symphonies, Liszt's *Les Preludes*, *Festliches Präludium* by Richard Strauss and the *Blue Danube* waltz by Johann Strauss. The film takes a light-weight rather than serious approach to the difference between symphonic music and jazz, the former presented as "great art" and the latter "primitive music

Members of the LPO were not the only musicians who found themselves in difficulty at the start of the war. The Wessex Philharmonic Orchestra, a regrouping of 26 dismissed players of the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra who, like their counterparts in the LPO, formed themselves into an orchestra under its own management,⁴² held its first festival of music at Bournemouth in March 1941. While it was preferred that at the time it was better to distribute symphonic music as widely as possible, remarked *The Times*, there was “ample justification” to “concentrate” it at the Bournemouth festival, where quality – the competence of the musicians engaged and the standard of performance – could be assured:

The war-time practice of providing as much music as possible was rarely submitted to public criticism and [was] generally offered to audiences too hungry for music of any sort to be sensitive of its quality.⁴³

Convened under Reginald Goodall, the Wessex Philharmonic had also provided a series of winter concerts in the seaside town. In addition to the performance of classic works, it had managed to present Rubbra’s latest symphony, his third, Op.49, “not yet heard in London,”⁴⁴ Constant Lambert’s *Horoscope*, and Lennox Berkeley’s *Serenade for Strings* under guest conductors which included Malcolm Sargent and Adrian Boult. It was also to stage an early performance of the Walton Violin Concerto later that year.⁴⁵

Music in London

Towns like Bournemouth benefited from the dearth of musical activity in London in the early years of the war, and *The Times* was not expecting “too much” of music in the Capital in 1942 either.⁴⁶ Its New-Year review summed up the experience of music in London since the outbreak of war:

for blacks.” Jazz is never actually heard in the film, only “afternoon tea music and dance music,” some of it of rather poor quality. The film features Berlin’s Philharmonie concert hall in the Bernburger Strasse, which did not survive the war. I am grateful to Maggie Dowdeswell for the translation of this synopsis which appears in the German *Geliebter Kintopp* review for 1942, 1943 and 1944 (Wendtland, 1989: 131).

⁴² Anderson, October 1940 [2]: 420

⁴³ *The Times*, 15 March 1941. *The Times* contains on the same day Vaughan Williams’ letter to the Director General of the BBC in which he withdrew the offer of a new choral song *Valiant for Truth*, in protest at the Corporation’s banning of the music of Alan Bush for his political beliefs.

⁴⁴ The Symphony No.3, completed in 1939, received its first performance by the Hallé Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent in December 1940. Its premiere was to have been on 23 September but the concert was cancelled because of the Blitz.

⁴⁵ This concerto, a would-be commission of the British Council, is discussed in the following chapter.

⁴⁶ The 18-month gap in the activities of the British Council’s Music Advisory Committee, discussed in chapter 4, can be said to prove the point of *The Times*’ columnist.

The first year of the war was occupied in combating the doctrine that nothing should be done because something might happen to stop it. The National Gallery concerts and the Sadler's Wells Opera Company (still in its own home) operated bravely in that fight. The second year proved that something must be done because everything was combining to stop it, from the dissipating of orchestras to the destruction of the Queen's Hall. Now in the third year London at least (the provinces, we are told, are more vigorous) has settled down to a minimum musical ration, orchestral concerts at the week-ends, and an hour of chamber music instead of luncheon on other days of the week...⁴⁷

The concentration of concerts on Saturday evenings could well be stretched out across the week, argued the reviewer. London may not need more concerts but they should be staged at different times of the week and with a wider variety of music and thus become again the centre of current tastes, and not only for the works of the greats such as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, but also for the music of Shostakovich, Walton, Bloch and Vaughan Williams.⁴⁸ Indeed, the article continues, "the business of the concert-room is to bring, and keep, forward the best from wherever it comes, no matter its origin, country or date."⁴⁹ *The Times*, not shy in calling for the highest standards – musically and culturally – to be maintained, was scrupulous to emphasise the highest production of music events even during the dark days of 1940 and 1941. But, contrary to *The Times*' expectations, by the second week of January, the musical calendar in London was in full swing. The presentation to Myra Hess by Vaughan Williams of the Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal was to take place at the Albert Hall on Saturday afternoon (17 January 1942), with Sir Adrian Boult conducting, she was to play Beethoven's 4th Piano Concerto, "the concerto with which perhaps more than any other she is specially associated." For the reviewer, the G Minor concerto, Beethoven's most intimate, was "the only

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 2 January 1942

⁴⁸ Interest in Bloch's music was stimulated by the release of several recordings of his works later in the year. The String Quartet, written during the First World War, "tells the composer's own story of spiritual crisis – his own and the world's" (*The Times*, 9 April 1942 [2]). The British premier of Shostakovich's 7th Symphony, "Leningrad", took place at the Albert Hall prom on Monday 29 June 1942, to an "immense audience" who listened "with profound attention." A new work by Vaughan Williams was also performed on the same day at a recital of choral music at St. Michael's, Cornhill: "A setting of the famous passage in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' in which Mr. Valiant-for-Truth makes his dispositions and goes to cross the flood. The work for voices unaccompanied begins in recitative manner, which soon develops into a rich polyphony culminating in vocal trumpet calls as decisive as those of William Byrd," whose *Sing Joyfully* was also on the programme (*The Times*, 30 June 1942). The St. Michael's Singers were conducted by Harold Darke. The work is, of course, *Valiant for Truth*, which was actually written in 1940.)

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 2 January 1942

perfect combination of piano and orchestra achieved since Mozart.” Brahms’ first and Mozart’s *Haffner* symphonies were also on the programme.⁵⁰

Later in the year, Vaughan Williams’ 70th birthday was marked by a National Gallery concert on Monday 12 October 1942 which included a performance of his Fantasy String Quintet and the Double Trio in D Minor. *The Times*’ leader on the day discussed two kinds of musical leadership – the first, which pioneers, and reaches out “to that which is beyond his own grasp,” and the other which “seeks to shape the tunes of the people.” Vaughan Williams’ had the ability to express both, “because at one moment the style may recall an English folk-song, at another the polyphony of Tallis or Byrd, or the rich freedom of Purcell’s declamation in song.” All Vaughan Williams’ works “display a character at once homely and remote; some would say mystical. For mysticism implies both. It is a character which only becomes fully articulate in musical notes.”⁵¹ On the following day *The Times* reported that: “The Russian composer Shostakovich and other members of the Presidium of the Soviet Composers’ Union sent a message to Dr. Vaughan Williams on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, saying: ‘Your music is known and loved in the Soviet Union. Your “London Symphony,” which in 1920 was acclaimed as one of the best compositions created by an Englishman, will be performed in Kuibyshev in the very near future.’”⁵² A concert presented as a tribute to the composer was held at the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday 7 November 1942, with the Royal Philharmonic Society and Royal Choral Society under Sir Malcolm Sargent performing *A Sea Symphony* and *Dona Nobis Pacem*.⁵³

There was much else on offer. Other concerts taking place that week included the annual performance of Brahms’ Requiem at Southwark Cathedral; Phyllis Sellick and Cyril Smith playing music for two pianos and orchestra at the Aeolian Hall and a programme of Beethoven piano music performed by Frederick Lamond at the Wigmore Hall. On Sunday 8 November several orchestral concerts were scheduled throughout the capital and a full National Gallery programme for the week included Moura Lympany at the piano on Tuesday, with Cesar Franck’s A Minor Violin Sonata performed on Thursday. By December *The Times* was discussing “songs of the time” in an article about music “inspired by these changing times.”⁵⁴ However, “inspired” is “scarcely the word” for some efforts, wrote the columnist, in a complaint levelled at poets and musicians alike:

⁵⁰ More Beethoven could be heard the following day at the National Gallery concert at which Solomon was to play the B flat Piano Concerto (*The Times*, 12 January 1942)

⁵¹ *The Times*, 12 October 1942

⁵² *The Times*, 13 October 1942

⁵³ *The Times*, 2 November 1942

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 11 December 1942

Of this type are two songs issued in the Hawkes Octavo Edition [of orchestral songs] with accompaniments for full orchestra. They are “The Internationale” and “The Land of Freedom,” music originally by two Russian composers and fitted to English words and orchestrated for English bands by several hands.

The former attracted particular criticism, the English translation rhyming “Internationale” with “rally.” Fortunately there was “better stuff” to be had in “Freedom” by Roger Quilter with words by Rodney Bennett, and two hymns including one by Vaughan Williams, *The Airman’s Hymn*, with words by the Earl of Lytton, and “This England,” a musical setting by Stanley Marchant of words by Canon Alexander of St. Paul’s could be compared “not unfavourably” with Sir Hubert Parry’s “England” and “Jerusalem.” A short cantata, “Travellers” by Alan Pryce Jones with music by Patrick Hadley deserved a London performance “on a sufficiently large scale” and, it was hoped, “should be heard while ‘the hard road’ is still being travelled,” and before 1943 “was far advanced.” The work, scored for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra was completed in January 1942.

By June 1943, the National Gallery concerts were supplemented by similar recitals at the Royal Exchange. *The Times*’ hopes for music in the Capital had clearly been realised, with 1943 a better year for music than even 1942 had been. *The Times* reported in June of the concert of Russian music on the previous Saturday at the Wigmore Hall, organised to coincide with a two-week exhibition of music in the Soviet Union at Novello’s publishers. In the same week, Vaughan Williams found himself defending conscientious objector Michael Tippett, who had failed to meet the required conditions of the registration required, and had been sentenced to three months’ imprisonment. In defending him, Vaughan Williams said “I think Tippett’s pacifist views entirely wrong, but I respect him very much for holding them so firmly. I think his compositions are very remarkable, and form a distinct national asset, and will increase the prestige of this country in the world.”⁵⁵ A carefully worded statement, which emphasises the significance of a composer’s work to the national consciousness, the case gives another glimpse into Vaughan Williams’ views on the importance of music, especially at that particular time:

We know music is forming a great part in national life now; more since the war than ever before, and everyone able to help on with that work is doing work of national importance.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 22 June 1943

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

At least one BBC presenter did not agree with Vaughan Williams. The programme schedule listed a Tippett work for broadcast on Sunday 4 July 1943, with Clarence Raybould announcing. "In view of his notorious tenets as a conchie coupled with his recent sentence to gaol for refusing to abide by the conditions of his exemption, do you think we are officially justified in including this work at the present time?" asked Raybould. "I cannot agree with VW's statement in his evidence at court the other day when he said Tippett's work is of national importance, or to that effect," desiring that if the work remained in the programme, "I should prefer that it was not in one of my own."

The First performance of Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony took place at the Proms, conducted by the composer, on Thursday 24 June 1943. Anticipating the concert, *The Times* commented that the "germinal idea" of the Symphony came from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, so already there was some idea of what to expect. *The Times* duly carried a review of the first performance the following morning, Friday 25 June, in what it called "an event of major importance." The idea that the Symphony was the apotheosis of the composer's career was, even on first hearing, immediately apparent: "It seems to absorb into itself and sum up all that he has ever written, and to give us a restatement of his whole philosophy now proved by life's experience."⁵⁷ The slow movement, *Romanza*, in particular gave the impression "that this is music not only of contemplation but of benediction."

The connection to and presence of Bunyan's work in Vaughan Williams music was the subject of a major feature, "Vaughan Williams' Pilgrimage in Symphony and Drama," in *The Times* on 17 September 1943, in which the composer's long-standing engagement with the 17th Century text is explored. Jeffrey Richards has also written of the relationship between *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the "secular analogue" in *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948). "Scott's journey," he writes, "becomes another version of the journey of the human soul, which had long provided Vaughan Williams with inspiration, through the long gestation of his *Pilgrim's Progress* project and dating back as far as his setting of [Walt] Whitman's *Towards the Unknown Region* (1907), which might almost have been an alternative title for *Scott of the Antarctic*."⁵⁸ *The Times* concurs in its survey of all Vaughan Williams' works which draw on the Bunyan classic, "in descending order of magnitude," beginning with the new Symphony, in which "it is not difficult to detect the note of pilgrimage, first sounded long ago in *Towards the Unknown Region*." The Symphony "is a wonderful summary of Vaughan Williams' music," containing the essence of the rest of it; only its immense range and variety would be concealed from an unwitting

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 25 June 1943

⁵⁸ Richards, 1997: 315. The project was to become the "Morality," first staged at Covent Garden in 1951

posterity.” A further performance of the Symphony in December 1943 inspired further reflection of this great work:

About this there can be but one opinion. A few performances only have sufficed to unite novice and expert in admiration of a work of singular beauty and completeness. It can best be characterized as giving us the very essence of the Composer’s most personal thought, which is made eloquent in music everywhere of an effortless sureness, amounting at times to a wonderful and almost unearthly serenity.⁵⁹

The *Romanza*, once again, attracts the warmest acclaim:

For this music, which seems familiar but is not, is indeed an example of the late perfect flowering of an imagination which always before has been in some way too much under pressure to achieve perfection continuously. It marks arrival at a stage reached only by a few of the great composers.⁶⁰

On its first hearing, *The Times* review had given the work possibly the greatest possible praise: “It is not too much to say that this belongs to that small body of music that, outside of late Beethoven, can properly be described as transcendental.”⁶¹ The inspiration of Bunyan is carried on from *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* from after the Great War, to its most recent manifestation, *Valiant for Truth*, both of which end with the passing of the pilgrim, continues *The Times*’ “Pilgrim” survey. “But ‘end’ has two meanings. In the conclusion is also the objective, and the objective is what gives meaning to the pilgrimage.” In a concluding footnote, the article remarks that Vaughan Williams’ versatility is again manifest in his film music for *49th Parallel*. The publication by Oxford University Press of the film’s opening theme in 1943 with words by Harold Child picks up the idea of pilgrimage once again, but now as a journey towards a better society: “*The New Commonwealth* expresses the aspirations of this war, as Parry’s *Jerusalem* did those of the last war.”⁶² The release by the British Council of its commissioned recording of the Fifth Symphony coincided with a revival of the Fourth by the BBC Orchestra in May 1944.⁶³ The occasion provided an opportunity to compare it to Vaughan

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 6 December 1943

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *The Times*, 25 June 1943. The comparison to late Beethoven is significant in both directions. First as a compliment to Vaughan Williams, but also to further underscore the place Beethoven still occupied in the musical canon and repertoire in England. What could follow a major new work – and a remarkable one – by Britain’s most distinguished composer? That night’s prom was an all-Beethoven concert, featuring the third *Leonore* Overture, the First Symphony and the *Emperor* Piano Concerto.

⁶² *The Times*, 17 September 1943

⁶³ The circumstances surrounding the British Council’s release of its recording of the Symphony is contained in chapter 4.

Williams' other symphonic output, particularly the *Pastoral* 3rd Symphony and what *The Times* was now calling the "Pilgrim" Symphony:

Vaughan Williams' artistic creed has always been that an artist lives in the world and should find his inspiration in what is going on around him. The sea, London, and the English countryside⁶⁴ have said something to him which he had embodied in symphonies, and so has spoken in music of England and things English more clearly to the rest of the world than any of his predecessors and contemporaries since the time of Queen Elizabeth. The F Minor [4th] Symphony was torn from him by the times in which we have lived. The D Major looks back over them all, and over the great range of his choral and dramatic works as well, and with the mellow wisdom of age discourses of those things that abide through good and evil.⁶⁵

Another of Vaughan Williams' symphonies, or at least a part of it, was performed at the British tribute to the Red Army on its 26th anniversary, which took place in the form of a concert of mainly British modern poetry and music at the Royal Albert Hall on Wednesday afternoon, 23rd February 1944, organised by the Ministry of Information. Laurie Lee wrote a blank-verse narrative which was spoken from the rostrum and the LSO under Malcolm Sargent played music drawn largely from the films, after beginning with the first movement of Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*. The film selection included Walton's *Spitfire Prelude* from *The First of the Few* (1942), Bax's music from *Malta GC* ("to illuminate the theme of 'Resistance'") and, to illuminate "solidarity," a performance of *The New Commonwealth*. The march from *Things to Come* (1936) by Arthur Bliss was followed by a new work by Sir Arnold Bax, a setting of verses by the Poet Laureate John Masefield which *The Times* called the artistic climax of the afternoon. The emotional climax, meanwhile, was the massed orchestra and bands of the Royal Marines and the R.A.F. playing the "Dead March" from Handel's *Saul*, for which the audience stood. Elgar's setting of "For the Fallen" preceded the work, which was followed by the Hallelujah Chorus, *Rule Britannia* and the new Soviet National Anthem. The Home Secretary gave the speech, which promised "the launching of the largest combined operations that the world has ever seen," with the forces of Britain, the United States and Russia combined in an operation that "would involve the landing of forces somewhere in Europe."⁶⁶ D-Day was just months away.

⁶⁴ *The Times* here makes the common mistake of associating the *Pastoral* symphony with the English countryside. It is in fact the desolation of Flanders in the First World War that was its inspiration.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 19 May 1944

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 24 February 1944

Vaughan Williams and CEMA

Vaughan Williams can be credited with having no small part in the creation of CEMA, the predecessor to today's Arts Council. Established soon after the war had begun, by December 1940 and after only a year in existence, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts⁶⁷ was "carrying first-class music, drama and paintings, as a means of stimulus and refreshment both mental and spiritual, to places which have only infrequent opportunity of enjoying them and, under present conditions, might otherwise have no such opportunity at all."⁶⁸ CEMA's initial objective was to boost morale through art. The war-time approach to the arts and the provision of entertainment through ENSA not only "upheld the morale of newly-recruited audiences" but also "made them rediscover a sense of Elizabethan magnificence," writes Anselm Heinrich in his recent book on the exchange of Arts in the regional theatres of Yorkshire and the German state of Westphalia. In respect of British propaganda efforts, the government was prepared to subsidise the arts but also was keen "to associate itself with artists who were supporting the war effort without obvious financial gain."⁶⁹ After 1939, for example, Sadler's Wells "had established itself as the country's leading ensemble" (having failed before the war to achieve the standards of other European capitals) and CEMA began to make plans "to reclaim the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as the national centre for opera and ballet."⁷⁰ The continued popularity of the great Austro-German composers, meanwhile, ensured that they remained "at the heart of the musical repertoire," the most popular works in the National Gallery concerts works by Beethoven, Bach and Mozart.⁷¹ In a note, Heinrich Anselm points out how the Government recognised the propaganda value of Myra Hess's efforts:

The government was well aware of the propaganda value of Myra Hess's concerts in the National Gallery. In a letter from May 1941 the Gallery asked the Treasury whether they were prepared to pay £160 to make the place safer and thereby enable the concerts to continue. Apart from having the

⁶⁷ A.P. Herbert MP's suggestion of an Arts Department can be seen to have been satisfied in the creation of CEMA.

⁶⁸ Board of Education Administrative Memorandum No.268 to Local Education Authorities, 27 December 1940 – TNA ED 138/14

⁶⁹ Heinrich, 2007: 47. A report to cabinet on the Women's Services suggested there was room for both ENSA and CEMA to provide "concerts and entertainments" for the forces: "Every type of citizen within certain age groups is to be found in the Forces, and in a serious educational effort no side is more valuable than the satisfaction of the claims made by beauty in her many varied aspects on ordinary men and women." (TNA CAB 66/27/41 – August 1942)

⁷⁰ Heinrich, 2007: 147

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 149

support of the Minister of Home Security, the Gallery's best argument was that 'Miss Hess makes a great point of the propaganda value of the concerts' both at home and abroad.⁷²

Set up in December 1939 with a grant of £25,000 from the Pilgrim Trust, with an additional sum of the same amount matched by the Treasury in April 1940, there were high hopes for CEMA. The "highbrow" version of the "lowbrow" ENSA, which was also set up at the outbreak of war to recruit performers to entertain the armed forces, CEMA became the Arts Council in 1946. An official potted history of CEMA reveals these high hopes, in the somewhat purple prose of the President of the Board of Education, Lord de la Warr, who "had Venetian visions of a post-war [Lord] Mayor's show on the Thames in which the Board of Education led the Arts in triumph from Whitehall to Greenwich in magnificent barges and gorgeous gondolas; orchestra, madrigal singers, Shakespeare from the Old Vic, ballet from Sadler's Wells, shining canvasses from the Royal Academy, folk dancers from village greens – in fact Merrie England."⁷³

CEMA's central policy was "to maintain the highest possible standard in our national arts and music, drama and painting at a time when these things are threatened and when, too, they may mean more in the life of the country than they have ever meant before."⁷⁴ Here, then, is further evidence of the recognition afforded to and value of the arts in war-time, particularly with regard to music. Among other activities, CEMA had been assisting British orchestras to give concerts in "drab industrial areas" where few opportunities to hear music existed, as well as encouraging music-making at local festivals and concerts "and helping local choirs and orchestras to continue their excellent work for the encouragement and entertainment of the people in dark and dangerous times."⁷⁵ One of its first activities was to send out "musical missionaries" into various parts of the country. Subsequently known as the "Music Travellers," their idea was to "carry the live arts of playing and singing into remote places, encouraging music-making by example and providing illustrations of a professional standard to local choirs and orchestras."⁷⁶ A further development after June 1940 was the Music Travellers' demand for funds for "the provision of professional concerts to supplement their work" and, as a result, a "system of concert-giving under the Council's direct control, with musicians engaged by the Council, grew up." Eventually the Music Travellers' work split into two: "Those of the travellers who showed an interest in organisation became music advisors... while those who

⁷² Heinrich quotes PRO Home Office HO186 Air Raid Precautions, TNA HO186/466

⁷³ History of CEMA from December 1939 (draft memo of the Board of Education) – TNA ED 138/14

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *What is CEMA? Good News About Good Things* – CEMA brochure filed in TNA ED 138/14

⁷⁶ History of CEMA from December 1939 (draft memo of the Board of Education) – TNA ED 138/14

preferred to concentrate on their work as performers were freed to become full-time artists.” A further scheme was set up “to guarantee chamber music subscription clubs against loss for seasons of concerts which, in war time, could not be risked against loss for some such security.” Doubling in size every year from its inception, the scheme was a great success, with no fewer than 346 concerts taking place, and more arranged in factories in co-operation with ENSA and other bodies, including the British Council. Boasting other successes, the author of this potted history ends it with a quotation from a letter received from one member of the audience of a CEMA concert, which illustrates vividly the contrast in approach to the German attitude to the arts:

I could not help contrasting the whole enterprise with any government-sponsored affair in any other country. The entire concert was the essence of freedom... A splendid example of state administration without visible red tape or any ulterior motives.⁷⁷

The sentiments expressed in this letter of appreciation can be seen to capture the entire approach to official involvement in the musical life of Britain during the War. While many opinions existed, and influential members of various official bodies expressed, where they could, the approach to be favoured with respect to the encouragement of music and its use for propaganda purposes, the common element is one of understatement. The music, in other words, was allowed to speak for itself. Uniquely British, this point of view resonates with the tone of what Lord Lloyd was to call the “reasonable cadences” of the British Council, as we will discover in the following chapter.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Chapter Three

Reasonable Cadences: Cultural Propaganda and the British Council

Everywhere, people turn with relief from the harshly dominant notes of propaganda to the less insistent and more reasonable cadences of Britain¹

We are fortunate to have a musical metaphor in the words of Lord Lloyd (chairman of the British Council in 1941, when these words were penned) to provide this chapter with an opening into the various attempts made by the British Council at the art of cultural propaganda. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how those “reasonable cadences” of the British message were played. First created as the “British Committee for Relations with Other Countries” when set up in 1934, the committee’s name was shortly changed to “council” and in 1936 the body became known simply as the British Council. Its work continued uninterrupted throughout the war in the neutral countries of Europe, including Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Turkey, as well as in South America. In an introduction to a presentation on the history of the British Council published in 2009,² current chairman the Rt. Hon. Lord Kinnock of Bedwellty paraphrases a speech made by British Council chairman Lord Lloyd of the Council’s early days in 1941:

We have in many places a wary and critical audience to convert, but our opponents’ lack of discretion has worked largely in our favour. Everywhere we find people turning with relief from the harshly dominant notes of totalitarian propaganda to the less insistent and more reasonable cadences of Britain. We do not force them to “think British,” we offer them the opportunity of learning what the British think.³

This approach, which is echoed in the BBC’s attitude to audiences, that is, not to tell people what to think, but rather to give them something to think *about*, could sum up the entire British approach to propaganda. As soon as war broke out in September 1939, the various official bodies involved in propaganda in Britain were obliged to agree on the scope of each of their activities, particularly the line that was to be drawn between the newly-revived Ministry of Information and the British Council: “even in wartime, the British Council’s supporters were

¹ Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, British Council Chairman in 1941

² *A Short History of the British Council* (presentation accessed online at the Council’s website April 2009)

³ Forbes Adam, 1948: 284-5

to argue the importance of relationship-building over political propaganda.”⁴ In this context, “relationship-building” becomes a euphemism for “cultural propaganda” in 2009. The latter term has since disappeared from official terminology, but it is appropriate to trace its appearance and use. Squeamishness over terminology is not just a recent phenomenon, however. The official history of the British Council points out how both British and American public servants viewed First World War propaganda efforts with “extreme distaste.”⁵ Propaganda, in the words of one British official based in New York, was “a good word gone wrong,” because “over here it has now only the debased meaning of a sinister activity.”⁶

The Council's Role

An early war-time House of Commons debate on the role of the revived Ministry of Information, which had not got off to a good start, emphasised that in Britain, “publicity” meant “straight news” rather than the style of propaganda used in the Totalitarian states.⁷ Thus, by 1939, the term “publicity” came to be preferred, but in the early days of the war, whatever the preferred term was, important distinctions were also to be made between different *kinds* of propaganda. Within weeks of the start of the War, Lords Lloyd and MacMillan were in discussions about the Council’s role. Following a conversation between the two, Lord MacMillan (newly-appointed Minister of Information) wrote to Lord Lloyd, his counterpart at the British Council, towards the end of September, to set down his views on the Council’s “continued activities,” now that war had broken out. The Council was to continue under the direction of the Ministry (i.e. as the department responsible for its grant-in-aid in place of the Foreign Office). Its activities were “subject to the approval of the Treasury and Parliament,” on an “agreed basis.” Although MacMillan was careful not to express a “final opinion” on which of the Council’s services should remain as they were, he was confident in his perceived demarcation between the Council and the Ministry of Information and on the basis upon which the Council’s work should continue:

This basis should be broadly that the Council should remain responsible for certain cultural activities, while the Ministry will take over whatever of its activities can be regarded as having a publicity, or some publicity, flavour.⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Donaldson, 1984: 13

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Times*, 12 October 1939

⁸ Letter dated 25 September 1939, TNA BW2/363

Aware that though the Council was already restricted to the cultural field in theory, Chairman Lord Lloyd recognised that the Council had taken on “a certain political or publicity tendency in recent times.” There was a clear difference, in other words, between “cultural” and “publicity,” or “political” propaganda. By 28 October, three classes of propaganda were identified by the British Council, and with them a clearer understanding of which department was responsible for what, given the confusion over the “proper division of functions between us and the Ministry of Information.” His fear was “the likelihood that other important national propaganda activities [were] being hampered by similar uncertainties and confusion.” Agreeing that propaganda is a matter of foreign policy requiring a centralised approach, his suggestion was that no “Minister of Information” was required as such, but that a co-ordinated approach under the Foreign Office was required, with the distinction between the three divisions being retained abroad as well as in Whitehall. The British Council was to concentrate on cultural propaganda and “educational work,” with the Ministry responsible for political propaganda:

Political or Belligerent Propaganda is short term work, effect depending chiefly on clarity and veracity; Cultural (as opposed to Educational) Propaganda is chiefly effective through the intrinsic international value of the performer (musician, lecturer, actor, picture), whereas the effect of Educational Propaganda is long term and, to be valued as Education, should be disinterested and therefore dissociated from the Political work, as well as distinct from the Cultural work, which needs quite a different type of planning.⁹

These are important distinctions, and throughout the war the British Council was careful to ensure that any lecture it organised was not of a political nature, or that it did not encroach upon forms of propaganda that had been identified for other institutions. Although the term “cultural propaganda” was used in Britain from the 1920s, it was not until after the War had begun that the Ministry of Information, the Foreign Office and the British Council, in the correspondence that flowed between them, spelled out the various methods of propaganda, thereby defining the relevant terminology. The term “British cultural propaganda” appears to be almost exclusive to the British Council, and, by that department, is used only in the period 1935-47. There are few references to the term outside of the records of the British Council. The term is also used in the captured records of the German government, for example those of

⁹ “The Chairman: Certain Suggestions on Propaganda.” British Council file note dated 28 October 1939 (TNA BW2/363).

the German Foreign Ministry archives for the period 1931-1933,¹⁰ as well as in those of the Colonial Office concerning Palestine 1925-1935,¹¹ and of the Cabinet Office.¹² Records of the Foreign Office concerning the use of British films for cultural propaganda in Egypt, Greece and elsewhere, contain some reference to the term in its reports of the distribution of gramophone records, books, periodicals and the placing of book reviews in the Egyptian press, its funding for education and, in a comparison between Britain, France and Italy as rivals to cultural expansion in Egypt.¹³ An early reference to cultural propaganda, also concerning British activities in Egypt, can be found in cabinet meeting minutes of November 1927. The success of a tour of the English Shakespearean Company prompted a wry observation:

If the Foreign Office were allowed annually the cost of one regiment to be spent on cultural propaganda, it might be found in the long run to be an economy.¹⁴

These productions were financed by the Egyptian Minister of Education. Contrast was given in the Italian government's direct sponsorship of a season of Italian opera at the same venue as well as a twice-weekly course in Italian in Cairo, free to any Egyptian. Rex Leeper of the Foreign Office uses the term "cultural propaganda" in a letter in 1931: "We have taken over a new sphere of activity – known for want of a better name, as "cultural propaganda..."¹⁵ There are a few other references to "cultural propaganda" in the papers of the Foreign Office, some dated as early as 1906¹⁶ and, in particular, in papers concerning activities in Germany in the immediate Post-War period.¹⁷

Cultural Propaganda in Germany

Papers from the Foreign Office dated January 1945 paint an interesting picture of the "culture war" between Germany and the Allies. As we have seen, to a British official at Stockholm, the German attitude was one of "Teutonic frightfulness,"¹⁸ and this point of view sets the scene for British cultural propaganda in Germany as the War was drawing to an end. The official attitude can also be demonstrated by the Government's advice to British soldiers who would begin to

¹⁰ TNA GFM33/2999 – England

¹¹ TNA CO733/282/5

¹² TNA CAB24/189 (Cultural propaganda and music in Egypt)

¹³ TNA FO141/482 (1934) and FO141/677 (1937)

¹⁴ TNA CAB 24/189

¹⁵ Donaldson, 1984: 19

¹⁶ TNA FO395

¹⁷ TNA FO924/1196 – German cultural propaganda: British Council activities in Germany: ENSA performances 1945

¹⁸ TNA FO924/208

occupy Germany from 1944. The “Pocket Book,” originally published in November 1944 when the British occupying forces had “barely entered Germany and Hitler and the Nazi regime ha[d] not yet been overthrown,” was careful to point out the average German’s good qualities: hard work, thoroughness, obedience, tidiness and order, keenness on formal education, “proud of their ‘culture’ and their appreciation of music, art and literature.”¹⁹ Under the section “How the Germans Live,” a few paragraphs are devoted to food and drink, sport, health, religion, entertainment, literature – and music: “The Germans are extremely fond of music and have produced composers and performers of great eminence. Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Wagner were all Germans.”²⁰ The good qualities of German musical heritage are thus emphasised and even this late into the War the *Pocket Book’s* views on music, at least, were not quite so stereotypical, the eminence of those German composers duly acknowledged. The *Pocket Book* is careful to differentiate between Nazis and Germany, but does not fail to account for the influence Hitler and Goebbels had had on the German population, and the British government’s advice was to treat all Germans as suspects. The British Council was prevented from working in Germany in the immediate post-war period to begin with, records of the Council confirming that any interaction – that is cultural, rather than political propaganda – in Germany was pointless for the “duration.” In fact, archival material on British Cultural Propaganda in Germany is grouped into three distinct periods (1934-38, 1938-39 and 1946-47) which illustrates this point.

The British Council’s effort with regard to cultural propaganda in Germany in 1938 duly recognises the political context in which its work must be carried out. In a memorandum about introducing “Chamberlain Scholarships” (Neville Chamberlain was still Prime Minister) for young German university students to visit Britain, it was important to emphasise that “they must, however, be *our* scholarships and have nothing to do with the Londonderry-Ribbentrop Gesellschaft.” Furthermore, on the idea of sending lecturers to Germany, “this would do not only the Council’s cause but the Council itself some good. We do not want to get the reputation of being a purely anti-German organisation.”²¹ The attitude expressed here is contained in a British Council memo which proposed a number of suggestions for a programme of cultural propaganda in Germany, following the Munich Agreement, which “had promoted a very strong pro-British feeling in a good many circles in Germany” and, among other suggestions, was a visit by a “well-known orchestra.” At this stage the British Council remained the only vehicle for propaganda but it was “impossible in this case to divorce cultural

¹⁹ *Germany 1944: The British Soldier’s Pocket Book*. Kew: The National Archives, 2006, p.18

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34

²¹ TNA BW32/1, Reasons for Increasing British Propaganda In Germany (Internal British Council memo dated 6 October 1938 by Mr Russel)

from political considerations” and an improvement in cultural efforts “could not fail” to produce a “corresponding improvement in the latter,” the memo argued. A great deal of attention was paid to various ideas to “capitalize the good feeling” but given the deteriorated state relations between the two countries (not least from the evidence of this memo itself) a gold medal for “best German film” and “reviving the value of the intellectual,” and trying to overcome German spiritual isolation “via a series of lectures on English political philosophy” seem as hopelessly naïve as the Munich agreement itself turned out to be. But these attempts at “relationship-building” with Germany after Munich, which for many people provided hope that War could be avoided, must also be seen in the light of the work of the British Council in Germany in the years leading up to the war, when relations between the two countries were still on relatively friendly terms.

In December 1935, the mayor of Frankfurt-am-Main, Dr. Krebs, had suggested a visit by the Westminster Cathedral Choir to a festival of Roman Catholic Church music to be held in the September of the following year. The Secretary-General of the British Council, Charles Bridge, was to have laid the proposal before the Council’s music committee in February 1936.²² However, the foreign office wrote to Bridge with a word of warning. Despite Krebs’ willingness to further cultural ties between the two countries he was “an ardent National Socialist” as well as being “something of a pusher.” Furthermore, his ability to raise foreign exchange for his frequent visits to London was in itself suspect and the Foreign Office was “not too keen on encouraging Dr Krebs’ activities over here.”

Somewhat hypocritically, the Foreign Office’s objection seems to be based on the mayor’s use by the German government as a propaganda channel, though it had no objection if the British Council could use him “as a means of furthering [its propaganda] work” in Frankfurt. The reason for this attitude is spelt out in a letter to Anthony Eden by Eric Phipps of the British Embassy in Berlin on the subject of Dr. Krebs’ proposal. Advising the British Council to ignore Dr. Krebs, he recommended that because propaganda in Germany was a matter for the state, it would be up to the Ministry of Propaganda to approach “foreign bodies” such as the British Council.²³ Given also that the German authorities would expect reciprocation, he was opposed to British efforts because of the natural disadvantage existing in the approaches of the two countries: strict control and censorship in Germany as opposed to virtually no means in Britain for curbing Germany’s “high standard” of propaganda.²⁴ The music committee did what was advised. A reply to Dr. Krebs’ letter of late February advised him to approach Westminster

²² The work of the British Council Music Committee is described separately below.

²³ TNA BW32/1 – letter dated 7 February 1936

²⁴ TNA BW32/1 – memorandum dated 7 February 1936

Cathedral directly. The excuses given, in the absence abroad of the chairman of the music committee (Makower) there was to be no meeting in the foreseeable future and there was no desire to “hold” up the mayor’s plans.²⁵

If plans for a continuing influence by the British Council on perceptions of Britain in Germany persisted, there were, too, some early signs of naïveté. In April 1937 German schools substituted English for French as the principal foreign language. “Whatever implications this might have,” the Council admitted, this could be regarded as a gesture of friendliness towards England. Suggestions for the production of English plays, in English, a programme of student exchanges and the supply of English publications (“the more conservative type” of newspaper such as the *Daily Telegraph*, *Spectator* and *Illustrated London News* preferred), were all reasonable, as far as music and opera were concerned, because Germany could claim “an advantage over us,” any expenditure in this regard, it was admitted, “would hardly be justified.”²⁶

Returning to 1938, in response to the goodwill engendered after the Munich Accord, the British Ambassador in Berlin invited Charles Bridge to visit Berlin where a number of events and meetings took place between him and his German counterparts. Arriving in Berlin on Friday 18 November 1938, Colonel Bridge was taken to a screening of a British film *The Drum* (1938)²⁷ which he considered was the sort that would make “good propaganda.” A meeting with the Ministerial *Direktor* of the German Foreign Office’s cultural department, Herr Stieve, produced several suggestions for the Council’s activities in Germany. Stieve considered the effects of music “ephemeral” but liked instead the idea of “an exhibition of British art in Berlin,” for which he could easily provide a Gallery.²⁸ The result of the week-long visit was the lengthy “Memorandum on the Development of Cultural Relations with Germany.”²⁹ The report begins by summarizing the hostile surrounding in which any cultural efforts by Great Britain could succeed. The most important of all such activities would be the broadcasting, in German, of a daily news bulletin. To avoid giving the appearance of propaganda, the “news service” should be “straight,” with “veracity” paramount in all respects. However, the Council’s recommendation to the BBC on its German-language service was to copy the German type of announcer and, at all costs, to avoid giving the impression of a Jewish announcer, justifying the reason, this would “unfortunately” influence the view “of the whole news matter.”

²⁵ TNA BW32/1 – letter to Dr. Krebs dated 28 February 1936

²⁶ TNA BW32/2

²⁷ A pro-Empire feature by the Korda brothers set in the British Raj

²⁸ Of course, finding a gallery readily would imply some indication of the German Government’s ability to control cultural events and the venues required for them.

²⁹ TNA BW32/2 – File Note dated 25 November 1938, Berlin

Student exchanges, libraries of British publications, films, and the preparation of lecture series, as well as music, were considered, though the effectiveness of these means of cultural propaganda were now beginning to be seen to be minimal:

In present conditions in Germany, it is a waste of money to subsidize grants of books, visits of choirs, orchestras and travelling theatrical companies, who, however excellent their performance, come and go and are forgotten. Almost every kind of book and music is at the command of this state of 80 million people to be supplied if so desired.

Colonel Bridge looked forward to a meeting in London in the New Year with a number of Stieve's staff to discuss details of cultural relations between the two countries:

As the Nazi attitude towards Britain, both in the party, in the home and in schools, is a strange mixture of admiration and jealousy, bound up with curiosity, it might perhaps be politic to satisfy this curiosity ourselves before it begins to decline or is fed by irresponsible German propagandists.

Thus there was at least some awareness that, despite some considerable favour towards Britain in Germany, there was constant erosion in the German press of the work that the British Council's efforts sought to promote. As war became imminent during 1939, cultural relations between the two countries would inevitably stop altogether, and it was not until 1947 that the Council took up the cudgel once again for "relationship-building" in a devastated Berlin.

It had been recognised as early as October 1945 that to allow German people to hear "good English music and lecturers would be a service to the cause of Truth, rather than an attempt to thrust our culture at them."³⁰ To begin with, however, the Foreign Office prevented the Council from any work in occupied Germany, and its indecision about how to proceed with any cultural activities typically led to the staging of disastrous events such as the cultural evening at Berlin-Wilmersdorf (a district of Berlin in the British zone) held by the Adult Education authorities in October 1945. A report from the ground lamented its effect:

There is no doubt that there is a great need for every kind of information about us and our life in this four-power city. What is happening at present is

³⁰ TNA BW32/3 – British Council memorandum dated 31 October 1945

that the worst possible side of the British case is being presented to the Germans by the Germans themselves.³¹

The programme of the Wilmersdorf evening was provided by way of example, but was “so tragically inadequate and misleading” that it looked “almost like an act of cultural sabotage.”

To allow the Germans to resort to this kind of stuff and put nothing in ourselves makes us just look silly... what we are giving them now is far worse than a stone and more like a very stale doughnut.

The evening included readings (in German) of Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, “with Gerty Herzog at the Piano” playing between readings, music by William Byrd (“The German’s Whistle”), Cyril Scott and Lord Berners. As the report testifies, the evening was an embarrassment and, as a result, the Foreign Office permitted the British Council to resume its activities at the end of March 1946. A planned tour of Sadler’s Wells Ballet became unstuck to begin with but by March 1947 the British Council was redoubling its efforts. Following a visit to Berlin, the Council’s representative Miss Sprigge returned “fully convinced that the Council has a job to do in Germany which can be done by nobody else.”³²

Nearly two years after the war in Europe had ended, Berlin was a difficult place in which to live. People lived five to a room, Sprigge reported; there was no privacy, little food and no soap. There were five women to every man in Germany, the latter either elderly or very young. A warm library or reading room was considered most important for a nation of readers, but films were to be considered very carefully. Any propaganda would provoke “nausea” and films of the beauty of the English countryside would be “almost too poignant for words.” Music, however, was “a much safer mode of communication” and here was an opportunity for some considerable cultural influence, because “almost nobody” had a gramophone or radio, and concerts of recorded music would be extremely popular. Yet again, the problem of the “land without music” was raised, however, in arranging such “concerts.”

But they should not consist exclusively of British music: this coming from ‘Das Volk Ohne Musik’ would be a joke in very poor taste.

Imagining life in Berlin under the circumstances described is almost impossible. The British Council thus had the added complication of providing an effective means of spiritual sustenance that would prove simultaneously inoffensive but effective. The British concern was for the spiritual health of the German people. The question of religion should be faced, but

³¹ TNA BW32/3

³² TNA BW32/3 – British Council Minute dated 18 March 1947

perhaps not by the Council, it was owned, but the danger in Germany was “the distressing tendency of the Germans to anarchy and mental self-mutilation” which was “even more apparent than in 1918.” Thus the role of the British Council became increasingly important as a memorandum written in November 1947 testifies:

... in view of the musical importance of Germany the [music] Department is unwilling to include Germany in its activities unless it is allowed to send musicians especially to Germany. It is felt that Germany cannot be simply tagged-on to tours being arranged for countries which may be of considerably less importance musically.³³

Thus we have seen the position the Council as a whole took when it came to cultural propaganda in Germany. The outbreak of War naturally postponed any activities in that country, and its efforts in Germany naturally came to an end. That the British Council was also restricted from engaging in cultural propaganda in the immediate post-war period also reflects the attitude of its specially-appointed Music Advisory Committee in the years leading up to the war, with a tendency, as we shall see, not to focus on Germany, but to find more fertile ground in the neutral countries of Europe.

The Music Committee

Membership of the Committee included, at the outset, Master of the King’s Musick Sir Walford Davies, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Professor E.J. Dent (of Cambridge University), Arthur Bliss, H.C. Colles (music critic of *The Times*), Herbert Bedford and Ernest Makower, who became the committee’s chairman. Two founding members were absent: “In accepting membership both Sir Walford Davies and Dr Vaughan Williams have indicated that, although they will be glad to lend their names to the Committee and to offer it any service within their power, they will not be able to take an active part in its regular work.”³⁴ The minutes of the music committee’s first meeting record that the work of propaganda for British music and musicians was to organise “major activities,” preferably in countries “of first-class musical importance” (Arthur Bliss’s suggestion) such as Italy and those countries “already known to be favourable towards British music.” Professor Dent, who enquired as to whether the purpose was to make British music better known or to making known the achievements of British musicianship. Both were agreed upon, plus the promotion of “an understanding of this country by sending distinguished

³³ TNA BW32/34 – Memorandum from Liaison Office, Overseas “C” to German/Austrian department regarding the “Proposed Inclusion of Germany in Tours arranged by Arts and Science Division”

³⁴ TNA BW80/1 – Agenda of the 1st meeting of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council, 24 July 1935.

foreigners to visit it.” Arthur Bliss mentioned a project for sending abroad, among others, Myra Hess, as well as the possibilities of sending orchestras and English choirs, provided they were “first rate,” mindful of the desire “to impress foreign opinion of the high standard to which British orchestral playing had attained.” Inviting “foreign musical critics to this country” would be one way of securing this, he ventured. Thus the Committee seems to have been bursting with ideas, the meeting agreeing that the “round tour” of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Austria would be a “most suitable start for propaganda on behalf of British music and musicianship,” which would comprise of two concerts in each of the major centres chosen; Prague, Krakow, Warsaw, Bucharest, Budapest and Vienna by the New English Singers, and by Myra Hess and Lionel Tertis.

The terms of the Committee were duly and comprehensively set out at the first meeting, which took place in July 1935. Under the heading “future work,” the possibilities of using gramophone records “as instruments of musical propaganda” were two-fold: the presentation of records to foreign broadcasting authorities and the establishment of lending libraries at foreign missions and “approved Anglo-foreign societies.”³⁵ By the third meeting of the committee, the sending of gramophone records was timed to coincide with live performances of British music, for example that of William Walton’s new symphony at Budapest and Vienna in the latter part of 1935. “Future work” also included the possibility of “work on a large or intensive scale,” for which committee chairman Ernest Makower and Arthur Bliss had various proposals, including sending Myra Hess and Lionel Tertis abroad. The object of the Council, said Rex Leeper, head of the Foreign Office News Department, “was not only to spread a more adequate notion of the ideas and achievements of Great Britain by means of lectures, concerts, etc. abroad, but also to promote an understanding of this country by enabling distinguished foreigners to visit it.” He considered that the most important country in which to work was Italy, earmarking that country in particular for a programme of cultural propaganda, though admitting that it was “impossible to foresee the relations of this country with Italy would be in the immediate future, and it might therefore be dangerous to count on launching any major campaign in that country for the present.”³⁶ Poland, he suggested, might be a better place on which to concentrate.

Beginning, then, in countries already known to be favourable towards British music rather than in countries where British music was “very little known,” it was decided that the “round tour” of Eastern Europe should go ahead, as well as the establishment “of a library of miniature

³⁵ Ibid. It was noted that this was already happening in Romania.

³⁶ Minutes of the 1st meeting of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council, 24 July 1935 – TNA BW 80/1

scores of works by British composers,” copies of which were to be sent abroad for their eventual performance (a number had already been sent to Finland, Sweden and Italy). A performance of the *Messiah* at Sofia and British chamber music in Bucharest, as well as a forthcoming performance in Salzburg of Vaughan Williams’ *Job* by the Vienna Philharmonic under Adrian Boult were also discussed. The minutes record events pertaining to the performance of British music and “openings for British music and British musical artistes” all over Europe in collaboration with British legations. “With this is bound to be the question of musical propaganda work in the least important countries where no work on a major scale is likely to be undertaken, and also the question of the basis on which the artistes are to be chosen to perform in such countries and the basis on which their services are to be engaged.” Committee member Herbert Bedford, the British delegate of the Permanent Council of the International Co-operation of Composers, an organisation which “apparently grew out of a meeting of the Performing Rights Societies of various countries, which was held in Germany in 1934 under the presidency of Herr Richard Strauss,” explained the roots of the council which “had developed from an old and honourable German society, which originally had been founded by Liszt, but it had now passed under Nazi control.” In what, interestingly, was to be the only mention of Germany at the meeting, Bedford wished to organise an international festival of music in England, but the committee decided not to incur any expense in this regard.

The committee met again on 7 November 1935. Proposals for 1936/37 included the performance by local orchestras under the baton of Sir Hamilton Harty, Walton’s symphony “as the newest big English work” in Prague, Budapest and Vienna, as well as further discussions on a proposed tour of Europe by Myra Hess. The itinerary, now grown considerably in size and still “subject to variation as circumstances enforce” included no German cities. The record of the meeting held on 23 January 1936 provides some considerable insight into why this was the case. At the meeting, it was decided to exclude Hamburg from a proposed tour by the King’s College Choir, as there was some concern “that there might be disturbances by Nazis in Hamburg if the choir were to sing in the churches there.” For reasons which the minutes do not record, but the committees’ concentration on countries of central and Eastern Europe must be seen in the light of the experience of the alliances of the First World War. Here is a British Council committee actively involved in propaganda in countries with which relations were perhaps considered important to secure as friendly alliances on a cultural level, in order to promote British values. The virtual absence of proposals for Germany in this regard is thus explained: the Nazis had already taken control of much of the German cultural institutions of musical life and Britain was best concentrating on growing its cultural influence in other

European countries, Germany's neighbours in particular, in order to aid in the prevention of a repeat of the 1914 slide into war.

Among the very earliest of activities was the arrangement of a visit by a number of European music critics to London in November 1935. Partly subsidised by Committee Chairman Ernest Makower himself, Frances Donaldson writes in the history of the British Council, that most of the performances given during the visit "owed much to the generosity and enthusiasm of private persons and the People's Concerts, at which a nominal admission of 6d. was charged, [and] were paid for entirely by Mr and Mrs Ernest Makower."³⁷ An early success for the British Council, *The Times* was able to report in December that the music critic of the Vienna *Reichspost* Prof. Max Springer, in writing of his visit on his return home, was able to refute the still widely-held idea of "England, the country without music," and which he was happily able to call a fairy-tale.³⁸

Myra Hess's 1937 Tour

Another early success was the tour that Myra Hess was eventually to make of Eastern Europe, the idea for which had been mooted at the very first meeting. Discussions about the tour began in earnest between the agents Ibbs & Tillett and Music Committee secretary Pamela Henn-Collins in July 1937. With the programme set by the end of September, the music committee met at the end of the month, feeling that the proposed programme contained too small a proportion of British works. Instead of Brahms the committee suggested "things" by Bax, Ireland, Bridge, Cyril Scott and Balfour Gardiner.³⁹ The programme, however, remained intact. The accompanying biography of Hess highlights that though she had been known for introducing new works, she was "most widely known" for her interpretation of the classics, "especially Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, and also Schumann and the Romantic school." Having attempted to make English piano music abroad better known she had played to dire reviews in Germany and the Netherlands and though she was willing to replace the Brahms or Schumann "for any British work of equal calibre" was "doubtful if such exists." She was, however, willing to play English works as encore; her reasoning that the piano appealed to few modern English composers, and it "would do more harm than good" to the cause of English

³⁷ Donaldson, 1984: 38

³⁸ *The Times*, 2 December 1935

³⁹ Minutes of the 7th meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee of 27 September 1937 – TNA BW 80/1

music if she were to allow “the opportunity for unfavourable comparisons in her programme.”⁴⁰

Hess’s final itinerary – the boat train from Liverpool Street via Harwich and on to Dresden, then to Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia, Belgrade, Zagreb for the concerts and then home via Vienna – was a full four weeks tour. A letter dated 17 February 1938 from EC Rapp of the British Consulate in Zagreb to the British Council which questions the cost of including the Fleet Street Choir in the tour makes the success of Myra Hess’s contribution clear:

I should like, however, to make an exception in favour of Miss Myra Hess, although her propaganda value is to some extent reduced by the general feeling that she is not of British origin.⁴¹

However, though there may have been some concern about her origins, of her considerable talent there was no doubt, as a letter from Terence Shore of the British legation in Belgrade to Charles Bridge at the British Council testifies:

We were rather afraid that Miss Hess might not have the audience which she deserves, partly because the idea persists (and I fear not only here) that the English are an unmusical people who have little or nothing to offer in the way of musical works of performers, and partly because Miss Hess’s name was practically unknown.⁴²

In replying, Bridge reminded Shore that, “of course the Council’s idea in sending these musicians abroad is just to dissipate the idea which you still say persists that the English are an unmusical people!”⁴³ The concert, which had taken place on 2 December 1937, included works by British composers, which was “more than appreciated,” and Myra Hess was brought back for seven encores. The first part of the programme was a mix of English and German. The English – Purcell, Arne, Giles Farnaby and Martin Peerson – was all ancient. The German included Myra Hess’s own arrangement of J.S. Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” as well as several Brahms Intermezzi, Beethoven’s Op.110 Piano Sonata in A flat and, to end, Schumann’s *Etudes Symphoniques*, Op.13. The concert in Zagreb, held at the Croatian Musical Institute drew ecstatic press reviews – “the most sensational artiste who has visited our city for centuries,” said one. If the purpose of the visit was to give the impression that England could

⁴⁰ TNA INF 6/29

⁴¹ TNA BW 2/128 – Papers relating to Myra Hess’ 1937 tour of Eastern Europe

⁴² TNA BW 2/128 – Letter from Terence Shore of the British Legation in Belgrade to Charles Bridge of 8 December 1937

⁴³ TNA BW 2/128 – Letter dated 20 December 1937 (Charles Bridge to Terence Shore)

boast great musical pianism, “Myra Hess did not disappoint; was forced to give encore after encore,” ran the review.⁴⁴

The New York World’s Fair

Riding on the success of Myra Hess’s tour, from early 1938 the Music Committee focused its attention further afield, and on a much more ambitious project. As we have seen, apart from showing off the talents of British musicians, its remit was to promote British music culture as a whole. In the context of “music and propaganda,” this can be seen as music *as* propaganda: the propagation of music for the purposes of representing British culture as a whole. This was clearly the impetus for the Committee’s programme for commissioning new British works for the New York World’s Fair, which was to take place in July 1939. The British Council’s musical contribution to the Fair was first discussed in March 1938. Vaughan Williams, Walton and Bax were each to be invited to write a special composition “which should be dedicated to the American people,” for which each would receive the sum of £250. Arthur Bliss co-ordinated correspondence with Arnold Bax, who felt of the offer, being “too tempting,” that “it would be foolish to turn it down.” “I shall try to produce something worthy of the occasion,” he wrote “whether this is a vain hope of course I cannot yet know. I have been very slow and indolent during the last two or three years and have only written one work – a violin concerto – during the last twelve months – And even so I don’t know yet whether it is good, bad, or indifferent!”⁴⁵ Vaughan Williams, however, had told Arthur Bliss that in his opinion “it was quite unnecessary to write fresh works” for the Fair, “since there were so many English works already in existence which had never been performed in America.”⁴⁶ In contrast, during April William Walton wrote to Arthur Bliss writing that the proposal suited him “admirably,” provided that “everything could be arranged.”⁴⁷ In his letter he explained that Jascha Heifetz (considered to be the greatest violinist of his time) had already commissioned a Violin Concerto from him, and that Heifetz would have to agree to its first performance “being under the auspices of the British Council,” expressing the opinion that Heifetz would probably agree as it would be “a good performance platform as he will ever get.” However, the terms of this arrangement were that Heifetz should have the right to be the sole performer for “a certain length of time” (this was to be two years). There were other considerations, too:

⁴⁴ TNA BW 2/128 – Cutting from the Zagreb newspaper *Vecer*, dated 9 December 1937

⁴⁵ TNA BW 2/136 (Music: Compositions Commissioned by the Council 1938-1942)

⁴⁶ TNA BW 80/1 – Minutes of the 10th meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee of 9 March 1938

⁴⁷ Letter from William Walton from Ravello, Italy, 22 April 1938 (Attachment No.1 to the minutes of the 12th meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee of 4 May 1938 – TNA BW 80/1)

I don't know if the British Council would insist on a British violinist appearing in New York, if so I am afraid it would dish the whole thing, or at any rate I should have to decide whether Heifetz or the British Council took it. But it is obvious that the best arrangement would be for the 'World Première' to be played by Heifetz under the auspices of the British Council.

Thus it seems that the difficulty of a foreign national playing a British work was first highlighted by the composer himself in the very first exchange of correspondence. He may have wished later that he had kept quiet, considering the furore that would develop later. By July 1938, Walton's publisher Hubert Foss at OUP was writing to Arthur Bliss for more information on the "exact final arrangements" as "the violin concerto is now very much in the process of writing." By the end of September committee secretary Pamela Henn-Collins reported that the first two movements of the Violin Concerto were in the USA with Heifetz though the "whereabouts of Mr. Walton were unknown."⁴⁸ On 14 October the committee chairman was writing to Walton at South Eaton Place:

As you can well imagine, the details of our plans for the New York World Fair [sic] require considerable time spent on them if the arrangements are to be satisfactory, and they are at present being held up chiefly by uncertainty as to the position regarding your Violin Concerto.

Walton telephoned his reply and wrote that he hoped to have the Concerto finished by the end of November, which was in good time for the concerts, due to be staged in New York the following June.

In October 1938, Pamela Henn-Collins laid out the financial plans for the World's Fair programme. Sending Scottish sword dancers, the band of Foden's Motor Works and the Vic Wells ballet under Constant Lambert could involve expenditure of over £6000.⁴⁹ Justifying the £2000 grant sought to send Adrian Boult and the BBC orchestra to New York, she wrote that "the successful performance of the new British works commissioned by the Council would be assured if they could be performed by a British orchestra under a British conductor."⁵⁰ In February, she expressed the concerns of the Committee as to the soloists who will perform at the World's Fair. The press had got wind that Solomon, who had already played the Bliss Piano

⁴⁸ TNA BW 80/1 – Minutes of the 15th Meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee – 22 September 1938

⁴⁹ Under the auspices of the Council, the Vic Wells Ballet Company had staged the first performance of Arthur Bliss' *Checkmate* at the Paris Exhibition of 1938.

⁵⁰ Internal memo of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council, 14 October 1938 – TNA BW 2/130

Concerto and had agreed to perform it, though this was not yet ratified, was Bliss's choice for playing the work.⁵¹ That Solomon was Jewish and William Walton's "A & B" choices for his violin concerto, Heifetz and Szigeti (Walton had suggested Joseph Szigeti in case of Heifetz's unavailability)⁵² were "foreigners" was the issue, the "British" nature of the concerts being thereby diluted.⁵³ Henn-Collins would have none of it. Solomon "is British born and bred," she wrote.

The Heifetz position was more complicated, as he had already commissioned the Walton concerto "subject to his liking it" before the British Council's offer to stage its première at the World's Fair was made. Walton now had to choose, favouring the British Council's offer but with Heifetz playing – a compromise to which the Music Committee readily agreed. However, the payment of £250 offered by the Council was too low for Heifetz and, furthermore, if the concert were to be broadcast, "He will not be able to play owing to a prior contract." Paying a foreign musician to play a new British work was likely to attract criticism but, on the other hand, there were no "English fiddlers" that could probably do the work justice and the concerto would "suffer considerably" as a result, affecting its reception in New York. Dr. Colles wrote to Lord Lloyd on 3 February 1939 explaining what the music committee was "out for": "We want to give at the World's Fair a practical exposition of the fact that British composers lead the world at the present day," but admitting that British soloists, unfortunately do not, and therefore the required demonstration would require "a certain amount of the foreign product" (i.e. Heifetz or Szigeti). For Lord Lloyd what was important was "British money for British products" and to counter this philistinism and attitude, Dr Colles used the analogy of using American weaponry in the "fight." "How far is the all-British doctrine to go?" he asked, citing the necessity of employing the New York Philharmonic should the BBC Orchestra be unable to travel and (heaven forbid) the violinist use a "British fiddle" ("He won't like that!"). Was the pianist also to take a British piano with him?! Dr Colles was obliged to take whatever decision Lord Lloyd was to make but welcomed questions in Parliament on the matter, because it would give him a chance to "cut it" in *The Times*. Whatever the decision, he assured the minister, even if it was to "cramp their style," the committee would loyally abide by it. An extraordinary meeting of the committee took place in March 1939 to discuss the Fair, which was now only three months away. Two concerts were required in order to perform the three new works planned. Significantly, Makower was to "endeavour to bring Mr. Walton to a more just sense of his duties to the Council." Trouble was afoot.

⁵¹ Solomon Cutner (1902-1988), British pianist known as Solomon, who was born in London's East End

⁵² TNA BW 80/1 – 19th meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee – 18 January 1939

⁵³ Internal memo of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council, 1 February 1939 – TNA BW 2/136

By the end of March, the matter had been settled – by the composer himself. Heifetz had contacted Walton in Italy saying that it was too late for the British Council proposal, but that he would like to have the concerto anyway, with exclusive rights for two years. It was important for the work to allow Heifetz, “the biggest fish in the ocean of violinists,” to play it – it meant “everything” to him. In fact, while excusing his “modesty,” Walton considered his “magnificent” concerto the greatest opportunity for British music propaganda since Kreisler first played the Elgar concerto. He suggested William Primrose, “one of the few British virtuosos” for a performance of his Viola Concerto as an alternative, the work having had no public performance as yet in America and just one studio broadcast. Walton’s full position was laid out in a letter to his publisher Hubert Foss at OUP, as well as to his friend Leslie Heward:

As you may have seen I’ve withdrawn my Concerto from the World’s Fair not as is stated because it’s unfinished⁵⁴ but because Heifetz can’t play on the date fixed (the B.C. only let him know about ten days ago!) Heifetz wants the concerto for two years and I would rather stick to him. But actually I’m afraid there is little to be said for either the British Council or myself, so keep this ‘under your hat’.⁵⁵

The saving of £350 (the original fee plus £100 for travel expenses) as well as the soloist’s fee would surely be welcomed, on the other hand, and Walton hoped that the Council would not lay all the blame at his door (“or will my works from now hence be permanently on the blacklist?” he enquired of the Council). A letter dated 9 February 1939 to Sir Adrian Boult at the BBC acknowledges that, of the three major works to receive their first performance, “Walton’s Violin Concerto is likely to be the most important, particularly in view of the fact that Heifetz will be the soloist.” This somewhat corroborates Walton’s argument. The work was written for Heifetz and he was the right soloist – there was no question that he would not play it. But the concerto, completed in New York on 2 June, was not to have its first performance until 7 December 1939. The outbreak of war prevented the composer from conducting the concert, which was given at the Severance Hall, Cleveland, Ohio, with Jascha Heifetz playing the solo part with the Cleveland Orchestra under conductor Artur Rodzinski.⁵⁶

Gramophone records of the original Cleveland performance given to Eugene Goossens were “lost in transit” as were Heifetz proofs of the score with his finger markings. Fortunately a

⁵⁴ The delay in completing the Violin Concerto mirrors a similar problem with the first Symphony, the final movement of which had taken the composer several years to complete.

⁵⁵ Letter from William Walton to Leslie Heward dated 28 March 1939, quoted in Walton, 1988:91

⁵⁶ Heifetz appears in a cameo role in the 1939 Hollywood production *Melody of Youth*, which was released in London in December.

photographed copy made in New York was dispatched safely to London for the first British performance, which, under the terms of the agreement between Heifetz and the composer, did not take place until two years later on 1 November 1941 with Henry Holst playing the solo part.⁵⁷ The work was scheduled for several provincial performances thereafter such as that on 22 December 1941 with Henry Holst again playing the solo part in a performance by the Wessex Philharmonic Orchestra in Bournemouth.

Vaughan Williams' contribution was also not without its difficulties. The German government in February had refused permission for a work of Vaughan Williams' (the *Norfolk Rhapsody No.1*) to be performed, probably as a result of the composer's sympathies with the Labour Party. In response, the Committee was concerned whether sending the BBC Chorus to the Baden-Baden festival later in the year was the appropriate response to what it considered "a direct insult to the composer."⁵⁸ As early as July 1938, Vaughan Williams had agreed to write "a short choral work" for the World's Fair, but because of the difficulty in procuring a suitable choir, he was to be approached again for "a short symphonic work with solo voice instead of a choral one."⁵⁹ By January 1939, Vaughan Williams was also holding things up and Henry Colles was tasked with extracting "any definite news" from him. Colles reported to Pamela Henn-Collins that the composer had sent him an answer "of which the whole point is in the postscript, but the postscript is marked 'strictly confidential' and 'not a word of this to the committee, please!'"⁶⁰ Refusing the committee's commission for a new work for the fair (his original position), on 6 March he had instead offered "a ten minute work for stringed orchestra with harp" which he was happy to place at the British Council's disposal for its first performance. The chairman of the committee wrote to Vaughan Williams on 27 March 1939 thanking him for the work, *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus*. "As you know," he wrote, "I am particularly anxious that Great Britain's musicians should be adequately represented at the fair and I am, therefore, delighted to think that a work by our leading composer will be given its first performance on this occasion." Vaughan Williams granted the work free of charge.⁶¹

⁵⁷ The first UK performance was heard in a "much heralded" broadcast of the Royal Philharmonic's concert at the Royal Albert Hall. However, the broadcast was faded out ten seconds before its end so that "Ration Racket" could begin on time (as a letter to *The Times* 4 November 1941 informs). Evidently there was much protest evoked by this incident, the practice of the BBC to read out the introduction to the work published in the *Radio Times* considered by at least one correspondent to *The Times* to be unnecessary. A letter of 9 January 1942 also to *The Times* bemoans the same treatment given to the Liszt Piano Sonata. It is unimaginable today that the premier broadcast of a major new work could be maltreated by the national broadcaster in this way.

⁵⁸ TNA BW 2/136 – Letter to Ernest Makower dated 9 February 1939

⁵⁹ TNA BW 80/1 – Minutes of the 14th meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee – 14 July 1938

⁶⁰ TNA BW 2/136 – Letter of January 1939 from H.C. Colles to Pamela Henn-Collins

⁶¹ TNA BW 2/136 – Letter from Ernest Makower to Vaughan Williams dated 27 March 1939

The commissioned works at this stage still included the Walton Violin Concerto. Arnold Bax had already completed his Seventh Symphony, needing just “another day’s work,” as early as January 1939. The Bliss Piano Concerto was to have its English debut at the proms in August and, already, the possibilities of recording it were discussed. However, HMV (The Gramophone Company) were reluctant to record any new English work because “the public response to our records of modern English composers to date has been so disappointing, that we could not contemplate further losses in this connection.”⁶² This response appears to have been the inspiration for a series of recordings commissioned by the committee beginning in 1942, Bliss’ Piano Concerto one of the first works to be tackled, its recording a natural progression. Rehearsal of the new works was to take place at the BBC’s Maida Vale studios on 16 May 1939. Arnold Bax was pleased with the rehearsal of his symphony: “I thought the orchestra read it extremely well,” he wrote on 24 May 1939.

The concerts took place in a sweltering New York in July 1939. Bliss’s Piano Concerto, Bax’s 7th Symphony, Vaughan Williams’ *Five Variants* and, instead of the Walton, a performance of Eugene Goossens’ Oboe Concerto was given by Sir Adrian Boult and the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall over two evenings, with other non-British works on the programmes. Solomon played the piano and Leon Goossens the oboe. In its review of the performances, and giving credit to the determination of the British Council, *The Times* acknowledged that the representation of British music at international exhibitions had, until the New York World’s Fair, been a matter of “frequent complaint.”⁶³ The heat wave in New York, according to the New York papers, “did not make for the best instrumental efficiency” but, more importantly, the point of the concerts was the music and the emphasis on this occasion was on musical works, rather than performance. For example, the Americans were more readily able to appreciate new music by Vaughan Williams “in the light of past experience” and the new work brought the *Tallis Fantasia* to mind for New York critics. The other music had a mixed reception: though not perhaps the greatest possible success, therefore, the concerts did go some way in achieving their aim.

Fifty-one meetings of the Music Committee took place between 1935 and 1945. After a slow beginning (four meetings in the first two years) the committee gained momentum and the 1939 New York World’s Fair was its first great achievement, despite the difficulties of procuring Walton’s concerto. There were, however, only two meetings between June 1939

⁶² TNA BW 2/136 – Letter to Pamela Henn-Collins, dated 11 July 1939 from Rex Palmer

⁶³ *The Times*, 29 July 1939

and October 1941 in what was obviously a time of great uncertainty. But by 1942, its work was re-established and the committee met regularly with no less than nine meetings taking place in 1943. In the following chapter I discuss its war-time work, which included a remarkable success in what was to become a lasting contribution to the work of British cultural propaganda.

Chapter Four

“Under the Auspices of the British Council” – the Music Committee during the War

It would be more in keeping with the spirit of these times to emphasise the England that is being fought for¹

At the final meeting of the Music Advisory Committee to take place before the war, a letter from British Council chairman Lord Lloyd was read in which he emphasised “the importance of musical propaganda” in Bucharest,² thus underlining the continued importance of cultural propaganda in the form of music in the activities of the British Council as a whole. A visit of the Welsh Choir to Germany, it was decided at the meeting, was not opportune, a letter from Rex Leeper of the Foreign Office dated 10 June 1939 was also read pointing out that there was a risk of the Choir’s “Nazi hosts” making use of the visitors “to further German separatist propaganda with regards to the British Isles.” The committee was also considering a series of concerts for the Balkans, and on 18 July 1939, the final proposal before the outbreak of War, discussions began over a proposed tour by Clifford Curzon to perform the Bliss Piano Concerto, which had just been premiered in New York.

Early War Years

As usual, the date of the next meeting was left “to the discretion of the Secretary,” Pamela Henn-Collins. In the event, the committee was not to meet again until February 1940. Another followed in March but it was not until eighteen months later that it was to meet again. The problem seems to have been in defining a role that the music committee could play effectively under the changed circumstances that the outbreak of war had brought. As early as January 1939, the British Council as a whole had been considering various preparations that War might call for, including activities which were of “immediate importance” and those which could not be abandoned. Music and drama were not considered of immediate importance, though both would “probably assume importance as the war goes on.”³ This indeed seems to have been the case. Immediately upon the outbreak of War, a list of the British Council’s activities “which should continue in neutral countries in war time” was circulated. They included “Students and

¹ Victor Hely-Hutchinson

² 23rd meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee, 27 June 1939 – TNA BW 80/1

³ TNA BW 2/363 – British Council Wartime Role 1939-1940

Prize Visits, Books and periodicals, Teaching (Institutes and schools), Societies, Lectures ('but strictly non-political'), Music, Fine Arts and Drama, with "activities of the Council which will presumably be taken over by the Ministry of Information, "Receptions, Press, Visual Propaganda, Films and Broadcasting."⁴ In a further memorandum designed to clarify roles and the demarcation between the Council and the Ministry of Information, a full exploration of each of the activities included one for music:

Foreign tours by concert artists will presumably cease; it seems a waste of public money to organise them at the moment, quite apart from travelling difficulties. I suggest, however, that supplies of gramophone records and music and the answering of miscellaneous musical inquiries should be continued as far as possible. We have built up with considerable effort a flourishing circle of musical contacts abroad, and there seems little point in letting them lapse of the still wish for material. The sum of money involved would probably be well under a maximum of £2,000 per annum.⁵

Naturally, given the uncertainty, it was difficult to decide what to do. The Council's executive committee was as conservative. At a meeting on 25 September 1939 it was decided that the Council's work with regard to music "should continue in so far as the distribution of records and manuscripts was concerned" only.⁶ Apart from the urgent concerns of the blitz, and the uninspiring nature of this continuing "work," the lack of activity on the council's music committee for the next two years was due to the increasing difficulty of reaching a quorum and the struggle to find something with which the committee could really engage. The first real business of the War concerned the request by Professor Leo Kestenberg, General Manager of the Palestine Orchestra, for a subsidy. In a letter to Professor Dent written in January 1940, he explained how the purpose of the orchestra was not only to perform music in the region but to provide "a means of livelihood for refugee musicians from central Europe who had been deprived of their posts by Nazi persecution."⁷ The letter deals with some of the orchestra's work, including the performance of British music. As Dr. Colles pointed out that "the orchestra had, from its inception, laid itself out to popularise British music in Palestine," and therefore "it should be treated on a different footing from orchestras in the Dominions."⁸

⁴ TNA BW 2/363 – internal British Council memorandum dated 5 September 1939

⁵ TNA BW 2/363 – "The British Council's Work in Wartime" – internal memorandum 14 September 1939 to the chairman of the British Council by Mr Croom-Johnson,

⁶ TNA BW 2/363 – minutes of the Executive Committee of the British Council – 25 September 1939

⁷ TNA BW 2/363 – letter dated 23 January 1940 to the British Council Music Advisory Committee

⁸ TNA BW 80/1 – minutes of the music committee's 24th meeting, 13 February 1940

But with the domestic situation now critical, the committee was effectively in limbo for over two years. More than eighteen months elapsed between the 25th meeting, held in March 1940 during the “phoney war” and the next, in October 1941, at which Sir Adrian Boult, representing the BBC, was present, and which seems to have been convened for one particular purpose only. On 29 September 1941 Vaughan Williams was asked for an arrangement of carols for male voice quartet to be broadcast in Iceland by HM Forces. The manuscripts were sent to Pamela Henn-Collins in October 1941 for twelve songs which were largely drawn from the Oxford Carol Book.⁹ Following a few revisions, all twelve arrangements were on their way to Reykjavik by 18 November 1941.

In March the following year a new march for the RAF was discussed. The existing march, written by recently-deceased committee member Sir Walford Davies and used by the air force since 1918 did not, in the opinion of the chairman Ernest Makower, “quite fit the bill.”¹⁰ The idea seems to have been for a competition for a new march, but this was revised as the RAF was satisfied with the present march but that a “general march” might be written instead. By now, the committee had reconvened and in early 1942 agreed to extend invitations to several eminent persons, among them Myra Hess (by then a Dame), the war having made it even more difficult for the meetings to reach a quorum (indeed, only the chairman, Ernst Makower, Professor Dent, H.C. Colles and Pamela Henn-Collins were present at the June 1939 meeting). But there was still some difficulty over what kind of activities the committee could effectively engage in. A proposed visit by the Red Army Choir, to be reciprocated by that of a visit by the Welsh Choir to Russia, was considered to be impractical owing to “transport difficulties” and the “military situation in Russia.” At the 27th meeting on 10 February 1942, the committee was “to consider the Council’s musical policy at home and its own relations with other departments concerning themselves with music,” as well as “a grant towards concerts for English music in Jerusalem.”

The minutes contain a report of various concert tours that had taken place between October and December 1941 in Spain, Portugal and Malta, as well as the presentation of music to Bermuda, Brazil, Jamaica, Japan (transferred to the British library in New York “owing to the international situation”),¹¹ Iceland, Peru, Portugal and Turkey. The committee seems however to have avoided the express use of British music as propaganda, but rather focussed on the

⁹ They were *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*, *As Joseph was A-walking*, *Mortal Man Remember Well*, *The First Nowell*, *The Lord at First*, *I Saw Three ships*, *The Coventry Carol*, *A Virgin Most Pure*, *The Truth Sent from Abroad*, *On Christmas Night* and *The Yorkshire Wassail*, and Vaughan Williams’ own *Dives and Lazarus*, which had been first performed at the New York World’s Fair.

¹⁰ TNA BW 2/136

¹¹ The US naval base at Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese forces on 7 December 1941

propagation of British music through concert tours and the like, as an indirect method of promoting British musical culture. Throughout the War its principal concerns remained the performance of British music in the Dominions, in South America and Europe, and the distribution of sheet music and recordings. The export of music to foreign countries did not, however, always meet with success, as a report in *The Times* of a consignment of British compositions in printed form to Russia in 1942 reveals. Contrary to expectations, there was no “immediate performance” of the works which had been dispatched at some considerable expense. It was to be hoped, however, that the “British Council’s buyings” would remain in Russia for future use.¹²

The difficulties of promoting British music abroad seemed to be in the material itself. “Some of our music, that which requires large orchestras and choirs, is as difficult to export as an English field of buttercups,” observed *The Times’* columnist. But it was not only a problem of logistics:

The cultured Englishman is frequently surprised to learn that any foreigner wants to know anything about this country’s music, because he wants so little of it, or troubles so little about it, himself. He thinks of it as something rather common, the buttercups or daisies of an English field. He prefers to cultivate his rock garden with plants from the Himalayas, the Andes, and wherever else rare rock plants are to be found. It is the function of the British Council to show other nations what are our common things among which we live.¹³

The Committee from 1942

Finding energy in 1942 to continue in this function, the music committee took up its remit with renewed vigour and invited a number of new members. Whereas only three had attended the final pre-war meeting, with just three meetings taking place in the three years to February 1942, the Committee embarked upon what is probably its most ambitious project, the results of which were to endure as its major lasting legacy. By April the composition of the committee had been beefed up to include Arthur Bliss, Sir Adrian Boult (representing the BBC), Dr H.C. Colles, Prof E.J. Dent, Dr. R. Vaughan Williams, Leslie Boosey, Lord Glentavar, Philip Godlee, Dame Myra Hess, Prof. Victor Hely-Hutchinson, J.A. Westrup with Pamela Henn-Collins continuing as Secretary.¹⁴ Victor Hely-Hutchinson (professor of music at Birmingham

¹² *The Times*, 1 May 1942

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The Times*, 9 April 1942 [1]

University, the music publisher Leslie Boosey and Myra Hess were all present at the next meeting on 10 March 1942, and by 12 May the committee was discussing the possibility of a film on British music, a “feasible scheme” the scenario for which seems to have been worked out by OUP’s Hubert Foss. Discussion around new ideas were an inevitable element of the new committee meetings, but there was also time to reflect on what the committee was “out for.” Victor Hely-Hutchinson lost no time in contributing. In May he wrote to Pamela Henn-Collins, informing her that he would not be able to attend the June or July meetings of the Music Committee because of other commitments, including one to attend a camp of the University Senior training Corps – “and I’m afraid there’s no getting out of that.” As one of the newer members, he was keen however to offer his perspective on the RAF march and the kind of music the Council should be considering for commission. His observations are key in understanding the emphasis that would become a hallmark of British music propaganda:

...whereas in the last war the thing to stress was the people who were fighting for England (the outlook of “The Spirit of England” is to a large extent military), it would be more in keeping with the spirit of these times to emphasise the England that is being fought for (i.e. the outlook should be rather pastoral and romantic).¹⁵

The composers with the credentials to undertake the commission were discussed at the previous meeting. Hely-Hutchinson considered Patrick Hadley¹⁶ as the best suggestion, “unless of course V-W would take it on.” Unlikely as that might be, and with Arthur Bliss perhaps too busy, as an alternative John Ireland might “produce something impressive and admirably effective,” but a “certain lack of humanity” in his recent works would be a defect in this case. With both Bax and Moeran too Celtic, Walton too angular and uncompromising, Lambert lacking bigness and Armstrong Gibbs lacking power, Hely-Hutchinson tentatively suggested the early works of Edmund Rubbra as having the “right thing.” What was the “right thing” here? Clearly something of the pastoral was required and in Hely-Hutchinson’s view of the difference between the kind of music required now, in contrast to that of the First World War, the composer, whoever it was to be, should also in his opinion be able to consult on the choice of poem that was to be set.

There was already much evidence of the “home” based spirit of England that was wanted during the Second World War. But what of the “military” outlook of the First? K.A. Wells’

¹⁵ Letter to Pamela Henn-Collins, secretary of the British Council’s Music Committee dated 29 May 1942 (TNA BW2/136)

¹⁶ Patrick Sheldon Hadley (1899-1973), British composer influenced by Frederick Delius and, to a certain extent by Folk Music. Like his contemporary E.J Moeran (see below), he was also influenced by the landscapes of Ireland and Norfolk.

“Music as War Propaganda” asks the question “Did music help win the First World War?” and provides a survey of the role popular music played in conveying messages of “fervour, pride, patriotism and action” by governments in their efforts to “gain manpower, homeland support, and funds.”¹⁷ Wells’ essay is concerned largely with American popular music of the earlier conflict and cites many specific examples of songs that were written to directly express patriotic sentiments or to inspire compliance and support for official policies, thus “serving as an effective propaganda tool for private citizens and governments” alike. The added dimension of lyrics which, together with melody and rhythm, enabled listeners to join together in groups for a shared experience, ensured that the message could be conveyed to people not used to reading, the largely emigrant – and non-English speaking – population of the US in the early twentieth century benefiting in particular. Naturally, the obvious type of musical propaganda is to be found in “patriotic songs, national anthems and military music” but, writes Wells, “Anti-government sentiments have also been effectively inserted into musical messages” and of course music has been used as a propaganda weapon against foreign governments: “During the summer of 1942, Hitler suggested that propaganda broadcasts aimed at Britain should contain musical styles that appealed to those audiences.” It is not known the effect “Churchill’s latest song,” set to the tune of *The Sheik of Araby*, had on British listeners:

I’m afraid of Germany, her planes are beating me.
At night, when I should sleep, into the Anderson I must creep.
Although I’m England’s leading man, I’m led to the cellar by ten.
A leader in the cellar each night, that’s the only damned way I can fight.¹⁸

But the British Council’s Music Committee was not concerned with popular media, preferring to concentrate on more serious music genres. In the light of Hely-Hutchinson’s distinctions, the Music Committee’s most ambitious project to date, which was to begin shortly, indeed focussed on a very particular kind of music, almost all of which reflected in some way the “rural outlook,” and emphasised again, the “Britain that was being fought for.” Given the restrictions placed upon its activities, a recording programme of British works for distribution to foreign missions seemed a natural solution. The first suggestion, the recording of a number of madrigals by, among others, William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons sung by the Fleet Street Choir, however, failed to materialise. Decca was to have undertaken the recordings, which were intended to illustrate a lecture on the Madrigalians. The project did not go at all well,

¹⁷ *Music as Propaganda in World War 1*, ParlorSongs.org, The Parlor Songs Association Inc., 2004, accessed 7 December 2009

¹⁸ Quoted in Morton, 2003

Pamela Henn-Collins suggesting that if nobody had written one yet, a madrigal beginning “Come Let us Cease our Wrangling Now,” they ought to have done.¹⁹

The Recording Programme

Because of the War the emphasis changed, with the recording programme the most obvious of the Council’s activities. Of course there were other activities too – visits of conductors to other countries (Sir Malcolm Sargent to Sweden in 1942 and Portugal in 1944, for example) and other reciprocal arrangements for foreign musicians – but it was the recording programme which provided its lasting legacy. After the false start with the Fleet Street Choir, the first draft list of proposed recordings was drawn up following the 32nd meeting, which was held on 8 September 1942. The proposals included E.J. Moeran’s first set of *Songs of Springtime* as well as his *Symphony in G Minor*, Arthur Bliss’s *Piano Concerto* (a British Council Commission), songs by Arnold Bax (“with the composer at the piano”), Howard Ferguson’s *Piano Sonata*²⁰ (with Dame Myra Hess), and John Ireland’s *London Overture. Belshazzar’s Feast* (William Walton) was also to be recorded when the BBC Choral Society “was once again in existence.” In addition, Hely-Hutchinson suggested three choral works – Parry’s *Blest Pair of Sirens*, Vaughan Williams’ *Towards the Unknown Region* and Britten’s *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, Op.27. Other suggestions included Rubbra’s *Third Symphony* and Alan Rawsthorne’s *Piano Concerto, The Dream of Gerontius* (Elgar), Arnold Bax’s *Garden of Fand* and Britten’s *Les Illuminations*.

By January 1943, the programme was in full swing, with the Walton and Bliss recorded in the first half of the month. The first release of these recordings, made “under the auspices of the British Council” for the promotion of British music culture, was Moeran’s *G Minor Symphony*. A popular work in its day, the symphony encapsulates all the values the British Council sought to promote. Having been performed by the Hallé Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent several times, it was to Manchester that Leslie Heward, who had conducted the first performance in 1938, went to conduct this new recording. In his contemporaneous essay on Moeran and the English tradition, Hubert Foss has remarked that in the early twentieth century, while Russian ballet music, in particular that of Igor Stravinsky, might “reveal new exotic charms” and while Schoenberg could “attract attention for the very unattractiveness of his intellectual sounds,” the new spirit of English composition was affected by “two quite separate elements,” folksong and the ancient music of a bygone era. “The greater part of the work was carried out among

¹⁹ Letter dated 20 July 1942 (TNA BW2/172). The madrigals were eventually recorded by the Cambridge University Madrigal Society in 1946.

²⁰ Howard Ferguson (1908-1999). British Composer chiefly remembered for his Op.8 *Piano Sonata*.

the mountains and seaboard of County Kerry, but the material of the second movement was conceived around the sand-dunes and marshes of east Norfolk.”²¹

Not having yet had the opportunity to hear the work often enough to make a full assessment, Foss could nevertheless recognise in Moeran’s Symphony, as in all his music, “a touching quality which defies analysis. It has the human tenderness of the country people, and a sense of the long endurance of the countryside.” The British Council’s recording, released just a year after the publication of Foss’s article would have given him a permanent opportunity to assimilate the music, which he called “as English as this land.”²² Geoffrey Self writes of the presence of County Kerry in the work that “By the middle years of his life, Kerry had become as necessary to him as Norfolk had been in his early years.”²³ A native of Norfolk, he had been an ardent collector of its folk songs. The explanation for its selection as the first British Council recording was the “growing public interest” in the work, in which “Moeran emerged in full maturity as a composer able to work on a large scale, and thereafter much of his work was in the larger forms. His progress was matched by growing public interest, coming to a peak, perhaps during the 1939-1945 War (although it must be allowed that most British composers benefited from understandable patriotism during the war.)”²⁴ The attention afforded the work by the British Council’s recording by no means did the work any harm: “Although critical reactions were mixed, the Symphony prompted much discussion and made an impression – Moeran, at the age of 44, had scored his first major success. It was the first symphony to be recorded under the auspices of the British Council, and [in 1940] *The Music Review* published an extended analysis by Heathcote Statham.”²⁵ The symphony’s chief influence is Sibelius. Said Sir Arnold Bax at the time of its debut, “I well remember his perturbation when I pointed out that a passage in his symphony bore a remarkable resemblance to the famous whirlwind in *Tapiola*.”²⁶ It is this aspect of the work that connects it to another in the programme.²⁷ At the May 1943 meeting, it was agreed to record Bax’s Third Symphony, Vaughan Williams’ *Flos Campi* and the Elgar, but by September the committee seems to have made little progress. But

²¹ 1943 sleeve notes which accompanied the British Council recording, written by the composer himself.

²² Foss, 1940

²³ Self, 1986: 102. Geoffrey Self’s 1982 M.Phil. Thesis on E.J. Moeran is in the library of Exeter University, where he studied at the Music Department.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 91-2

²⁵ *Ibid.* 106

²⁶ Sleeve notes from the original recording

²⁷ Vaughan Williams’ 5th Symphony, dedicated “without permission” to Jean Sibelius. In contrast to the Moeran symphony, however, rather than detecting a direct influence on composition, for Hubert Foss the “sole point of resemblance between the Finn and the Englishman [i.e. Vaughan Williams] is that each of them has, in his own way, by the process of devising from within his own mind a new symphonic method for each major conception” (Foss, 1950: 146).

on 12 October, the committee was informed that the Hallé Orchestra had agreed to record the Bax for the sum of £650 and that Vaughan Williams' new symphony "should be recorded in place of *Flos Campi*."²⁸

The success of the recording programme had solicited a number of letters to the committee with suggestions for all kinds of amateur works. Some of the suggestions were acted upon (like the *Hymn of Jesus*) and taken seriously. Others were considered, but like Ireland's *These Things Shall Be*, were rejected. These included Frank Bridge's *Suite for the Sea* (also rejected) and many other British works. However, in June 1943 a London correspondent wrote to Pamela Henn-Collins suggesting the new Vaughan Williams symphony, which had received its first performance the previous Thursday at the proms on 24 June 1943. Henn-Collins replied that a note had been made of his suggestion, and eventually the new symphony was to replace the original Vaughan Williams work on the list (*Flos Campi*).²⁹ A further correspondent to the British Council wrote early in the following year asking whether it had considered recording the work. His motivation for the suggestion was that "It is probably true to say that this work was as highly thought of upon its first appearance last year as any English symphony since Elgar." A "quiet and meditative" work, the symphony was ideal for recording: "I am speaking for a number of musicians and purchasers of gramophone records when I make this suggestion," the correspondent wrote, pointing out that the vast space of the Albert Hall was hardly the ideal place to really hear this contemplative work.³⁰

Pamela Henn-Collins wrote to Vaughan Williams on 22 October 1943 enclosing the minutes of the Music Committee's meeting at which it was decided to record his new symphony instead of *Flos Campi*. This decision seemed to have been inspired by the Southgate correspondent: "We know that there is a very great interest in this symphony," she wrote. "Since you have been good enough to join the Committee, [we] would much like the Council to have the honour of recording this work." As Vaughan Williams was likely to be inundated with correspondence, unless the committee heard otherwise, she continued, it would go ahead with what was to become the symphony's premier recording.³¹ Writing again to the

²⁸ TNA BW 80/1 – Minutes of the 42nd Meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee held on 12 October 1943

²⁹ TNA BW2/170 – "Records Made Under the Auspices of the British Council" 1943-1945 – Letter to Pamela Henn-Collins dated 28 June 1943 from H.L. Morris of 64 Crown Lane, Southgate, London N.14,

³⁰ TNA BW 2/176 – Letter to the British Council dated 6 March 1944 from RR Hopkins of Harpenden, Herts.

³¹ The composer was engaged at the time with *Thanksgiving for Victory* (to be renamed *A Song of Thanksgiving* in 1952). "The music is beginning to shape itself around the words," he wrote to Revd. John W. Welch at the BBC (Cobbe, 2008: 363, letter #420). His concern was "not to let the anthem develop into a sermon – that is the business of the preacher, not the singer." The words to the anthem,

composer in January 1944, Pamela Henn-Collins expressed her personal excitement at the prospect of the forthcoming recording session of the symphony, which was to take place in Manchester under John Barbirolli on 15 and 17 February: "I think it is very good of you to allow us the honour of recording this work," she wrote.³² Barbirolli was delighted with the resulting recordings as a letter to Henn-Collins dated 2 March from Walter Legge at the Gramophone Company (HMV) reveals. It now remained for Vaughan Williams to approve of the recording and a session at the Abbey Road studios for Wednesday 8 March was arranged accordingly. Copies of the recording were despatched during May 1944 to the composer, Henn-Collins, Ernest Makower, Philip Godlee at Vaughan Williams' publisher at the Oxford University Press and to John Barbirolli. Godlee wrote to thank Pamela Henn-Collins for the records. "My elder son and I have derived great pleasure from Bax III [i.e. the records of Bax's 3rd Symphony] and I know this other symphony will be a valuable possession too."³³

Godlee was by this time a committee member himself but transport problems prevented him from attending meetings regularly. "From the Hallé point of view," he wrote, "and from a much wider angle I do value my association with your Council and feel so keenly that in the post-war years there is quite unlimited possibility of progress towards getting music more where it ought to be in our national scheme of things, and that is a crusade in which the British Council will play an important part."³⁴ In June, Pamela Henn-Collins wrote to the editor of *Sound* to thank him for the "extremely nice notice" in the June issue which described the Council's recording activities, particularly the Vaughan Williams which had just been released by HMV:

...these recorded performances of British works for the purpose of spreading music abroad (and, fortunately, there is still a good deal of the world in receptive frame of mind) besides satisfying our own desire to hear it, has undoubtedly been a most successful process.³⁵

Despite criticism from a newspaper "that used to be musically reliable," that the choice of recordings was unambitious, the author wrote that the Council had chosen skilfully: "Moeran, Walton, Bliss, Bax – and now Vaughan Williams, one of the most splendid Englishmen of them all." He is unreserved in his praise for the recording of the latter's Fifth Symphony: "From the

some of which he wanted to be familiar so that they could be heard "over the wireless" were taken from Henry V and adapted from Chronicles and Isaiah Chapters 60-62.

³² TNA BW 2/176 – Letter from Pamela Henn-Collins to Vaughan Williams dated 13 January 1944

³³ TNA BW 2/176 – Letter from Philip Godlee to Pamela Henn-Collins dated 5 June 1944.

³⁴ Ibid. Everyone knew that it was a matter of time before the war ended, hence the free talk of "post-war."

³⁵ TNA BW 2/176 – Letter from Pamela Henn-Collins to the editor of *Sound* dated 22 June 1944

very beginning, to the last side of recapitulation of thought, I discovered not a dull moment or unnecessary phrase.”³⁶ The *Gramophone* magazine praised the British Council for its continuing good work with the release of its “latest godchild,” the Vaughan Williams recording: “I should call this symphony a more typical expression of English music than anything the British Council has sponsored so far,” reads its July 1944 editorial. “Curiously enough I started to play it just as these idiotic Germans were beginning to show off their latest Nuremberg toy and the contrast between the serene music and the minds of those sinister lunatics was plenary in its assurance of ultimate peace.” Finding an affinity with the “beguiling” mood of some of Delius’s chamber music, the editor writes:

By the time these words are in print the pilotless planes may have ceased to be a nuisance, but if they are still about I can imagine no better mental antidote than Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony and Delius's Third Violin Sonata. The music is as completely languorous and restful as any even Delius ever wrote and it is guaranteed to make Southern England when attacked by pilotless planes seem a "murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves."³⁷

What is the significance of Vaughan Williams’ Fifth Symphony? Considered by many to be the heart of his orchestral output, it marks a pastoral midpoint, but was written during the bloodiest War in history. I have covered the response to its immediate reception above. Like the Moeran work, this symphony, too, surely benefited from an early recording “under the auspices” of the British Council. Later commentators and critics had the benefit of hindsight. “Public appreciation of the D major was more immediate than that of perhaps any other single work,” wrote Hubert Foss in 1950. “The circumstances of time and place can be partly discounted – the fact of the composer’s age, the availability of music through radio, the contrast of the music’s peace with the noise of war.”³⁸ Its spiritual context is broadly Christian, like Vaughan Williams’ own agnosticism, and is a broad expression of the Christian Civilization for which the allies were fighting. Writes Hugh Ottoway, “the Fifth [Symphony] is the climax of Vaughan Williams’ development in one particular direction, the ultimate expression of his modal lyricism – and of the traditional (religious) responses inherent in that lyricism.”³⁹ Thus, the musical mode is itself religious: the spirituality is in the music itself, its raw material in the

³⁶ TNA BW 2/176 – extract from *Sound* (Sound Wave Illustrated), June 1944, “British Council Activity” under the section “Music and Records” reviewed by Russel Palmer

³⁷ *Gramophone* magazine, July 1944, editorial (p.11). The “pilotless planes” are of course the V1 rockets – or “doodle bugs” – that began to rain on the southern counties during the summer of 1944

³⁸ Foss, 1950: 144

³⁹ Ottoway, 1971: 35

folk-song tradition on which he drew so often. “Vaughan Williams elevated their [i.e. the traditional folksong melodies’] simple, direct catchphrases into a full-scale symphonic language, one that mistily describes an idealised, abstract, timeless England. No symphony, by him or anyone else, does this better than the Fifth.”⁴⁰

As we have seen, the British Council’s contribution to the New York World’s Fair in 1939, Vaughan Williams had offered *Dives and Lazarus*, also a working of ancient folk song. This, and other compositions of the War years are markedly peaceful – some have commented on the influence his growing affection for Ursula Wood had had on his life, but also could surely be the result of a drawing from the well of spirituality deep within him, a response to the awfulness of the world crisis that was playing out. The timelessness evoked in Vaughan Williams’ music has been commented upon by Peter Ackroyd. In his book on the origins of the English imagination, Ackroyd writes that, in particular, Vaughan Williams’ *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* embraces “present and past time,” and represents a musical form which he calls English antiquarianism. George Meredith’s words “Silver chains of sound, of many links without a break,” the inscription on the score of *The Lark Ascending* refers, writes Ackroyd, to the “unbroken chain” of English music.⁴¹

The material shared between Vaughan Williams’ “Morality,” *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and the symphony, writes Michael Kennedy, “occurs in the first, third and fourth movements but the treatment is different. At the heart of the Fifth – and thus the heart of all Vaughan Williams’ music – are John Bunyan’s words, which are inscribed in the score: “Upon this place stood a cross, and a little below a sepulchre.” The most obvious dramatic quotation, writes Michael Kennedy, occurs at the beginning of the *Romanza* when the cor anglais has the theme which in the opera (Act 1, Scene 2) is sung to the words ‘He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death’.”⁴² It is among the most profound of musical expressions found in any symphony. It is worth quoting Hubert Foss’ summary of the work’s meaning in full:

The D major Symphony is in every way different from the recent war in Europe. It is democratic, universal, in its attitude to mankind; it is slow, contemplative, kindly, and philosophical in outlook. There is never an attempt to dominate – to bowl you first ball, or to win five miles’ territory of your thought by *Blitzkrieg*. The philosophy persuades, as the philosophy of a wise thinker of experience in life. We lack no evidence of struggle, but the

⁴⁰ BBC Music Magazine Vol.16 #11

⁴¹ Ackroyd, 2002: 440

⁴² Preface by Michael Kennedy to OUP’s Study Score in Horton (ed.), 2009

victory is, in the main, that of soul over materialism. The thinker takes us by the hand and leads us – willing travellers – over the rougher places to a valley where we can contemplate, in a blessed silence, both the wisdom of the ages and the folly of brutality in war-sought ambition. We meet no pacifism nor Communism nor any other ‘ism.’ We meet only the wisdom of religion, of the Bible, of John Bunyan.⁴³

Drawing on Bunyan and a particularly English spirituality, this was not the last time that the work of the 17th century author was to be deployed in the furtherance of British values during the War, if not necessarily an expression of an idealized conservative – Christian – past, then, at least a liberal view of a future in which Vaughan Williams’ believed.

Though the British Council was not necessarily elitist or deaf to the suggestions of ordinary people, its concern was for works of great national importance that included the towering achievement of Vaughan Williams’ Fifth. In June 1943 Vaughan Williams urged Elizabeth Maconchy to write in suggesting a recording of one of her “most characteristic works” (in the composer’s words), her fourth string quartet.⁴⁴ The suggestion was turned down. The committee did sometimes have to field bizarre requests for music to be included in its recording programme. In October 1943 Horace Shepherd of Inspiration Pictures had written to the Council requesting the consideration of his *Invincible City* and a concert overture, *Crusade of Empire* in the Music Committee’s programme of recording. *Invincible City*, an orchestral suite with London in wartime as its subject, consisted of four parts: “In the Shelter,” “Child’s Shoe in the Debris,” “Taxi in the Blackout” and “The Cross of St. Paul’s.”

Horace Shepherd (“Mus. Bac.”) was writing from his office at Inspiration Pictures, Wardour Street. Composer of the music for *Hatter’s Castle* (1942) (a success, according to Mr. N. Kearney, now also on the music committee) was “extremely keen upon helping the national cause.”⁴⁵ His original letter to the council, having met Kearney, claimed that during the previous few years “no significant contribution to British music has been forthcoming” and the

⁴³ Foss, 1950: 145

⁴⁴ TNA BW 2/171

⁴⁵ Horace Shepherd (1892-1960) directed a dozen films, many of which had a musical theme e.g. *Life is Nothing Without Music* (1947), *Harry Parry and his Radio Rhythm Club Septet* (1943) and *Swingometry* (1943), a 17-minute short featuring Harry Parry’s dance band and singer Shirley Lenner. He composed for five of his films, including *The Great Gay Road* (1931) and *Nudist Paradise* (1959). An early interest was a film called *The Television Follies*, a silent short made in 1933 by English Films, in which he was musical director. *The Immortal Brush* (1938), *Romance in Colour* (1939) and *The Master’s Touch* (1939) (the latter two known in the U.S. as *The Immortal Brush* Nos. 2 & 3 respectively) were documentaries (in Technicolor) on painting. *Hatter’s Castle*, the 1931 novel by A.J. Cronin which tells the story of the Tay Bridge disaster, was adapted by Lance Comfort in 1941/2 with Robert Newton, Deborah Kerr and James Mason. Horace Shepherd scored it.

“momentous wealth of drama, energy and devotion had apparently remained inarticulate.” To rectify this glaring omission he suggested that two of his “latest musical works, which may prove useful in this respect, (apart perhaps from some National significance) – with a view to sponsor recordings of same,” may be worthy of consideration. Kearney had known Shepherd “for some considerable time” and believed him “to have considerable musical ability as a composer,” but in view of the works whose recording was eventually commissioned by the Committee for overseas distribution to Broadcasters and for home sales, his concert works were hardly tuned in to the Council’s work.

The sentiments expressed in the titles of the music can hardly have attracted the committee’s interest and seem entirely out-of-synch with the opinions of Hely-Hutchinson, the practice of other serious composers and of official bodies such as the BBC and the Government itself (whose instruction for new Choral music stressed the exclusion of the word “England,” an indication of the preference for indirect references.) Shepherd’s motives were, however, in keeping with the official line: “As music is a suitable medium for world-wide propaganda being unrestricted by any foreign tongue, and constituting a language understood and known by all.” As no recording of those works seemed to have ever been made, it is impossible to judge their musical distinction. Clearly irritated by the Council’s rejection of his invitation the disgruntled composer complained that the rejection was based on the assumption “that there can be no worthy British music outside the work of members of the Committee themselves or their associates.” His “rather rude” letter of complaint, to which a footnote was added by way of commentary by a member of the committee that it was a pity the Council’s letter of decline was “deliberately misinterpreted.” “Let him now lie in his bed,” is the remark.⁴⁶

From 1943 the recording of music became the committee’s main preoccupation to universal acclaim. Commenting on the Finnish government’s sponsorship of the recording of Sibelius’s first and second symphonies, the *Gramophone* magazine talks of the “extreme of improbability the likelihood of any such a gesture being made on behalf of a British composer by the British Government.”⁴⁷ However, in the British Council’s release of the Moeran symphony, the “miracle” had happened. Bax’s third Symphony was eventually recorded on 31 December 1943 – and the committee secretary Pamela Henn-Collins reported at the 44th meeting on 11 January 1944 that she “had heard the records made,” recommending the re-recording of the second movement which was not “up to standard” – but by the time the minutes were prepared and distributed, the entire recording was now satisfactory. Vaughan Williams’ Fifth

⁴⁶ TNA BW 2/170

⁴⁷ *Gramophone*, March 1943, p.3

was to be the next project and the third work for 1944, following a number of requests to record it, was Gustav Holst's *Hymn of Jesus*. The committee agreed that Malcolm Sargent was to be approached to conduct. By the following year J.A. Westrup was already highlighting the achievement of the programme in the August 1944 issue of the *Musical Times*: Were it not for those "auspices," he wrote, "most people realize that the chances of being able to play *Belshazzar's Feast* or Vaughan Williams' fifth symphony in their own homes would have been slight,"⁴⁸ a useful observation, given that by this time the author was a committee member:

The aim [of foreign concert tours] has been not merely to choose the best performers but also to ensure that those who are sent will most effectively serve as ambassadors of English culture;" calling this propaganda but saying "there is nothing odious in the term."⁴⁹

A performance took place in Cairo "just before the Alamein offensive" of the Messiah with the co-operation of the Council. And the recordings, he reminds us, begun in 1942 were "of music which for commercial reasons did not figure in the ordinary catalogues," but which were "to some extent a consequence of the war, which made it impossible to give 'live' performances on the same scale as in the past."⁵⁰ The release of the recording of *Belshazzar's Feast* was to Yehudi Menuhin's mind "sound judgment. Writing the editorial for the Gramophone magazine's June 1943 edition, Menuhin considered the work worthy "to represent the national spirit," and makes a keen observation in doing so. The encouragement by Stalin of the composition of works by Russian composers showed that it was clear that the Marshall "attaches more importance to music than our own generally Philistine Chancellor of the Exchequer." The point of the recordings, after all, was to disseminate as widely as possible music that could convey the national spirit in some way. Of course the recordings could only be distributed to the allies and to neutral states. "I will hazard that Walton's music will convey to our Russian allies much more of the spirit of Britain than all the wordy propaganda put together," wrote Menuhin. "I only wish Hitler could hear *Belshazzar's Feast*, and I should like Tojo⁵¹ to hear it; but I doubt whether it would have much effect on Mussolini, who is still living in the world of Leoncavallo." Menuhin is tempted to discover a kinship between the civilization depicted in the work and that of Nazi Germany, finding it in at least one aspect:

Still, *Belshazzar's Feast* does express one mood most welcome to us at the moment, and that is the exaltation in the sudden collapse of a tyrant. I doubt

⁴⁸ Westrup, August 1944: 236

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 236

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 237

⁵¹ Japanese Prime Minister

if any listener will hearken to [soloist] Dennis Noble's superb MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN without thinking of Hitler, though it is an undignified comparison for the wretched Belshazzar.⁵²

Another large-scale work that benefited from the British Council's efforts was Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, which was eventually recorded on 7 and 8 April 1945 by the Liverpool Philharmonic and the Huddersfield Choral Society under Sir Malcolm Sargent. Advertisements for the records accrediting the British Council appeared in the press. The Council were the "sponsors," and received universal acclaim for their efforts. The programme was clearly showing signs of success. The Bliss had sold 11,240 copies to June 1945, the Bax 8,021 and the Vaughan Williams 9,467. The latter's opinion was sought, along with those of several others, for a list of possible works to be recorded for what was eventually to form the Cambridge madrigalists' programme, which had been the Committee's first idea. His reply was, simply: "Dear Miss Henn Collins, The list of Byrd and Purcell etc. records seem to me very good. Yours sincerely, R Vaughan Williams, August 13 1944, The White Gates." Vaughan Williams also wrote and suggested John Ireland's "These Things Shall Be" which, having heard it several times, he concluded it was a *fine* work.⁵³ Henn-Collins replied that the "work had been up for consideration before, but was put off for other things which, for various reasons at the time, seemed to have greater priority." She appears to be referring to Adrian Boult's letter of August 1943 in which he writes:

I believe this has all been most carefully discussed, but our performance on Saturday, the 31st of "These Things Shall Be" reminded me that this work of John Ireland's is unquestioningly one of the most significant works that has been produced this century, and I do feel it ought to be recorded.⁵⁴

In the event, Holst's *The Planets* was to be the final war-time project, but the programme did not cease at the end of hostilities. Mooted in January 1945, Constant Lambert conducted the recording of Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, which took place in July with Joan Hammond and Isobel Baillie. Lambert considered the recording week "most enjoyable" and "worthwhile." New proposals in 1946, revealed in a letter from HMV to the Music Committee included the album of madrigals by the Cambridge University Madrigal Society, with Boris Ord directing, Alan Rawsthorne's *Symphonic Studies*, with the Philharmonia under Constant Lambert, the Rubbra Violin Sonata, with Albert Sammons and Gerald Moore.⁵⁵ Rubbra himself had written

⁵² *Gramophone*, June 1943 (editorial), p.5

⁵³ Emphasis Vaughan Williams', letter dated 3 November 1944

⁵⁴ TNA BW2/170 – "Records Made Under the Auspices of the British Council" 1943-1945

⁵⁵ TNA BW2/171 – letter from HMV to the British Council dated 25 March 1946

to the Council on 25 April 1945 enquiring as to which of *his* symphonies might get some attention.

Co-operation with the BBC

Kenneth Wright of the BBC had also written to Pamela Henn-Collins on 26 June 1944 listing a number of suggestions for the programme, including works of “allied composers” and “some excellent “Dominion music” such as New Zealander Hubert Clifford’s String Serenade and Symphony, as well as africaans [sic] composer Arnold van Wyk’s symphony. He also mentions “some very good excerpts from recent Ministry of Information films” though he doesn’t mention which. The letter, which reflects the growing optimism that the War was reaching its climax, ends on a personal note:

Between ourselves, I sincerely hope that even if Germany does crack up, as we all pray it will, before the end of the year, that this prospectus will nevertheless go forward from the point of view of the future projection of British music, and is a practical form of demonstrating friendship for our Allies, many of whom have longed for years to have such works as I have included, by their own composers, in the form of permanent recordings at least to be heard over their own radios.

The principal works he had in mind were listed in a supplement. Most were of short duration but many composers were represented (including the BBC’s commissioned work *Bredon Hill* by Julius Harrison). None of the works were included, however, in the final programme. Among the suggestions were Bax’s *The Garden of Fand* and Holst’s *The Perfect Fool* and *Somerset Rhapsody*. The range of music reflected a wide choice from all corners of the British Isles by 17 composers. Similarly, Decca provided the Council with a “List of British Works Suitable for Recording in Conjunction with the British Council,” commercially unviable works that it felt should nevertheless be recorded.⁵⁶ Common to both lists was *The Perfect Fool*; the Decca list contained more substantial works, but also from a wide range of British composers.

Cooperation between the Music Advisory Committee and the BBC, by now firmly established, had begun rather precariously. The relationship between Pamela-Henn Collins and the BBC begins in July 1937 with a meeting between British Council Secretary General Charles Bridge and Kenneth Wright (assistant director of music at the BBC). After their first meeting Bridge was able to report that Kenneth Wright was “immensely keen” on spreading British music

⁵⁶ TNA BW 2/171 – Letter from Decca to the British Council dated 14 September 1945

abroad. Having already done some work, he was “anxious to co-operate” with the British Council. Given the lack of funds at the Council, it was felt the BBC could take over the role of sending conductors abroad. On a personal note, Charles Bridge, who had been scouting for a new young committee member, expressed his impression of Kenneth Wright (“a very clever man at his job”) and wondered if he was the right man to join the Music Advisory Committee.⁵⁷ Pamela Henn-Collins followed up this initial lunchtime meeting between the two men with a telephone call on 23 September 1937. She was able to report back on a number of activities that were due to take place under the BBC’s care for the following month, including concerts arranged in Stockholm and Athens. What was of particular interest was the performance of English music by Bax, Elgar, Walton, Ireland, Vaughan Williams, Goossens and Bridge. In New York, a performance of British music at a festival usually devoted to American works was planned.

Pamela Henn Collins was able to report to the Secretary General on 3 November that the Music Committee chairman, Ernest Makower had heard Adrian Boult’s opinion, that the Council, “being an official body, should be responsible for all British music and musicians sent abroad and should ask the BBC to assist them in their plans when necessary.”⁵⁸ Whether this would become the official position would be discussed at the next committee meeting. In the event the committee decided to adopt a policy in accordance with the wishes of British Council chairman Lord Lloyd. Attending the first part of the meeting on 24 November, he said that “while he was anxious to keep on friendly terms with the BBC,” he was equally anxious to do nothing that could possibly make the British Council (which was, after all, in its infancy and still establishing itself) a satellite of the BBC, and after some discussion it was decided that the Council would agree to a three-monthly interchange of information with the BBC and the Incorporated Society of Musicians, but that while ready to attend a special meeting should the need arise, “they could not see that any object would be gained by regular quarterly discussions.”⁵⁹

Especially where high costs were involved, however, co-operation between the two bodies was subsequently shown to be a two-way affair. Rex Leeper of the Foreign Office wrote to Lord Lloyd in the June of the following year in response to a request from the BBC for funds to enable the BBC to send its orchestra to Italy in 1939, as the BBC “could not properly be expected to bear the whole of the expense.” Favouring the “maximum possible co-operation” between the Council and the BBC as in the national interest, he suggested paying half the

⁵⁷ Memorandum from Charles Bridge to Pamela Henn-Collins dated 28 July 1937 – TNA BW 2/130

⁵⁸ Memorandum from Pamela Henn-Collins dated 3 November 1937 – TNA BW 2/130

⁵⁹ Minutes of the 8th meeting of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council held on 24 November 1937 – TNA BW 80/1

expenses. Charles Bridge added a note to the letter that as these expenses were likely to be £2000, it was not necessarily good value for the Council's music activities as the BBC was likely "to get all the publicity, despite any precautions we may take to the contrary."⁶⁰

The Music Committee's draft response was that it had agreed unanimously not to recommend subsidising the expenses, citing the original terms under which the committee was established, which included the proviso that it was not to fund the ventures of other bodies, but be responsible solely for its own activities. Furthermore, breaking this rule would set a precedent (presumably an unwelcome one) and, as Charles Bridge had pointed out, that publicity for the British Council would be "nil," with the BBC "swamping" the "propaganda value."

However, committee member Mr. Johnstone personally felt that rather than promoting itself, the purpose of the Music Committee was not to engage in propaganda for itself, but for British music abroad: "It does not, in the last resort, matter whether our name is attached to the venture or not," he added. What was important was whether the Council's financial assistance should have the desired effect. "The Committee's 'rigid rule'," he continued, "makes it impossible for us in certain cases to help out at little expense to ourselves a good piece of work projected by someone else." It was important to keep relations with the BBC in good standing and he suggested that it was therefore wise for the Council to overrule its own Music Committee on this occasion so that the BBC orchestra could go to Italy as planned.

Henn-Collins agreed, though she pointed out that its intention to send the Student's Orchestra from the Academy of Music also to Italy in early 1939 as well as the request for a separate grant of £2000 for the New York World's Fair in the same year underlined the perception that the Committee already has a "reputation for extravagance." If the BBC venture could therefore be seen as one of the Council as a whole, the Music Committee's professional pride could be saved "since the decision would rest on other than musical grounds."⁶¹ This was in sharp contrast to the committee's response to Sir Thomas Beecham's request for assistance for a tour to Greece. In early 1939, a meeting between the BBC and the Incorporated Society of Musicians on British music abroad was to take place at Broadcasting House. Kenneth Wright was keen to have a representative of the British Council Music Advisory Committee present to give an account of its activities with regard to promoting British music abroad. Sir Thomas Beecham was also to be present. Wright warned Henn-Collins that he had got the impression that Beecham was annoyed at the Council over his proposed visit to Athens and that, "in consequence, fears that Sir Thomas may take the opportunity to make himself unpleasant."

⁶⁰ Letter dated 10 June 1938 to Lord Lloyd from Rex Leeper – TNA BW 2/130

⁶¹ Internal memo of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council, 20 July 1938 – TNA BW 2/130

Pamela Henn-Collins did not therefore wish to go to the meeting alone, and the advice of Charles Bridge was to find a way to “mitigate Beecham’s wrath before the meeting.”⁶² By May 1939, relations between the two organisations was formalised with Sir Adrian Boult, representing the BBC, attending his first Music Advisory Committee meeting. He was able to report that the BBC was “very impressed” with its work, the committee’s activities now regularly reported on at quarterly intervals.⁶³

Thus the British Council, the BBC and the Incorporated Society of Musicians at least began to share information. The annual conference of the Incorporated Society of Musicians discussed the position of British music abroad in early January 1939. Concerned mainly with the payment of performing rights fees, Sir Thomas Beecham, in the chair, also gave a summary of attitudes shown in continental Europe towards British music. France, he said, was looked upon as a hopeless case, though there might be some consolation in that the French “did not like the great part of their own music” either.⁶⁴ (There is a significant lack of French destinations in all the British Council Music Committees’ itineraries.) However, statistics revealed that for the rest of Europe the performance of British music was on the “up-grade,” apart from in Germany, that is, where the view was consistently held that there was no music apart from German music, except perhaps a little Italian opera. A correspondent to *The Times*, Herbert Bedford, of the *Conseil Permanent pour la Cooperation Internationale des Compositeurs*, pointed out, however, that in his role of sending British works guaranteed of success, British music, “when announced” is thoroughly appreciated in Germany and that the work of the British Council in the few years since its existence had done much to promote the work of British musicians.⁶⁵

The first meeting of the joint committee in November 1937 on British music abroad had given each body the chance to explain its work. Ernest Makower explained that the British Council’s Music Advisory Committee “was concerned solely with the export of British music and artists abroad,” though unlike the Incorporated Society of Musicians, “not with any sense of reciprocity.” Kenneth Wright expressed the BBC’s recognition of its “moral responsibility to encourage as far as practicable the performance of British music abroad.” In line with the British Council’s wishes, it was agreed that a quarterly exchange of information should take place between the three bodies, with Makower reserving the right to commit himself to

⁶² Internal memo of the Music Advisory Committee of the British Council, 30 December 1938 – TNA BW 2/130

⁶³ Minutes of the 22nd meeting of the British Council Music Advisory Committee, 24 May 1939 – TNA BW 80/1

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 6 January 1939

⁶⁵ *The Times* (letters), 31 January 1939

representation on the proposed joint standing committee.⁶⁶ The joint committee met again on 2 March 1938 at which the activities of all three bodies were reported. There was no British Council representation however, and neither was there at the following meeting. But a regular full and comprehensive report was provided with details of English music performances, including one in Berlin where on 2 November 1938 a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Norfolk Rhapsody* had taken place. It was probably one of the last performances of Vaughan Williams' music in Nazi Germany, as the minutes of the fifth meeting of the joint committee held in the following April reveal. It was reported that "members of the Committee already knew that the [proposed] visit of the BBC Chorus to Baden-Baden had been cancelled owing to the difficulties over the inclusion of a work by Vaughan Williams." Consequently, no British music at all had been played at the festival. "It was hoped that the former happy relations between this country and Germany would soon be restored."⁶⁷ Just four months later this hope became, of course, impossible and no further meeting of the joint committee took place, with the British Council handing over its interest in broadcasting to the Ministry of Information.⁶⁸

At the closing stages of the War, the relationship between the BBC and the British Council became the subject of a House of Commons debate in May 1945 when it was clear that if the work of the two organisations in the newly liberated countries of Europe were to succeed, it would need to be co-ordinated. The British Council's position, spelled out in an internal memo, was that although there was no reason why it should not be in touch with the BBC, there was no need for to resuscitate the Joint Broadcasting Committee that had existed before the War. Citing the BBC's independence and its natural competence in the broadcasting field, interference from the Council would be understandably inappropriate, its role to assist other bodies rather than "command and control" the interpretation of Britain to other countries.⁶⁹ Avoiding broadcasting altogether was therefore preferable, especially since the shortage of foreign exchange prevented the Council from establishing a broadcasting division. The Council had, in fact, organised radio broadcasts to Latin America from 1943, and though this was a model for liberated Europe, it was essential that no overlapping of activities existed. The view of the Foreign Office was that the most effective means of ensuring the success of British overseas "publicity" was to plan it as a whole under one government department, preferably

⁶⁶ First meeting of the BBC Sub-Committee "Performance of British Music Abroad," 9 November 1937 – TNA BW 2/131

⁶⁷ Minutes of the 5th meeting of the BBC Sub-Committee, 25 April 1939 – TNA BW 2/131

⁶⁸ Draft letter dated 11 May 1945, British Council to the BBC, TNA FO 924/121

⁶⁹ British Council memo dated 11 May 1945, TNA FO 924/121

the Foreign Office itself.⁷⁰ In its report of a parliamentary debate, *The Times*' took a similar position saying that "Official publicity is a branch of foreign policy; that is its sole – and decisive – justification."⁷¹ Opening the House of Commons debate, Kenneth Lindsay MP gave a sketch of the government's activities in the field of "foreign publicity" since the British Council's inception in 1934. He reminded the House of the range of activities involved:

There is purely political warfare, which I hope will be discontinued, there is propaganda, there is publicity, there are what are called cultural contacts, library service and so forth, and there is the work which is being done by the British Council.⁷²

Lindsay acknowledged that budget restraints at the Council were creating uncertainty and that its very role was under review now that the Ministry of Information was to be closed. During the War, added another speaker, the Ministry's role had been to "give out the news" while the British Council's was to propagate "the British way of life."⁷³ But the BBC also had a role to play. The parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Information pointed out that during wartime, the BBC presented a unified, national point of view. "We are," he said, "[now] thinking of peace time and it is quite certain that, as we get into conditions of peace, there will not be that same unanimity of outlook, and the British point of view will not be just one point of view but numbers of conflicting points of view."⁷⁴ By using the different channels of propaganda available, those multiple points of view could be put across to foreign audiences and if unanimity was present it would thus be reflected. This can be seen as the democratic ideal in practice. But there were other considerations, too. The BBC's desire, he said, was also "to produce news and a feature service representative of the point of view of Britain in accordance with the highest standard set during the war."⁷⁵ And it is to the wartime BBC that we turn next.

⁷⁰ Foreign Office minute dated 18 May 1945, TNA FO 924/121

⁷¹ *The Times*, 19 May 1945

⁷² HC Hansard, Vol.410, col.2815

⁷³ *Ibid.*, col.2839

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, col.2845

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, col.2843

Chapter Five

Broadcasting, Policy and Music Commissions of the BBC

*From one day to the next there's nothing but a sort of drum doing the first bar of the V Symphony. Maddening*¹

As we have seen, to British Council Music Committee member Victor Hely-Hutchinson's mind, the new national spirit called for music that would reflect the England that was being fought for: a call to draw upon the pastoral and romantic.² As I will show, by the time Hely-Hutchinson took over from fellow committee member Arthur Bliss as the BBC's Director of Music in 1944 (Bliss had himself taken over the position from Sir Adrian Boult in 1942), music commissions at the BBC can also be seen to have taken his recommendation to heart. "A way of furthering the national effort through song," suggested in 1942, was that the BBC "should commission poets and composers to produce good straightforward songs expressing the spirit of the time."³ Rather than "high falutin'" the requirement was that they were "definitely propagandist in their aim... giving expression to our aims in the war and afterwards," with the primary stress on "when we have won the war." Similar to Victor Hely-Hutchinson's recommendation, the approach was at least partly in agreement with his idea of "the spirit of England" in the current hostilities and the BBC hoped that the whole country would eventually be singing "this new and healthy brand of patriotic music – very different from the old 'hope and glory' stuff," with the emphasis on what could happen when victory had been secured; that "science, education... will be used for their right purpose without debasement." Without "too much exaltation," the songs were to be "in the nature of a tonic for every day consumption, available always for everyone."⁴

BBC Commissions

Earlier guidelines, drawn up in 1940 when the BBC first embarked on commissioning music for the War effort called for

¹ Diana Mosley in a letter to her sister Nancy Mitford

² See letter 29 May 1942, TNA BW2/136

³ BBC Internal Circulating Memo, Peter Montgomery, "Music for the National Effort," 4 August 1942, BBC WAC R27/121/5

⁴ Ibid.

a song or a lay hymn, with orchestral accompaniment, the *theme* patriotic but not necessarily warlike; an *air* theme specially welcome (as there are no air songs worth mentioning); caveat – the word ‘England’ to be avoided as a synonym for Britain. For the *lyric* the composer can take his choice of the words by the BBC, or, if preferred, he can await the result of the commissioning of the poets; the *length* to be two or three short stanzas totalling, say, not less than six and not more than eighteen lines.⁵

A “general proviso” was added that “simplicity and direct appeal to the emotions” was to be the “main requisite.” The BBC classed Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Roger Quilter and George Dyson (with Walford Davies as a reserve) among those that could be commissioned to write serious music of a “fine nature,” classing Frederick Keel and Noel Coward among those that could be relied upon for lighter material. Since in 1940 there was already much new material of the latter type in circulation, the BBC concentrated on commissioning works from its “A” class of composers. Out of respect for him as the most senior, Vaughan Williams was approached and commissioned separately in advance of the others in his category. Quoting the “general proviso,” Adrian Boult wrote to the composer informing him that what was required was the “Jerusalem” brand of hymn, adding that the BBC “would be glad to be able to know the poem you propose to set before you actually embark on the setting of it.”⁶ Vaughan Williams replied that he would “probably want to go to the old masters,” but would gladly consider any contemporary poems suggested.⁷ Forging ahead without the BBC’s recommendation of any appropriate material, however, he overlooked the main consideration. By the end of October, Adrian Boult was “kicking himself” because Vaughan Williams’ “splendid tune” was set to W.E. Henley’s poem “England, My England,” in direct contravention of the terms of the commission. “However,” wrote Boult in an internal BBC memo, “we cannot alter the poem, and I really do not see why trivialities like this should worry us in a case like this,”⁸ and a suggestion was made to counter the use of “England,” by commissioning “a patriotic song framed on a Scottish basis” in addition.⁹

Though one reviewer compared Vaughan Williams’ tune with “God Save the King,” the *Marseillaise*, Tchaikovsky’s [first] Piano Concerto and the composer’s own *Sine Nomine* (the

⁵ BBC WAC R27/58, *Note on a Scheme for Commissioning Patriotic Songs*, August 1940

⁶ Letter A. Boult to R. Vaughan Williams, 9 September 1940, BBC WAC R27/58

⁷ Letter R. Vaughan Williams to the BBC, 13 September 1940, BBC WAC R27/58

⁸ Adrian Boult, 30 October 1940, BBC WAC R27/58

⁹ Memo dated 8 November 1940, BBC WAC R27/58

tune to *For All The Saints*) and, having tried it out on the BBC Singers, could not “in all humility” fault it apart from a few suggestions for the middle bars, which they had found “dull”:

Of course I feel in writing this, who am I to criticise the work of a man of such musical stature as V-W? I know you will pass this on in a very modified form. The extraordinary thing is that I see hundreds of patriotic and marching tunes submitted to us, mostly through MOI. 90% fail because the words are wrong. But the tunes which fail (perhaps 98%) nearly all break down because the composers *will* head for home just as the adventurous part of their walk has begun. It interests me to find that I have the same feeling about this tune of the most distinguished composer in the British Empire!¹⁰

The problem seems to have occurred in one bar, which became Adrian Boult’s sole suggestion for amendment in a letter written to Vaughan Williams in November. “In any case, whether you propose to amend or not,” he wrote, “I am empowered by the Corporation to accept gratefully your song when complete, and naturally we should like it as soon as you can manage it.”¹¹ Vaughan Williams was to write many such “lay hymns” during the War. His “Hymn of Freedom” was published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 20 December 1939, with “Valiant for Truth” appearing in 1940, together with “Six Choral Songs (In Time of war),” a BBC Commission for the 1940 Proms (the performance of which was cancelled).¹² “England My England” followed in 1941, and the “Victory Anthem,” also known as “Thanksgiving for Victory” appeared in 1944, eventually becoming “A Song of Thanksgiving,” after BBC officials objected to its title on the grounds “that this was not an anthem.”¹³

The 1940 commissions received mixed reviews from the panel of opinion within the BBC. Though the most superior, Vaughan Williams’ work proved unsatisfactory because of its divergence from the original commissioning requirements. Furthermore, in the opinion of the Director of Music it would never “go” like “Jerusalem” or “For all the Saints” and, for that reason, it was felt that the BBC would be wasting its time to “plug’ it.” Victor Hely-Hutchinson gave the final verdict on the commissions – which demonstrate the BBC’s commitment to the highest standards – towards the end of 1944, four years after their original planning, providing

¹⁰ BBC Internal Memo, “Patriotic Songs,” 19 November 1940, BBC WAC R27/58

¹¹ Letter A. Boult to R. Vaughan Williams, 12 November 1940, BBC WAC R27/58

¹² Of the six (entitled, *A Song of Courage, A Song of Liberty, A Song of Healing, A Song of Victory, A Song of Pity, Peace and Love* and *A Song of the New Age*), the last, according to Steven Connock, “is the most impressive, its spirit closer the Fifth Symphony or Pilgrim’s Progress. Vaughan Williams’ wartime output is surveyed by Steven Connock in issue #22 of the Journal of the RVW Society (October 2001, p.18).

¹³ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 385

a brief statement to the Director General on each. George Dyson's "Motherland," a setting of a poem by Sir William Watson, was "Effective but uninteresting." "England My England" was "Good, but not up to Vaughan Williams' best standard." "O Happy Land," with words by W.J. Linton and music by John Ireland was "Very good musically but too elaborate for this kind of thing" but Roger Quilter's "A Song of Freedom," written in collaboration with Richard Rodney Bennett, was "universally condemned."¹⁴

The commissions were not the only major project of the BBC during the war. One striking example is Julius Harrison's rhapsody for violin and orchestra *Bredon Hill*. Harrison (1885-1963) was director of music at Malvern College from autumn 1940 after the Hastings Corporation disbanded its municipal orchestra after the outbreak of War. Returning to his native Malvern, he could see Bredon Hill from his home and was soon "filled with an overwhelming desire to celebrate in music some of the thoughts and emotions" behind A.E. Housman's *In Summertime on Bredon*.¹⁵ Whether or not it was commissioned is unclear, but the BBC promoted *Bredon Hill* extensively, using it on the North American service in particular to depict the pastoral "spirit of England." The first performance was given in a BBC studio concert on 29 August 1941 with soloist Thomas Matthew and the composer conducting. *The Musical Times'* review described it as "one of the sweetest additions to music with our own country's sap and surety in it. No composer now more genially evokes a testament of things felt and prized, things true for us all, about England."¹⁶ For its first broadcast the following year, the BBC scripted a discussion between Elizabeth Poston (director of European Music at the BBC and a performer at the National Gallery concerts who had become aware of the work) and Harrison, the announcer preceding the music with a glowing introduction:

[It is] one of the loveliest works of the year indeed, I would go as far as to say – of our own time... [It] was completed by the composer with a view to its special appearance in the Music of Britain [series]. It is a fact remarkable in itself that such music as this comes out of the present time. That it does, is perhaps the best witness to the eternal spirit of England.¹⁷

In the same radio conversation, Harrison said of *Bredon Hill* that "it grew out of itself in my mind from all those scenes I have known all my life. After all, we mustn't forget that this part of Worcestershire speaks of England at its oldest. It is the heart of Mercia, the country of Piers

¹⁴ BBC Internal Memo: "Unison Songs Commissioned by the BBC," 9 October 1944, BBC WAC R27/58

¹⁵ The 21st poem in A.E. Housman's 1896 collection *A Shropshire Lad*

¹⁶ *Musical Times*, Vol.82 No.1184, October 1941, p.367

¹⁷ Accessed online at <http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2007/Jan07/Harrison.htm>

Plowman, and it is the spirit of Elgar's music, too."¹⁸ As Harrison's biographer Geoffrey Self has written, the "peer work" of what he calls "this essentially Worcester music" is that of the Gloucester man, Vaughan Williams, "and to say that *Bredon Hill* compares favourably with *The Lark Ascending* is to measure its achievement. Harrison's lark soars, swoops and wheels as gracefully as that of Vaughan Williams, but his rhapsody is more complex, and more symphonic in texture, than *The Lark Ascending*, and it is scored for larger orchestra."¹⁹

The Use of German Music

Vaughan Williams' name, of course, looms large throughout the War. In September 1944 he was in correspondence with the BBC's head of religious programming Revd. John Welch on the subject of the use of German hymn tunes. Welch wrote that he "should very much like to have your mind on the whole question of our using German music in broadcast religious services,"²⁰ in response to the composer, who could "hardly believe his ears" on hearing a broadcast from St. Paul's on D-Day which included *Ein' Feste Burg* ("A Safe Stronghold").²¹ Welch explained that in Church history it had been "the hymn of believers in freedom struggling against tyranny."²² Although it had already been established that both *Ein' Feste Burg* and *Nun Danket Alles Gott* ("Now Thank We All Our God") might be "reasonably" excluded from European broadcast on account of their "particular German tone,"²³ their use on the Home Service was not deemed inappropriate. The use of another well-known hymn tune, on the other hand, understandably provoked further reaction from the listening public, the broadcast of which attracted some criticism from at least one listener in 1940.²⁴ The second movement (Poco Adagio) of Joseph Haydn's 1779 *Kaiser* (Emperor) Quartet Op.76 No.3 did not actually become Germany's National Anthem until 1922, by which time it was the preferred tune for two English Hymns, *Praise the Lord Ye Heavens Adore Him* and *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*. Like *Ein' Feste Burg*, the inclusion of the tune was "undesirable" for broadcast on the European Service, "the familiarity of the tune in the political context" seeming to override "any religious significance it may have."²⁵ The objection to its use was based on the danger of confusing

¹⁸ Self, 1993: 49

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50. Vaughan Williams also adapted the poem for the fifth in his song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*.

²⁰ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 379

²¹ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 378

²² Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 379

²³ BBC Internal Memo – Deutschland Uber Alles, 22 July 1940, BBC WAC R27/121/3. At the time, Vaughan Williams was using *Ein' Feste Burg* in an inverted version for his film score to *49th Parallel* (see Chapter 7).

²⁴ Mackay, 2000 [1]: 520

²⁵ J.R. Clark, 21 July 1940, handwritten note on a BBC Internal memo dated 21 July 1940: "Hymn in Religious Service: Overseas Transmission." BBC WAC R27/121/3

overseas listeners rather than the associations of the tune itself. Welch later explained to Vaughan Williams that “listeners in occupied Europe, not knowing the English language, would be conscious only that we were broadcasting the old German national anthem.”²⁶ His colleague Cyril Taylor, therefore, had written “a very good alternative tune called *Abbot’s Leigh*,” which has remained a popular alternative ever since.²⁷

Questions about the appropriate use of music and, indeed broadcasting of music in general were not so clear in the early days of the War. *Musical Times* columnist W.R. Anderson complained in the October 1939 issue about the BBC’s “lamentable” response during the “strange, horrible, moving days at the beginning of September” when of the great volume of works at the Corporation’s disposal only light orchestral pieces were broadcast. “No emergency could justify such programme poverty,” he wrote, “What use might have been made of music of heroic mould!” Suggesting that a musician with imagination should have been let loose among the some eighty thousands records of the BBC’s library, where something of Chopin to acknowledge a “crucified” Poland could surely have been found. “Where was the strengthening medicament of great poetry, alone or allied to great music?” he asked. “What was there to ease the strained mind, to brace the spirit and comfort the heart?” Instead, the BBC’s response was “an insult alike to the art of music and to intelligent listeners.” Anderson hoped that as the War’s “first casualty,” British broadcasting may be raised “from the pit into which it lamentably fell.”²⁸ However, as the same issue of the *Musical Times* reports, the BBC’s dereliction was to be addressed so that listeners would soon be able to “hear weekly a reasonable proportion of musical broadcasts,” and that the “hard-hit musical profession will be glad to find that gramophone sessions will be reduced to seven – less than in peace-time.”²⁹ Acknowledging some of the criticisms levelled at it, the BBC accepted that its “instantaneous and utter abdication from England’s musical life” in the first week of War, contributed to the temporary paralysis of the musical world. “By means of persistent pressure both from the Music Department and outside sources,” however, “the BBC has now returned to a position of respectability, though in reduced circumstances. It is necessary, during the next few months, that every effort should be made for the BBC to regain its former role of leadership in musical England.”³⁰

²⁶ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 379

²⁷ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 380 (Note 2)

²⁸ Anderson, October 1939 [1]: 712

²⁹ Anderson, October 1939 [2]: 727

³⁰ BBC Internal Memo, “Music Policy,” 8 November 1939. BBC WAC R27/121/2. The BBC’s first symphony concert had taken place a week earlier on 1 November 1939 at the Colston Hall in Bristol. The concert included a performance of Vaughan Williams’ *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus*, which had been first performed at the New York World’s Fair earlier in the year.

Meanwhile, the question of the use of German music was on everyone's minds at the outset of the War and the debate about German music on the radio in Britain began immediately. "I have already heard a good deal of German, Austrian and Italian music broadcast during the crisis," begins one BBC internal memo in the first week of hostilities: "I take it, therefore, there is no ban on 'enemy' music in general. This is good news and I am glad such a sensible attitude has been adopted."³¹ Robert Mackay, the leading expert on music in Britain during the War, has discussed extensively the BBC, music and censorship. One might wonder, he ponders, at the picture presented by so trivial a matter as the potential objection of broadcasting *Silent Night, Holy Night* because of its German origin. Such enquiries were, as Mackay writes, "part of the unforeseen and frequently absurd consequences" flowing from the BBC's policy for music broadcasting.³²

While the members of the various committees (both at the BBC and the British Council) may have had their preferences for the kinds of music they wished to commission for the purposes of promoting British culture abroad, when it came to the broadcast of "enemy music," the BBC was forced to formulate a policy in the face of a barrage of criticism and misunderstanding as well as audience response. Consequently, it might reasonably be argued that the BBC was the only organisation that had anything like a documented official policy towards music (in contrast to the British Council, which formulated its approach through the opinions and practices of the Music Committee). It was not just a case of whether or not to impose a simple ban on the music of German, Austrian and Italian composers from the airwaves. A suggestion forwarded in December 1939 that the BBC should broadcast in its home programmes works banned by the Nazis: "I gather this blacklist is now quite a formidable one, and that it should be possible to base at least one first class concert upon it."³³ Mahler, banned by the Nazis, is one practical example. A concert at the Wigmore Hall organised by the Council of Austrians in Great Britain and the Free German League of Culture in Great Britain took place on 18 May 1941 to mark the 39th anniversary of the composer's death. The concert was "something of an occasion" and so popular that many were turned away, with "many distinguished Germans and Austrians present." On the strength of this, it was hoped that a Mahler symphony could be performed by the BBC Orchestra, with the broadcast of excerpts "of a suitable length."³⁴

³¹ BBC WAC R27/121/2, BBC Internal Memo, "Theatre Orchestra Programmes," 6 September 1939

³² Mackay, 2000 [2]: 75

³³ BBC WAC R27/121/2, BBC Internal Circulating Memo, 21 December 1939

³⁴ BBC WAC R27/121/4, BBC Internal Memo, "Gustav Mahler," 19 May 1941

Policy

A fledgling policy, if there was one, not only concerned the broadcast of German, Austrian and Italian music, but also performances of light music by artists of “enemy nationality.” A round letter to the leaders of all the major dance bands, including Ambrose and Geraldo, was sent by the BBC’s Outside Broadcast Executive in June 1940 requesting that any musician of German, Austrian, Czech and Italian nationality among the orchestra should be replaced for the radio, as they were “not permitted to take part in broadcasting programmes.”³⁵ A glimpse of the official line towards music and its propaganda value can be found in the various correspondences of BBC staff, for example, in an internal BBC file note on music on the Empire Service for the guidance of announcers and script-writers, including finding ways of adding a “propaganda twist:”

If there is any war experience of the artist which can be mentioned, or if the music has any tie-up with the occupied countries, it is as well to make a mention of it; e.g. Polish, Czech or Jewish. Don’t labour it – just slip it in.³⁶

Scriptwriters were urged to “look out for special national associations” that would “appeal to the ‘exile’ audience, or [to] European émigrés in North America.” Indeed, broadcasters tried to respond to events as they happened. A BBC Internal Circulating Memo of July 1941 concerning Russian music, “Russia being in the news right now” (Hitler had just declared war on his previous ally), suggests “a few practically unknown Russian items” suitable for broadcast, among them Rimsky Korsakov’s opera *Kitesh*, the orchestral intermezzo of which, “The Battle of Kerschenetz” was not just “easily digestible” and “topical,” but “the best battle music ever written.”³⁷ The occasion of Stalin’s birthday later that year, meanwhile, called for programming that “would include the music for Alexander Nevsky, Russian songs, Glinka etc.”³⁸

The first draft of the BBC’s formal policy towards music was drawn up by Arthur Bliss in his capacity as Director of Music at Christmas in 1941 and circulated from March the following year. It begins with the “truism” that “A sense of music is a primal thing in mankind, and a tremendous force either for good or evil.”³⁹ By the time the third draft appeared in April 1942, this bold statement had been refined into what became the “creative principle” behind this

³⁵ BBC WAC R34/290, letter dated 17 June 1940

³⁶ BBC WAC R27/416/1, presentation of Musical Programmes in Empire Service, 1 September 1941

³⁷ BBC WAC R27/94/1, memo dated 17 July 1941

³⁸ BBC WAC R27/238, minutes of a meeting chaired by Kenneth Wright of programme controllers, 30 October 1941

³⁹ BBC WAC R27/241/1, Music Policy (first draft), 30 December 1941

general, formal policy, not specific to war-time music and German musicians, but rather to the guiding principles concerning the place of music at the BBC:

Music is an ennobling spiritual force, which should influence the life of every listener.

Behind this “creative principle” is its “practical interpretation:”

Inexorably to continue and expand the principle of great music as an ultimate value, indeed a justification of life,

Faithfully to enrich leisure hours with entertaining music,

Physically and mentally to stimulate, cheer, and soothe tired bodies and worn nerves.

Because the BBC’s role in developing the art – and furthering the cause – of music was through *broadcasting*, it followed that not all musical programmes made *good* broadcasting. Rather, “Good broadcasting” meant a recognition of the limitation of the medium, both technically and artistically, as well as an insistence upon “the best possible of all worthy music” to raise public taste through winning the largest possible audience. The development of “a strong sense of pride” in British music was important, “in order to exercise the long-standing national sense of inferiority in music and rid music of its status as a foreign art.” But even in 1942, the policy recognised that “the relay of first-class opera from Milan” would be a “better way of fostering opera in Britain than setting false standards by undue encouragement of, say, provincial touring opera.”⁴⁰

Outside this formal statement of music policy was the development from mid-1940 of a separate policy on exclusion of music copyrighted in enemy nations, based upon the example set by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and reported in the American journal *Broadcasting* in July 1940. Though it was “impossible to specify any inflexible rule to cover the entire problem,” the CBC used two specific principles: to refrain from broadcasting the works of “*contemporary* German and Italian composers or those whose compositions might be too closely associated in the mind of the listener with either the Italian or German nation,” and that music for which performance rights or royalties would be paid “should naturally not be used.” The CBC emphasised that rather than issuing a directive, it was simply suggesting ways

⁴⁰ BBC WAC R27/241/1, BBC Music Policy (third draft), 1 April 1942

of tackling the problem, based on “three basic considerations,” namely “good taste, common sense and the sensitivity of one’s audience,” care taken to avoid any offence to members of the radio audience “whose reactions are unusually sensitive.” While admissible on a musical basis, for example, Johann Strauss’s waltz *Tales from the Vienna Woods* might just give offence on account of its title.⁴¹ Implementing the example set for the commercial aspect of these suggestions, decisions made on the political and cultural associations of music itself inevitably affected the BBC’s own policy, too. Like the CBC, which did not consider the broadcast of Italian and German language songs as good policy, the question of broadcasting German *Lieder* in their original language had already been raised at the BBC. In May 1940, a number of complaints were received during the broadcast of a concert of *Lieder*, as well as by correspondence on the following day. The “artistic desirability” of performing *Lieder* in their original language was nevertheless set aside in favour of the “general conclusion” that the BBC should avoid the German language altogether, though where “good translations” into English were available, German *Lieder* would continue to be broadcast.⁴²

At the end of 1940, the whole question of a policy towards the broadcasting of “enemy” music was thrown open in the pages of the *Radio Times* as a way of opening up the hitherto unpublicised policy, which by November had become the subject of much speculation. The debate opened in an article by music editor Ralph Hill which provided a succinct précis of the argument for common sense, good taste and audience sensitivity as per the example set by the Canadians. The idea of banning the music of enemy countries *in toto* was to Hill’s mind “childish, totalitarian and anti-musical,” reminding readers that during the previous war Sir Thomas Beecham had succeeded in refuting a similar “ignorant and misguided patriotism.” And while British composition may have suffered under uncritical worship “at the shrine of German music,” the art “would have been infinitely poorer had Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner” never existed. That the great German composers of the past (with the possible exception of Wagner) would “doubtless be the first to deny the present regime of oppression in Germany”, and that even Mozart himself “indulged in what one might call propaganda” in his setting of Beaumarchais’ “notorious play” *The Marriage of Figaro*, Hill argued that “the value of a piece of music has nothing whatsoever to do with the character of his country.” And though there was a case for banning *some* musical works, “nobody but an unmusical imbecile could possibly find any connection between *Madam Butterfly* and Mussolini, he wrote. On the other hand, *Ein Heldenleben* and Hitler “might tempt more astute

⁴¹ BBC WAC/R27/3/1, “Using the Enemy’s Music: Canada Suggests Policy Covering Works by German and Italian Composers” published in *Broadcasting*, 15 July 1940

⁴² BBC WAC R27/121/3, BBC Internal Memo, West Region, Subject: German Lieder, 3 June 1940

and impressionable minds,” and furthermore, Richard Strauss (the composer) was “notoriously anti-British” during the First World War. Summing up the BBC’s position, Hill wrote that “music by composers of Nazi sympathisers and old works that can be interpreted in terms of modern Germany” (that is, their “*Wirkungsgeschichten*,” to use Dahlhaus’ nomenclature) would be avoided, the latter specifically to include works such as Brahms’ *Triumphlied*, which despite being “an excellent work from a purely musical point of view,” was unsuitable as the “only important occasion” (it was written to celebrate Germany’s 1870 victories) “on which Brahms ever turned himself into a musical jingo.” Following up his article a fortnight later, Hill introduced the question of copyright, quoting correspondent Haydn Wood, whose letter the previous week suggested a policy towards the elimination from broadcasts and public performances music that would attract royalties payable to composers of enemy nationality. Hill explained that since only a portion went to the composer, with the majority going to publishers, and thus to their shareholders, the financial state of its great commercial concerns determined every country’s wealth and power and thus their ability to wage war, he saw no reason why “we should strike our enemies with one hand and provide them with the means of future retaliation with the other.”⁴³

As Robert Mackay has discussed, the departure from the standard liberal approach revealed in the pages of the *Radio Times* was met with “much disquiet” among BBC staffers, especially in the Music Department. Crucially, however, music policy was not decided by the Music Department despite its aspirations, with the principle already established before the War that “central administration was the policy maker for *all* departments.”⁴⁴ Mackay writes that “the secretive, hole-in-the-corner way in which the policy was formed and operated and the autobiographical silence on the matter from those at its heart suggest that the Corporation was aware of the implication of bad faith and was uneasy about it,” pointing out that the BBC Yearbooks published during the War make no mention of the policy or of music censorship in general. Neither do the memoirs of Adrian Boult, and others who are otherwise comprehensive when writing about the BBC at War. Indeed, wrote one BBC official in 1942, the BBC had always been careful not to publish its music policy as such.⁴⁵ Tackling rumours among music publishers and others that certain composers were subject to some sort of censorship, Mackay points out that in fact Ralph Hill was pressed to “put a gloss on the copyright rationale”⁴⁶ in the *Radio Times*.

⁴³ *Radio Times*, 22 November 1940, p.7

⁴⁴ Mackay, 2000 [2]: 75

⁴⁵ Mackay, 2000 [1]: 523

⁴⁶ Mackay, 2000 [2]: 76

Among the copyrighted composers whose music had been regularly played in Britain and would have attracted royalties were those who were mistakenly included in the secret selection criteria, and evidence of “contrary direction” in the policy could be found, for example in the exclusion of *Finlandia*, Sibelius’s tone poem which, though out of copyright, was considered by many in Britain to be a Finnish anthem, and therefore inappropriate after Finland’s status changed to that of an enemy nation.⁴⁷ The first draft contained the names of 99 German, 38 Austrian and 39 Italian composers but it soon became clear that the number of anomalies and contradictions made it very difficult to maintain. Nevertheless as the War progressed the list grew, with governments-in-exile making requests of the BBC to ban the music of certain collaborators and, furthermore, it was the exceptions to the criteria that gave staffers trouble and included music that was classified as subjectively as “firmly established in the public affection.” This included Puccini and Lehar, the latter’s music simultaneously satisfying the censors and falling foul of the selection criteria, depending on the context in which the music was being broadcast. For most of the staff of the BBC Music Department, the policy was “misguided and offensive to their belief that music was above politics.” Their concern, writes Mackay, was simply for the provision of a “varied programme of high quality music of all kinds, performed to the highest possible standard.”⁴⁸ Although Deputy Director of Music R.S. Thatcher “deplored the tendency of a music policy that would drag art into the arena of politics,”⁴⁹ the overriding consideration when considering the broadcast music of enemy nations was public morale, rather than compiling a list of music whose copyright restrictions would benefit enemy nationals. Public reaction was immediate, with Gramophone editor Compton Mackenzie arguing that such bannings and behaviours dragged Britain down to “the level of what we are fighting against.”⁵⁰

Broadcast Monitoring

The War Cabinet was also to discuss the hazards associated with broadcasting. In July 1942, the Minister of Information was recommending a reduction in broadcasting hours from a midnight close to 10.30pm in order to conserve energy.⁵¹ Acknowledging that it would not make much difference to *actual* fuel consumption, reducing broadcasting transmission times would send a message. Paradoxically, he pointed out that “music of good quality is readily available from several enemy stations and this may claim a proportion of listeners who need

⁴⁷ Mackay, 2000 [1]: 519

⁴⁸ Mackay, 2000 [2]: 79

⁴⁹ Mackay, 2000 [1]: 513

⁵⁰ The editor of the *Gramophone Magazine* in the December 1940 issue, quoted by Mackay, 200: 518

⁵¹ Brendan Bracken

relaxation.”⁵² In a further contradiction to the BBC’s policy, at Christmas 1939, the Secretary of State for War reported that the Fécamp Station broadcast from France, its signal reaching the south coast, and “500 or 600% better” than the BBC, was giving “a first-class entertainment of third-class music.”⁵³ Thus the power of music broadcasting was not underestimated by the Government itself. On 29 January 1940, the Foreign Secretary acknowledged that the “average German” was inclined to listen to music rather than politics “when he comes home.”⁵⁴

In his *Radio Times* articles, Ralph Hill revealed the practical aspect of music used as bait, explaining the policy of excluding the broadcast of German and Italian songs: “at all costs it must be made clear to listeners that they are not listening to enemy stations, whose excellence of music programmes are often a bait for insidious propaganda.”⁵⁵ Indeed, a correspondent to the BBC from the 2nd Battalion, The Rifle Brigade, stationed somewhere in the Middle East, wrote in 1941 with some comments on the BBC’s broadcasts. “A thing that is often remarked, even by seemingly uncultured troops, is that if one wants to hear a symphony or any kind of ‘good’ music, one must listen to a German station.”⁵⁶ Regular listening by “competent musicians” on the BBC staff of German and Italian transmissions that would ascertain the validity of this observation did not happen as a matter of course. Far from it; in June 1941 it was still a matter of “as many of us as can spare the time to listen regularly ourselves at useful intervals,” as a report on BBC transmissions in German written in June 1941 reveals. The use of music by German stations “in very good, and often first-rate, presentation” was “a kind of bait with which to attract customers.” Once hooked, the audience was captive: “The ideas they want to put over are then sandwiched between the music in the form of shorter or longer talks, sometimes even of single sentences.”⁵⁷ The author of this report stressed the difference in the volume of “serious” music transmitted by German home stations in comparison to the BBC Home Programme (much more on the former), and that in transmissions of programming directed to Germany, quality performances of “excellent and interesting music” was the best bait available to attract listeners:

We know for certain that a lot of listening-in is being done, both from occasional reports and from the length to which the German radio goes to

⁵² TNA CAB 66/26/42

⁵³ TNA CAB 65/56/0069

⁵⁴ TNA CAB 65/11/22

⁵⁵ *Radio Times*, 1 November 1940

⁵⁶ BBC WAC R27/416/1, extract from a letter to the Director General from Anthony McDonald, 17 January 1941,

⁵⁷ BBC WAC R27/510, “Standard of Music in BBC Transmissions in German,” 27 June 1941

refute or neutralize British news... And illicit listening to music is certainly more difficult to spot than listening to the spoken word.⁵⁸

Suggestions for a new programme aimed at Germany on the BBC's European Service were presented in September. "Aus der Freien Welt" was planned as a weekly slot for transmission on Mondays. The programme was to include music from Britain. The suggestions did not include English orchestral music – this was given over to another expert – but the list provided by author Leonard Isaacs included Irish, Scottish and Welsh music, Elizabethan and Restoration selections, and songs from Parry, Stanford and Twentieth-Century composers including Delius, Ireland, Peter Warlock, Victor Hely-Hutchinson, Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, Roger Quilter and Ivor Gurney.⁵⁹ Isaacs also made representations for the broadcast of German music, citing a recent incident in which "the audience joined in the famous chorus of freed prisoners" in a performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Broadcasting the opera was to him a "very possible" idea (and not just on the European Service), a "special production" of which was needed that was "carefully planned from the political rather than the musical point of view... using the independent and freedom-loving Beethoven as an emotional pivot, with the Prisoners' Chorus as a sort of leit-motif." His recommendation for Kurt Weill's *Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera) was at odds with the prevailing attitude at the BBC, however, in that he deemed it inappropriate for broadcast to Germany because it represented "just that type of music which very many people (outside Berlin) regard as decadent, even without Hitler's encouragement."⁶⁰

A report of the place of music in German broadcasting was also presented in September. *Deutschlandsender* (the German Home Service) was devoting no less than an average of fourteen of the nineteen hours' daily transmission to music, with "really high-class classical music" and a high class of good "light" music taking the daily broadcast of quality music to upwards of five hours a day. Marches and military music, however, were "almost without exception laboured and devoid of spontaneity or individuality," being the works of "hack composers" attached to the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. The most popular of these indiscriminate marches was an updated version of a First World War composition "Wir Fahren gegen Engeland," played only on "appropriate occasions," its opening bars preceding "all important announcements of the High Command whenever successes against England [were] claimed." Meanwhile, the policy in broadcasting to occupied territories was "to eliminate the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ BBC WAC R27/94/1, Suggested programmes for "Aus der Freien Welt," 29 September 1941

⁶⁰ BBC WAC R27/94/1, German Programme Suggestions from Hyman Sachs, 8 October 1941

music of the conquered country” when it bore a “strongly national character,” though music that had acquired an international standing (for example Czech composer Smetana’s opera *The Bartered Bride*) would be tolerated. Being of a nationalist nature, Smetana’s *Má Vlást* would not. “Another German manoeuvre in the game of culture-crushing,” the report continues, was “to label as German any outstanding national figure belonging to a conquered country who may have been partly absorbed by a foreign culture.” But though the music of nationalist composers in Poland, Chopin among them, of course, was completely banned, there was “no evidence” in France that French music was being discouraged, and the same was true for Norway and Denmark.⁶¹

A fuller and more serious report on *Deutschlandsender* prepared by the BBC Monitoring service appeared in July 1943. The “prime function” of German broadcasting, “to mould the national will,” was gleaned from the work of a leading broadcasting expert, “Propaganda and National Power.” According to its author Eugen Hadamovsky all means at the disposal of the broadcaster (and, presumably therefore, the State) must be used to influence public opinion and develop a “national type.”⁶² The selection of music in transmissions was “influenced by ‘racial and political’ considerations. Compositions by non-Aryans, such as Offenbach and Mendelssohn, are avoided as carefully as works by enemy composers.”⁶³ Given over largely to the simple analysis of the output of music and other entertainments on German radio, the report ends with the observation that whatever the listener tunes into, “it is all part of the plan to mould him into the shape his masters have chosen for him.” Whether this might be a major event such as the Wagner or Salzburg festivals, the broadcast of orchestral music conducted by Furtwängler or prominent soloists such as Walter Gieseking, or of jazz (permitted on German radio since 1942) or folk song, the report points out that Hadamovsky has made the intention clear in a particularly striking contrast to the “creative principle,” penned by Arthur Bliss, behind the BBC’s policy:

Music exercises a deep influence upon the forces of the race and blood,
latent in the sub-conscious. Hence a great musical masterpiece will

⁶¹ BBC WAC R27/232, “The Place of Music in German Broadcasting,” internal Report by Rollo Myers, 24 September 1941

⁶² Hadamovsky was active in the Nazi party, earning Hitler’s esteem by arranging the sound system at mass meetings where Hitler spoke and was appointed *Reichssendeleiter* (chief of Nazi Radio) in 1933. During the war, he was Goebbels’s deputy at the *Reichspropagandaleitung*. He died fighting with an SS unit in Poland in February 1945 (<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/hadamovsky.htm>, accessed 24 November 2010).

⁶³ BBC WAC R27/232. Report on Music and Entertainment Programmes in German Home Service. BBC Monitoring Service, July 1943

engender, accelerate or, conversely, inhibit the awakening development or degeneration of these forces.”⁶⁴

In a further report to the Director General in September 1943, R.S. Thatcher provided analysis of six weeks of German music programmes with even more substantial comparison with the BBC’s output. Drawing on reports compiled by the Monitoring Service, the object of this new document was “to supplement the accounts already given, by making an appraisal of this music output and (where profitable) by drawing comparisons with the BBC’s output in similar fields of music broadcasting.”⁶⁵ Necessarily in general terms – with detailed criticism of programme content “out of the question” – the report focuses on German broadcasting to Africa and South and East Asia, with some observation of the German home service included and some comparison provided between the technical standards apparent on the German stations compared to the BBC. Presumably, because the point of using music at all in broadcasting was to attract listeners for the purposes of presenting propaganda, the quality of performance and the range and variety of music was the subject of much comment. That material in BBC programmes was “more varied and less repetitive than in German programmes and consequently more interesting and compelling” was a clear advantage in this respect. However, despite there being what Thatcher regarded as “a higher degree of virtuosity and musicianship in the all-round solo work of players in British ensembles,” the same could not be said of singers, with the advantage in this case on the side of Germany, whose singers won “heavily,” coming out “unmistakably in the full rounded tone, ease of production and freedom from wobble,” with the standard of opera broadcasts in particular “uniformly high.”

Broadcasting to Europe

Whereas the underlying motives of certain German programming were “so obviously political as almost to prejudice its artistic interest in advance,” the BBC scheme, wrote Thatcher, was “far more elastic and more imaginative, and more ingeniously varied.” Practically free from “political impulses,” the BBC combined “a nice blend of conservatism and progressiveness with a bias in favour of the listeners who like the best music but who could not claim to know much about it.” The effect of the BBC’s policy was, to Thatcher, obvious:

⁶⁴ Quoted from Eugene Hadamovsky, *Propaganda und Nationale Macht*. Oldenburg: Verlag Gerhard Stalling, 1933

⁶⁵ BBC WAC R27/112, Memo R.S. Thatcher to the Director General, 22 September 1943

...that a programme scheme which excludes all Jewish composers, and all the music of England and Russia (soon, probably, of Italy) and is half hearted about the greatest music of France and Finland is not in a position to compete with a scheme that uses the whole non-Nazi musical world as its happy hunting ground. And yet there are those who still say that they have got to rely on German broadcasting for their good music!

Concluding, Thatcher writes that comparing the BBC with its German counterparts “works out greatly in favour of British broadcasting,” accepting simultaneously the possibility of “ceaseless” improvement.⁶⁶

The role of the BBC’s Music Department, meanwhile, was to advise various departments “on choice and suitability of music used, while providing access to a wider knowledge of recorded music available; to exercise a supervision of all music on European transmission and thus to maintain a professional standard of performance both in live transmission and recorded programmes.”⁶⁷ One of its recognised responsibilities, further, was “to provide Occupied Europe with performances of its own music by its own exiled performers paying special attention to National music and to music by contemporary foreign composers whose works are ‘banned’,” even if this meant negotiating the obstacle of live performances, since most of this music was, at the time, unrecorded. A further role was to ensure that English music was broadcast to the highest possible standards, its value to the European broadcast invaluable:

England has been represented by Germans to Germany for many generations as “Das Land ohne Musik,” a sneer ill deserved considering how many Germans earned in music an honoured and commercially successful position here in the last 100 years. Sneers of this kind cannot be argued with, but they can be disproved by facts; and the facts in this case will be the steady excellence of English performers, rather than their occasional brilliance; the remarkable output in the present generation of younger composers, and the continuous appreciation of music in this country which has prompted the Corporation to promulgate such constantly interesting broadcasts as those of the European Service.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ BBC WAC R27/94/1, Memorandum on European Music (undated, likely March 1943)

Evidence of how broad the BBC's listenership was throughout Europe (despite attempts by Germany to jam its wavelengths) includes an astonishing remark made about the value of cultural propaganda in the invasion of France. Using the example from Lyons where one Frenchman in particular believed in June 1940 that a nation of musicians could not be a nation of brutes and that, on this premise, he was not afraid, the BBC admits:

We were wrong to neglect the intellectual side of propaganda. Germany did not make this mistake... by her music she prepared the political and subsequent military invasion of France.

The value of music, therefore, was twofold. Firstly "that England is shown to be no longer a country of uncultured barbarians" and, secondly, that England was a country in which "the music of free people may be freely heard – and that cannot be said of any part of Europe under Nazi rule." Imagining the response where BBC broadcasts successfully penetrate, it was hoped that listeners would know that "In England they can still play Chopin; in England you can still listen to Offenbach: in England Mendelssohn is not forbidden."⁶⁸ The policy of the European Service was quite explicit by July 1944. Added to the first and second policies (the first achieved by playing the best British music by the best British performers), is a third impetus, to broadcast music which was of an "inspiring character," though there was to be no attempt to "entertain without reference to the aims outlined," and while swing could be heard alongside orchestral works, poor performances and the "lower" types of popular music, the theatre organ and "crooning" were to be "rigorously excluded."⁶⁹ As an example of the high standards employed, in early 1944, as British troops landed in Italy, RAF organist John Healy broadcast from Naples and gave piano recitals from the Rome radio station. A professional musician from Newcastle, each Sunday Healy was to play the grand organ at St. Peter's, Rome, in the high mass attended by Allied military personnel.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ BBC WAC R27/94/1, Policy of European Music Programmes, 29 July 1944



Leading Aircraftman John Healy seen holding a score of J.S. Bach's organ works, in front of St. Peter's, Rome, in 1944.⁷⁰

In his extensive survey of music in Germany between the end of the War and 1955 Toby Thacker discusses the whole question of music and regeneration. During the War, he writes, the BBC German Service became an increasingly important propaganda weapon. Primarily a spoken word programme, it was established before September 1939 under the direct control of the Foreign Office. From 1940 it was providing British officials involved in psychological warfare with "practical opportunities to think about how different kinds of music might be used for propaganda, and to analyse what kinds of political message might be conveyed by music."⁷¹ Towards the end of the War the BBC turned its attention to music broadcasting policy in post-war Germany, and commissioned exiled composer Berthold Goldschmidt and the actor Marius Goring to draft a broadcasting plan. Proposing concert programmes with a strong anti-Nazi emphasis, their original recommendation was to accompany broadcasts "with an explanatory commentary." However, the BBC's Overseas Music Director Steuart Wilson was among those that "displayed typically British reluctance to mix music and politics in this manner," that is to build concerts with the idea of "direct propaganda."⁷² Compiling instead a series of concerts with "an indirect, rather than a direct, propaganda value," Goring and Goldschmidt used music banned by the Nazis and, as Thacker has emphasised, included in particular "international modernist music" which in a "commonly shared perception in post-war Germany," was "a language of anti-Fascism."⁷³ The lack of available recordings of Schoenberg for this specific purpose, however, hampered the BBC's inclusion of his works. Whatever the hurdles, though, Goring argued that there was propaganda value in broadcasting music of a "high artistic standard," with the chauvinism, anti-Semitism and

⁷⁰ Official photograph of the Air Ministry; TNA INF2/44

⁷¹ Thacker, 2007:19

⁷² BBC/WAC E1/758/2, 12 January 1945, quoted by Thacker, 2007: 20

⁷³ Thacker, 2007: 20

banality of the Nazis “to be replaced with an understated, but explicit, commitment to internationalism, to modernism, and to the highest musical standards.”⁷⁴

As we have seen, the all-important subject of music for post-war Germany was the preoccupation, not only of the Foreign Office and the British Council, but also of the BBC. A substantial report on the subject was prepared in late 1944 by Lionel Ward.⁷⁵ He was careful to acknowledge at the outset that his “suggestions for a general plan” for the Corporation were based on his experience of living in Germany before the War, and that it was “impossible to forecast every reaction of opinion after the unparalleled effects of modern warfare.”⁷⁶ He was also aware of his limitations with respect to the technical aspects of broadcasting, acting merely as an advisor to the BBC rather than as a qualified member of staff. The requirement was to find a way of approaching the German people intellectually and aesthetically through music. The first problem was the choice of music to which they would react favourably. To Ward’s mind the nucleus of that choice would be the music of Schubert, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, all of which were “firmly established in the affections of their own people, and with them, by way of Handel and Bach, to Purcell and the Italian Madrigal School,” with German folk song and folk music of other countries added to prepare what he described as “the conservative Teutonic mind” of the average German. But it was not going to be easy, German youth in particular “having been poisoned by subversive doctrines during the impressionable years.” The German people “must be made to listen, and they must be made to think,” to make their own minds up “unimpeded by any previous acquaintance and formula consciously or subconsciously planted in his mind.”⁷⁷ Ward’s suggestion of *Petrushka* or *Belshazzar’s Feast* as appealing to the German mind, appears to have been taken up in schedules drawn up by Berthold Goldschmidt with the latter work to be presented in the first week following the eventual defeat of Germany.⁷⁸ Steuart Wilson insisted upon a caveat, however, on the choice of music:

Composers, performers and the music which has been banned solely on account of anti-German, anti-Fascist or Jewish relationship must on no account be put forward unless the works themselves have the highest quality

⁷⁴ BBC/WAC E1/739, quoted by Thacker, 2007: 20

⁷⁵ Jack Lionel Ward, BA, OBE (1910-1986) was educated at the Konservatorium in Frankfurt-am-Main and at the Royal College of Music.

⁷⁶ BBC WAC R27/232, “The Re-education of German Thought Through the Influence of Music and the Radio,” 22 October 1944

⁷⁷ BBC WAC R27/232, 22 October 1944

⁷⁸ The *Gramophone* editor may not have had his wish for Hitler to hear *Belshazzar’s Feast* fulfilled, but here it appeared as the opening salvo in a week of programming that was also to include Mendelssohn and Bartók and other composers banned by the Nazis.

of programme value, not only in themselves, but in the position of the programme where they occur.⁷⁹

Wilson was also keen to point out that it was now undesirable to have *any* concerts built with the idea of “direct propaganda,” something of which he was highly suspicious, with music and its performance being the only “guiding consideration” and that any use of “direct propaganda” in music “would entirely prejudice our objects,” and that “nothing but ill can come from such an approach to musical programmes.” On the other hand, his advice was to take care that “we do not play collaborators, e.g. Mengelberg.”⁸⁰ Marius Goring agreed with Wilson, that “the basic principle that there should be as little direct propaganda as possible,” and rather that the value of the “high artistic standard” of the programmes was of an indirect propaganda value, “as a comparison with the many worthless programmes which German audiences are accustomed to hear on their present service.”⁸¹ The purpose of the suggested programmes was “to present unfamiliar things to the German audience – unfamiliar in the sense of showing, for instance, English ways of thought and living, German and world, artists, who have been forgotten by the Germans or banned by the Nazi authorities,” the indirect propagandistic approach was so subtle as to include concerts in which one banned piece was “slipped in among other pieces without comment.”⁸² The *political* point made by the BBC in its policy was that music’s universal appeal and its variety and freedom from Nazi ideology, put it in a much better position to attract listeners not only to appeal directly to them when the time was appropriate, but to send the underlying message that the policy was one of democratic freedom with a greater and more magnanimous attitude to all kinds of music, including that of the great German masters. Thus the BBC occupied the moral high ground in the stance it took on the seemingly abstract subject of music – one of the symbolic institutions of life – in contrast to the narrow and bankrupt Nazi approach.

Beethoven’s Fifth and Victory Celebrations

Seen in this light, claiming Beethoven’s Fifth and the V symbol that is encoded in its opening bar can be seen to symbolise the BBC’s entire approach. Programme organizer on the BBC Belgian Service Victor de Lavelye proposed the letter V “as an emblem to rally his listeners

⁷⁹ BBC WAC E1/758/2, BBC Internal Memo by Stuart Wilson, Post War Music Programmes for Germany, 12 January 1945

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ BBC WAC E1/739, “Report on Preparatory Work Done for Post-War Service to Germany,” 3 March 1945

⁸² Ibid.

against the Nazis” in January 1941.⁸³ By May, the French and Dutch services had also dedicated broadcasting airtime to “V” and on the 26th, Douglas Ritchie, the BBC’s assistant news editor chaired the first “V” committee meeting and other countries soon picked up the idea, from as far away as Bolivia. Someone else noticed the connection between Morse V and Beethoven and on 27 June “the Morse and the music were first broadcast together.” By 1942, when the BBC again took over the Proms, the opening work, Arthur Bliss’s *Epic March* (commissioned by the BBC) was introduced as having “more than a passing resemblance to the now-familiar V-Sign.” The “V” campaign wasn’t to last, however, as the Nazis co-opted the idea with German stations also broadcasting Beethoven’s Fifth. The symbol, however, remained potent despite the official abandoning of the campaign in 1942 and Beethoven’s Fifth became, to many, the “V Symphony.”⁸⁴ As late as 1972 Diana Mosley, in a letter to her sister Nancy Mitford, refers to “the V Symphony” in a comment about the BBC World Service signal. Diana is writing to Nancy complaining that the BBC moved the World Service from its “old wavelength:”

When you think how they go on & on boring one with wavelengths & metre bands & mega hertz or whatever they’re called, yet from one day to the next there’s nothing but a sort of drum doing the first bar of the V Symphony. Maddening.⁸⁵

Beethoven’s Fifth remained important throughout the War and, inevitably, it was to be a significant part of Victory celebrations when the War was finally won. Detailed recommendations were suggested in September 1944 by the BBC’s Music Department. To begin with, a hymn was recommended – “O God Our Help in Ages Past” as an English tune favoured over the German “Now Thank We All Our God.” The lunch-time performance should contain the *Hallelujah Chorus*, Elgar’s first *Pomp and Circumstance* march (“with chorus joining in at the end”) and Parry’s *Jerusalem*. The music of France, America and Russia was to be featured, as well as that of the empire – *Waltzing Matilda* for Australia and *Sarie Marais* for South Africa – on day two. “The “consensus of opinion,” however, was that based on a programme directive for the first day of Victory week, which stated that “programmes reflecting the pre-victory war effort” should be excluded. There was also a practical point that a full symphony, no matter how popular, was out of place in a programme that rather called

⁸³ Rankin, 2008: 298

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 299

⁸⁵ Mosley (ed.), 2008: 584 (letter dated 11 September 1972). In her autobiography, Diana, interned during the War under Defence Regulation 18B and a keen music enthusiast, tells of a fellow German prisoner who was permitted to bring a gramophone into Holloway: “We had Beethoven quartets, the second and sixth symphonies, Schubert, Bach Handel, Debussy, Wagner,” she writes in her autobiography (Mosley, 2003: 169)

for “more terse and jubilant utterances.” Thus for day three, when the BBC could “gradually get away from the feeling of *arrière-pensée*,” the evening programme was to be devoted entirely to Beethoven’s Fifth, a suitable introduction to “slightly more sustained listening... “from every point of view.”⁸⁶ In April 1945, the Overseas Planning Department was making preparations to broadcast the concert outside Britain:

Beethoven’s C Minor Symphony is to be played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult in the Home Service on one of the first few days of V-Week. This is, I think, considered by Music Department the most significant music programme of these days.⁸⁷

Beethoven’s Fifth was by this time ubiquitous, as we have seen. In the concert hall, on the radio and in film, it made its own very special contribution. In *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942), for example, the quintessential Edwardian detective (Basil Rathbone) receives a makeover in a film that was adapted to the urgent concerns of the day.⁸⁸ The plot revolves around broadcasts from Germany aimed at British audiences which are causing panic across the country: “People of Britain, greetings from the Third Reich. This is the voice you have learned to fear – this is the Voice of Terror.” If in some way a parody of William Joyce’s absurd broadcasts, in reality Lord Haw-Haw actually became a figure of fun. The film, however, is not quite so blasé and the private detective and his partner “join forces with the government” to solve the mystery and save the nation in the process. During his investigations, Holmes requests a broadcast of Beethoven’s Fifth so that he can analyse the sound waves to establish whether the “Voice of Terror” is live or recorded.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ BBC WAC R27/510, “Draft of Suggestions for Music Department’s Share in Victory Programmes prepared for meeting with Regional Music Directors,” 6 September 1944

⁸⁷ BBC Internal Memo, Victory Week: Beethoven C Minor Symphony, 23 April 1945, BBC WAC R27/510. This April memo is dated just one week before Hitler’s death.

⁸⁸ Based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s, “His Last Bow – An Epilogue of Sherlock Holmes,” the last of seven stories published in 1917 in which the detective is coaxed out of retirement in response to the approach of the Great War.

⁸⁹ Holmes, an amateur fiddler, can be also heard practising Mendelssohn’s E Minor Violin Concerto and, following their acceptance of the assignment, Holmes and Watson are in the study, listening to Beethoven’s 5th:

Watson: Well, if you ask me, it’s disgraceful!

Holmes: Beethoven’s Fifth? Not at all, it’s very good!



Sherlock Holmes (Basil Rathbone) analyses a broadcast of Beethoven's Fifth, with Doctor Watson (Nigel Bruce) looking on in *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942)

Because the BBC broadcast little in the way of music in 1940, inevitably people did tune into something more palatable, exposing them to the broadcasts of Lord Haw-Haw as a result. But in the same year, the dour Yorkshireman J.B. Priestley was dragooned to counteract the broadcasts of Haw-Haw whose broadcasts from Germany championed the working classes, and as a way of mitigating the “class voice” of the BBC and, crucially, he did not sound like an upper-class chap from Oxford or Cambridge,” as Nicholas Rankin has observed.⁹⁰ Priestley's hugely popular “Postscripts” captured the Zeitgeist in Britain and were aired at 9.15pm every Sunday evening during the summer of 1940, beginning just after the evacuation of Dunkirk. One particular broadcast in June gave him the opportunity to express his feelings about the Nazis:

My feeling from the first, I think, had nothing to do with economics and politics, but was really moral – or, if you like, religious. Here, in these cruel figures who emerged from the underworld, *who promptly destroyed the cultural life of their country*, trained boys to be brutes, brushed away the last specks of honour, organised two vast new government departments – one for systematic lying, [and] the other for systematic torture...⁹¹

By the former he refers of course to Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. Before *49th Parallel* and the corraling of British efforts in this regard, Priestley was well aware of the difference between British and German approaches to propaganda, not only in the broadcasting but also in other media. In early June he saw a Nazi propaganda film, which was used to “frighten neutrals” who were “about to be ‘protected’ by the Reich.” The film, *Baptism of Fire*, concerned the German invasion of Poland, and in his broadcast the following day Priestley

⁹⁰ Rankin, 2008: 291

⁹¹ Priestley, 1940: 15, emphasis mine

summed up the different approaches to propaganda – German solemnity against English light-heartedness; the Nazi machine of robots against decent people making the best of it:

It's the opposite of "The Lion Has Wings" – and I mean by that, that it presents all the contrary qualities. Our film didn't take itself too solemnly; showed our airmen as likeable human beings, cracking jokes with their wives and sweethearts. But this Nazi picture is all "drums and trombones" – gloom and threats. A loud German voice bullies you through it all. There's a lot about destruction and death, and not a glimmer of humour, fun, or ordinary human relationships.⁹²

Each "Postscript" had a different theme. On Sunday 15 September, for example, he spoke about London and the spirit of Londoners in the Blitz: "The Londoners, as the Americans are saying, can take it, and London itself – this grey sea of a city – can take it."⁹³ *London Can Take It* was of course the title of the American 1940 short. Priestley himself was also involved in film, scripting the Ministry of Information's 1940 *Britain at Bay*. A standard propaganda short, with music by Richard Addinsell, the film begins with scenes of rural England – both coast and field – accompanied by a broad, quiet theme linking music with landscape, as in so many films of the period. Later, an Elgarian "big tune" is used to accompany Priestley's words about the task that lay ahead for Britain. *The Times* found the film "emotional but in no way embarrassing, heartening without being hearty, the film's purpose [...] to make a direct appeal to the emotions," the music, commentary, and the "extremely distinguished photography" working together "to encourage the audience and to drive a point home with unusual speed and precision."⁹⁴ The "Postscripts" were to end on Sunday 20 October 1940. He began his final broadcast by explaining that it was his decision – and not that of the BBC – to quit. Fearing that

⁹² Priestley, 1940: 7-8. The use of trombones was not lost on Vaughan Williams. In the score to 49th Parallel the Nazi theme begins with fortissimo trombones and percussion: "a menacing staccato phrase on the brass depicting the Nazis (which VW later adapted for the scherzo of his second string quartet in 1943)" (Liner notes to Chandos Records' recording, *The Film Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams Volume 2*, CHAN 10244).

⁹³ Priestley, 1940: 72

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 13 July 1940. Elsewhere on the same page there appeared a review of a new book, "Letters to a Musical Boy" by Mervyn Bruxner on musical education and careers in music; a report of the Royal College of Music Students' Orchestra's concert of Glazunov's sixth Symphony and Brahms' first Piano Concerto; notices for "Music in the Parks." As well as the usual broadcasting schedule, information about new BBC announcers and the theatre listings, a short article reports on the Board of Education's announcement "that all possible assistance to save the London Philharmonic Orchestra" was being given by CEMA through the guarantee of funding for ten concerts "in the provinces", and the listings advertise a special benefit concert to be conducted by Richard Tauber on 2 August at the Queen's Hall with the soprano Joan Hammond and the London Philharmonic. At the cinema, meanwhile, were *Rebecca* and George Formby in *Let George Do It*.

he may become a “war bore,” to hear the same voice week after week at the same time may no longer be appropriate and that another interpreter of events may be better suited to broadcast, as the situation and mode of the country had changed. But in the preface to the published collection of these broadcasts he throws some more light on his decision:

Unfortunately the only persons here who do not seem aware of [the] terrific power of the broadcast word are the members of our War Cabinet, who still do not realise that in the BBC we have something as important to us in this war, which is quite unlike previous wars, as an army or navy or air force. The official under-valuation of this great medium of communication and persuasion is to my mind one of the most serious weaknesses of our war effort.⁹⁵

The previous week’s “Postscript” and therefore the final true commentary of his five months of broadcasts, made explicit the value and joy of the “gay” and “rich” life of recreation and entertainment:

Noble words finely spoken, great music, all the treasures of art, laughter and lights, and song, these musn’t be banished but should be given a greater place than ever before in our lives. This winter, here in Lancashire, everything from the Hallé Orchestra peeling out the finale of Brahms’ Fourth Symphony, to a bit of clog dancing should be in full swing...⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Priestley, 1940: vi. These sentiments, of course, put him on a direct collision course with the Establishment.

⁹⁶ Priestley, 1940: 93

Chapter Six

Handel, Beethoven and Humphrey Jennings: the Use of “German” Music in Film

*They sit down in the same butchers’ uniforms and listen to Mendelssohn and Schubert. Something horrid about that. Don’t you think so?*¹

Although Beethoven never came to London, Britain could, as we have seen, legitimately claim his music, if not the man himself. However, one great German composer, who did make Britain his home, unwittingly provided the Victorian choral societies of the future with the foundation of English music appreciation that Jennings showcased in *Listen to Britain* and *Dim Little Island*, as we shall see. Esteban Buch’s survey of the relationship between Beethoven’s *Choral* symphony and politics cites George Frederick Handel (1685-1759) as the first significant composer of modern “political” music. In Buch’s analysis, the *Hallelujah Chorus* becomes a political expression of allegiance to the Sovereign, its continuous deployment throughout the Nineteenth century part of the “Handel Cult” that, as we shall see, was to be evoked anew during the Second World War.

Handel’s Place in the National Consciousness

Buch points out that through his composition for the Hanoverian court in London from 1710, Handel “came to assume a political dimension hitherto unknown in musical history,” though it was not just his association with the court to which this status was attributed.² Rather, the new methods which made art more accessible “gradually freed contemporary artistic production from aristocratic control and made it subject to the market laws of supply and demand.”³ By the 1780s Handel had become a “symbol of national greatness,” the loss of the American colonies in 1776 providing the “paradoxical and indirect effect” of strengthening British identity, in which Handel was hailed as “the harmonic strength of Europe.”⁴ And in an effort to redefine the monarchy in “national terms,” the composer’s music was deployed by “the nation’s leading Handelian, George III, not only emphasising the monarch’s nationality but

¹ Deborah Kerr in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*

² Buch, 2003: 13

³ Ibid.

⁴ Buch, 2003: 24

also the humanity of his private life and “artistic proclivities.”⁵ This echoes the “godlike” status afforded to J.S. Bach and, to some extent, Beethoven that was the emphasis behind the elevation of their music to 1930s audiences in Britain.⁶ The virtues of the composer thus become a useful tool in the effort to rouse the better nature of the populace.

Celebrations in 1784 of the 100th anniversary of Handel’s birth included a performance of the *Messiah* by five hundred at Westminster Abbey. Around the same time, the legend that George II’s reaction on first hearing the *Messiah* accounted for the common practice of standing for the “Hallelujah Chorus” was “final proof of the English monarch’s devotion to the composer’s cult.”⁷ Official ceremonies in Victorian Britain “far outshone” those of the Hanoverian era, writes Buch.⁸ Handel remained a significant figure throughout the Nineteenth century, his music present at every major state occasion including, of course, every Coronation from 1727 to 1937 which used at least some of his music, and always *Zadok the Priest*. By 1937, however, some things had changed. “The music critic H.C. Colles noted that what distinguished the Coronation of King George VI from those of George V and Edward VII was the prominence given to Tudor choral music, sung without orchestral accompaniment, a form which had undergone a major revival of interest following the English Musical Renaissance.”⁹

The official programme of the 1937 Coronation contains nothing of the music used in the order of ceremony but the Coronation number of the *Radio Times* of 7 May 1937 provides a brief history, “Coronation Music Through the Ages” in which Edwin Evans explains to listeners that “the music of the Coronation service is largely governed by precedent,” citing Handel’s antiphon “Zadok the Priest as the most ancient example, included in all the Coronations since those of “our Saxon monarchs.” *Zadok the Priest* was arranged for Charles II’s Coronation, only to be superseded again in its original form. Evans acknowledges that by the time of the Coronation of George II “the great figure in English music was the Saxon Handel,” his spirit infusing the music of the next four coronations.¹⁰ Handel’s status as a British “culture hero” continued well into the Twentieth century. There is no doubt about Handel’s position in the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Chapter 1

⁷ Buch, 2003: 24

⁸ Ibid., 25. Buch quotes David Canadine’s “The Context Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, c. 1820-1977” in Eric J. Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.): *The Invention of Tradition*, CUP, 1983.

⁹ The German chorale *Ein’ Feste Burg* was also used as the regalia was carried in (Richards, 2001: .114), the significance of which becomes apparent in its use on the propaganda film *49th Parallel*, which I discuss in Chapter 7.

¹⁰ *Radio Times*, Vol.55 No.710, 7 May 1937, pp.16-17

mind of *The Times'* leader-writer who, on 25 August 1942, commented on a recent lecture given by Canon Adam Fox on Westminster Abbey's memorials:

“Handel joined his mighty genius” to those of Purcell, Blow Croft, Sterndale Bennett and Stanford “when he became an Englishman and was handed the Biblical verses proper to the coronation of an English King,” and that Handel’s sculpture “should face Chaucer’s cannot seem other than appropriate not only in view of his immense genius but because of his contribution to the Englishman’s understanding of his own language through music.”¹¹

The monument, by Louis François Roubiliac, was completed in 1761. “That he should be honoured by such a prominent tomb in Westminster Abbey testifies to his personal status and the growing sacralisation of his art,” writes Tim Blanning in *The Triumph of Music*.¹² Unsurprisingly, Handel was also claimed as a national icon in Germany. As Erik Levi points out in his recent book on the Third Reich and Mozart, Handel’s German nationalistic credentials were reinterpreted, however, as the political situation in Germany changed:

In 1935, during the 250th anniversary celebrations of his birth, Handel’s residence in England was utilised as a positive symbol of shared cultural values that existed between the German and English nations. Four years later, at the outbreak of war, it was no longer possible to make such claims. Handel was portrayed as someone who had resisted complete integration into English society, and had held firm to his Germanic principles in spite of a vicious and evil campaign against him by his enemies in London.¹³

While this interpretation of Handel’s status is understandable given Handel’s struggle for acceptance before the first staging of *Messiah*, it is a claim that, as we shall see, was comfortably refuted by British propagandists.

Culture Heroes in Film

Although by the 1930s the medium of film was being used as a vehicle to propagandise culture heroes of various kinds throughout Europe, especially in Germany, Britain failed to use cultural figures from history as a means of film propaganda as the German producers were doing, with

¹¹ *The Times*, 25 August 1942

¹² Blanning, 2009: 27

¹³ Levi, 2010: 18

audiences seemingly instead preferring the fantasy world of the Gainsborough melodrama. Aldgate and Richards remark that in Germany, poets, inventors, scientists and even musicians were all the subject of films which used history to present idealisations of the “culture heroes” of the past. All such films, they write, might well have been subtitled “Waiting for Hitler” in their treatment of Germany’s past as the cultural context in which National Socialism was to emerge as the destiny of the German race, allowing it to flourish under Hitler’s “own inspired leadership.”¹⁴ The outstanding musical example of the genre is *Friedemann Bach* (1941), a biographical portrait of J.S. Bach’s eldest son (played by Gustav Gründgens). Given Friedemann’s reputation as a tortured and misunderstood soul, it is noteworthy that the German cinema should choose him over any of his sixteen siblings (Carl Philipp Emanuel, say) or even, of course, the father himself, given the subjects of other German “culture hero” films of the period. *Friedrich Schiller* (1940), *Paracelsus* (1943), *Diesel* (1942), *Andreas Schluter* (1942) “all celebrate the struggles and achievements of solitary German geniuses, striving for perfection, knowing they are right, refusing to compromise, sacrificing personal happiness to attain their ultimate goals.”¹⁵ The films covered, respectively, the lives of a poet, scientist, inventor, and architect. *Paracelsus*, with music by Herbert Windt (composer of the score to Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1934)) contains what David Hull has called the best celluloid ballet-scene to date.¹⁶

Bach was to provide the musical example in this series of culture hero films. It, too, contains a pivotal ballet scene. The film uses music by both W.F. (Friedemann) and J.S. Bach. W.F. Bach was a child prodigy, the Two-Part Inventions as well as the early preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* written for him when a child. Legend has him as a drunkard but the film presents a very different picture. “It is the tragedy of a son who must live in the shadow of his great father. Friedemann, the eldest son of the great J.S. Bach, has a brilliant debut at the Saxon court. He has fallen in love with the dancer Fiorini, composing a ballet for her. The ballet is a kind of bacchanalian celebration of which Carl Philipp Emmanuel tells Friedemann of the shame such music might bring on the name of Bach. Furthermore, the young contessa Antonia, Friedemann’s pupil who loves him, also dislikes the ballet and accuses him of betraying music:

I admire you like I admire few people! You were the last word in music. But the ballet has disappointed me greatly. It is conceited and empty, and it is... it is not pure!

¹⁴ Aldgate & Richards, 2007: 157

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156

¹⁶ Wendtland, 1989: 17

Bowing to pressure, Friedemann leaves Dresden, deciding to make a new start in Braunschweig. For his audition, he plays his father's music (the Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor), but the auditioners would prefer some of his own music. Given a second chance, in desperation he perpetuates a fraud: passing off an early work of his father's – less familiar on the ear – as his own. But his dishonesty is seen through and he is rejected again. Wandering the countryside in search of a living with a group of street musicians, he eventually finds his way to Berlin, where at a music shop he witnesses a contemptuous dismissal by a rich client of the music of the elder Bach. A scuffle in which he defends the name of Bach ensues, and Friedemann dies from the wound sustained. The film, despite its official nomination as "artistically" and "culturally" valuable, however, was not widely distributed. The Nazi Filmpolitik realized in retrospect that Gründgens' tendency to downplay the cultural hero could allow an anti-totalitarian interpretation.¹⁷ "It is worth noting that the only British wartime 'culture hero' film," write Aldgate and Richards, "was a resounding flop."¹⁸ There is a parallel between *Friedemann Bach*, and *The Great Mr. Handel* (1943). Because of Gründgens integrity in his interpretation of Friedemann Bach, it was disliked by the Nazi machine and remained largely unseen.¹⁹ In Britain, despite its similar "cultural value" *The Great Mr. Handel* was rejected by the public. Both films, then, were "flops" in the commercial sense, even if for precisely opposite reasons.

The Great Mr. Handel, nonetheless, is a unique combination of film *and* cultural propaganda. Crucially, the film wastes no time in dealing with the awkward question of Handel's nationality, a distraction that could well limit the effectiveness of a British "culture hero" film – that this great British composer was, by all the usual measures, German!²⁰ In contrast, there was no apparent need to remind audiences that George II and George Frederick Handel shared the same roots and that German had been the language of court until only a few years before. To be fair, the directors were limited in the choice of musicians, with perhaps Henry Purcell the only other composer of equal rank to Handel about whom a British "culture hero" film could

¹⁷ Wendtland, 1987: 38, quoting Herbert Holba (Reclams deutsches Filmlexicon, Herbert Holba u.a., Stuttgart, 1984, p.127). Translated from the German.

¹⁸ Aldgate & Richards, 2007: 166 (Note #50). The "conventional wisdom" in the British film industry was that "historical films were unpopular with working class audiences" (Aldgate & Richards, 2007: 157). This wisdom prevailed in the reception of *The Great Mr. Handel*.

¹⁹ Gründgens is the subject of Istvan Szabo's 1981 film *Mephisto*, the material for which is taken from Thomas Mann's son Klaus' novel of the same name. Allegedly based on the marriage of Gründgens to Klaus' sister Erika Mann, the film contains a Göring-like character who says "When I hear the word culture I reach for my revolver," a remark that can be attributed to Goebbels. (Liner notes to the VHS edition of the film.)

²⁰ There is one significant contemporaneous filmic precedent for claiming Handel in a British film; the coronation scene in *Victoria the Great* (1937) incorporates actual music – Handel's *Gloria* – from Queen Victoria's Coronation. The film was followed with a sequel, *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938) which, significantly, was co-written by Sir Robert Vansittart.

be made.²¹ In any case, there was another significant reason for making the film, which is a Technicolor celebration of the 200th anniversary of the first performance of his greatest work – the *Messiah* – recounting the composer’s struggle to create the work and its eventual triumph in 1743 London. But the film also provided a propaganda opportunity of another kind for the newly-emergent J. Arthur Rank to evangelise his Methodism. Founder of the Religious Film Society and a multi-millionaire, Rank had money, studio space and the distribution channels required for his vision:

...to use film to spread the good news about religion. When distributors and exhibitors proved less than keen on *The Turn of the Tide*, Rank did what any multi-millionaire would do - buy a cinema chain so it could get seen. This laid the foundation for Britain's greatest film empire. Of course, the demands of the business soon meant that the company concentrated on more secular projects, but from time to time Rank produced something with a bit more religiosity. The *Great Mr. Handel* was the biggest, and last, of these projects.²²

The film begins in 1727 in the days before the coronation of George II. An early sequence – in which Handel’s British credentials are secured – is underscored by the anthem *Zadok the Priest* which is being rehearsed at Westminster Abbey. However, the composer’s credentials as the official court composer – who has been asked to write four anthems, no less – are at first questioned by the Bishop. To have four anthems commissioned for the Coronation is a “very signal honour” from one “who is not an Englishman,” he remarks, to which Handel (Wilfrid Lawson) replies (in a rather laboured German accent), “But I am even more certainly an Englishman than yourself, my Lord Bishop. I am English by Act of Parliament. That means that while you are English by no act of your own, I am English by choice – I made this choice for love of England. Also I think it very suitable that I compose anthems for England’s king...”

“Well, upon my soul,” comments the Bishop, “We live in strange times. That a Bishop should be browbeaten by a mere musician.” (Given that J. Arthur Rank was a Methodist, it was unsurprising that he allowed the “browbeating” of a Bishop in favour of the Low Church, the beliefs and principles of which feature extensively in the film.) The scene reveals aspects of the democratic principles for which Britain was fighting, such as the equality of Englishmen (even Naturalised citizens), and the precedence of Parliament over deference to rank, ecclesiastical

²¹ “Rank gave the production his favourite director and actor (Norman Walker and Wilfrid Lawson, both from *The Turn of the Tide*), and splashed out on Technicolor. What he forgot to provide was a decent script...” (http://www.britishpictures.com/arch_g3.html, accessed 14 October 2009)

²² (http://www.britishpictures.com/arch_g3.html, accessed 14 October 2009)

or otherwise. Of course the “strange times” are really those of 1942. While the film is historically accurate, it also references nationalistic, religious and charitable sentiments that were aspects of the film’s contextual production. The proceeds of its first two performances at the Leicester Square theatre, for example, benefited the Royal Society of Musicians, an organization set up in 1739 with Handel’s assistance, partly for the benefit of an oboist whose case (retold in the film) occasioned its formation.²³

The climax of the film depicts the creative process that went into writing the *Messiah*. The sequence begins with a conversation between the opera singer Mrs. Cimmer (Elizabeth Allan) and Handel at his keyboard:

“What, master, is your dream,” she asks, “Can you tell me?”

“In words, no. In music, only dimly. Here, maybe, I capture a faint echo... Ah, but the faintest echo... Music that will raise a man to the skies – cleanse his mind and soul...”

But he cannot write the music until he can “shake off the fetters of this world” (a reference to the obsession with money and the frippery and fashion of the time). Indeed, there is no love lost between Handel and prominent members of Society on whom he relies: “Saxon fella seems to have finished,”²⁴ declares the Prince of Wales at the end of one performance in a snub which ensures Handel’s latest opera is a flop. A “royal fop... without manners,” is the composer’s response. By now heavily in debt, Handel is also out of favour, and is ailing. But after prayer, his fortunes turn with the arrival of *Messiah* librettist Charles Jennens. From this point, the film becomes progressively pious, though the sequence depicting the creative progress of Handel’s inspiration – presented almost entirely without dialogue – uses Handel’s music as underscoring in a sensitive treatment of a number of themes from the *Messiah*. By now the composer is exhausted, the tentative arrangements by Ernest Irving heard whenever Handel is seen – half dozing – in the twilight. The halting arrangement mirrors the emerging shape of the opening chorus in the composer’s mind, with a similar treatment of “For Unto Us a Child is Born,” appearing towards the end of the sequence, which is the core of the film and more than twenty minutes in length. Music director Ernest Irving wrote the pastiche that underscores this sequence from a number of sections of the work, linked together by the leitmotiv of “Comfort Ye” which, he acknowledged, itself runs like a thread all throughout the

²³ *The Times*, 17 September 1942

²⁴ This is slightly ironic, since George II, who couldn’t speak English, was the Prince’s grandfather thus making him as much of a “Saxon fella” as Handel. In this rather hypocritical handling of the question, the film downplays the Royal Family’s German ancestry while at the same elevating that of the composer.

first part of the *Messiah*.²⁵ As it draws to a close, the music now more coherent, Handel's vision of his Saviour bearing the cross is followed by another of Christ Risen, before whom he kneels, heavenly voices marking the "miracle" that is taking place. Now the famous chorus begins to emerge, and the oratorio is ready. "He was despised and rejected; A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," sings Mrs. Cimmer, with Handel at the harpsichord, in a semi-diegetic scene with the orchestra underscoring, to which the entire neighbourhood stops to listen. "From my own travail," says Handel, "I have found the truth: I know that my Redeemer liveth." The first performance in Dublin is followed by a triumphant Covent Garden staging by Royal Command. The camera pans, focusing on Handel, and all the players. Finally, in a depiction of the legend, even the King stands at the end of the Hallelujah Chorus with the closing "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," and the film ends with Handel, in John Huntley's words, "restored to fame and favour," choosing right as he saw it, with a simple reliance "on truth, on virtue, and on God," and showing himself in his inevitable triumph to be "The Great Mr. Handel."²⁶

At the film's premier, the trade press enthused but, despite it being a "musical masterpiece," writes John Huntley, it had "one fatal mistake:" it was slow. Loathed by the popular press, it ran for just a week at Leicester Square. Although a flop in England, the film did well enough, however, in Australia, Canada and the US at least not to fail at the box office. But even J. Arthur Rank himself found it dull, despite or perhaps even because of the necessarily religious content required that was in keeping with his beliefs and desire to "uplift" the British public via the medium of film. The film's approach to the material certainly alienated audiences, and if, as *The Times'* listings for the first week of October 1942 suggest, the competition gives some indication of what audiences inevitably preferred. *In Which We Serve* was showing at the Gaumont, Haymarket and the Pavilion, Marble Arch; Disney's *Bambi* was at the New Gallery, Regent Street with *Fantasia* showing elsewhere. "Ironically, at the same time as this 'musical masterpiece' was playing to ever-decreasing houses at Leicester Square," writes Huntley, "a hundred yards away the musically worthless but slickly made American film *My Gal Sal* (starring Rita Hayworth and Victor Mature) was doing a roaring trade at the Odeon, where it ran for weeks."²⁷ This is what the public wanted, then, and not the didactic, preachy and lumbering tones of *The Great Mr. Handel*.

"Perhaps," Huntley observes, "the pastel shades of the magnificently restrained, soothing colour as photographed by Claude Friese-Greene and Jack Cardiff are the outstanding

²⁵ Huntley, 1947: 65

²⁶ Huntley, 1947: 64

²⁷ Huntley, 1947: 66/7

achievement of *The Great Mr. Handel*.”²⁸ Cardiff himself provides some insight to his involvement in the film. “Officially I couldn’t work on a commercial film, because I was working for the Government at the time, and if I left to work on a commercial film, I would be liable to be called up,” he disclosed.²⁹ *The Great Mr. Handel* was to be his real break into films, leading to work next on the Ministry of Information’s first “big feature”³⁰ in colour, *Western Approaches* (1944).³¹

The music from Handel’s original scores, including *Music for the Royal Fireworks* and excerpts from *The Water Music*, arranged by Ernest Irving (on loan from Ealing Studios), was supplemented by “a little tune of Buononcini,” and the inclusion of some ancient English music, including a theme based on a motet by Orlando Gibbons” in a number of vignettes depicting the street sellers of the period, their traditional street cries of the period acting as suture, and used at Irving’s suggestion “to denote lapses of time in the story.”³² For the purposes of authenticity, the string section of the London Philharmonic was persuaded to restring its instruments with gut, thus giving the sound of “period instruments.” Irving made other changes to the orchestration, too: “The difference in the tone,” in his mind, was “like that between silk and fustian.”³³ Later, Irving was to comment on the music critic’s ability to help draw attention to the public’s notice films which contain a higher-than-usual standard of music, and even adverse criticism “cannot but react to the benefit of film music.”³⁴ One such criticism concerned the use of the harp in “Worthy is the Lamb,” an instrument not used by Handel. Irving said that although “not a note” was altered from Handel’s score,³⁵ the re-orchestration prompted “well-meant efforts to improve the music” at cinemas where the film was being shown:

A short time ago, in Manchester, a film was exhibited showing Handel, directing from the cembalo, the first performance of ‘Messiah’ at Covent Garden. Handel’s original score (unaltered by Mozart, Costa or other improvers) was used, and for various reasons, the chief of which was an attempt to get great clarity in the vocal parts, the organ was not employed

²⁸ Huntley, 1947: 62

²⁹ Bowyer, 2003: 50

³⁰ Bowyer, 2003: 51

³¹ Directed by Pat Jackson for the Crown Film Unit with music by Clifton Parker, *Western Approaches* was regarded by the Ministry “as one of the finest propaganda films made during the war,” though “more noted for the difficulty of its production than for its aesthetic qualities.”

(<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/477207/index.html> accessed 14 October 2009)

³² Huntley, 1947: 66

³³ Huntley, 1947: 65

³⁴ *Music and Letters* 1943; 24 (223-235)

³⁵ Huntley, 1947: 64

for the continuo. The local manager and his organist, who were accustomed to hear 'thundering diapasons', not to mention mixtures and pedal reeds, decided in consultation to rectify this deplorable weakness, and so in front of the maestro, his eyes wet with the emotion of the occasion, a refulgent 'Wurlitzer' emerged from the depths and joined in with the Hallelujahs. It was not quite in tune or quite coincident in rhythm; but Handel showed no surprise, and King George II, on his feet for 'King of Kings,' did not even blink at the startling apparition.³⁶

However the experience of Ernest Irving's arrangement of Handel's music and these kinds of improvisations, the question of the composer's German origin was dealt with deftly in the film. But because the potential sensitivity regarding that of the Royal Family had perhaps already been addressed during the First World War, there was no need to remind contemporary audiences that the present King also had a potentially awkward ethnic background. His mother Queen Mary had after all been Princess May of Teck and his name at birth had been Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Ignoring then George II's ethnic origin, the film dispatches that of Handel at the outset. Esteban Buch points out that the German accents of both reflected "their shared geographical roots" and this had a comparable effect at the political level.³⁷ Handel's association with Germany and the Hanovers was mitigated by his proximity to the King and his music, particularly the Hallelujah Chorus and also the earlier *Zadok the Priest*, satisfied what Buch calls the "religious nationalists" not only because it was written in English, but also because its Biblical associations were interwoven with the identity of a "favoured" people (that is, favoured by Providence).³⁸

The deployment of Handel's "nationalistic" music (*Zadok the Priest* and the *Messiah*) in *The Great Mr. Handel* is in precisely the same spirit in which it was originally received two hundred years before and extends the symbolism of the preceding two centuries' devotion to Handel. The film can thus be seen as a latter-day attempt to revive the Handel "cult" for the purposes of war-time cultural propaganda. That it failed might not necessarily have been detrimental to the composer's music and it did little to change the status of one who remains a towering figure in English musical heritage. If there was still doubt as to Handel's nationality, this 1942 film at least made it clear to contemporary audiences that despite his German birth, the Great Mr. Handel was nevertheless *our* Great Mr. Handel.

³⁶ *Music and Letters* 1943; 24 (223-235), p.233

³⁷ Buch, 2003: 14

³⁸ Buch, 2003: 15

Music in the Documentaries of Humphrey Jennings

The great choral tradition in which Handel's music played an obvious and important part is a recurring theme in the work of one of the British cinema's most poetic directors whose propaganda films, made largely during the war, make considerable use of music to score some very subtle points. Testament to the prominence of the *Hallelujah Chorus* can be found in another film of the time made by one of the great poets of British cinema. The Crown Film Unit's *Heart of Britain* (1941) was Humphrey Jennings' tribute to the industrial workers of the Midlands and northern England. In it he deploys a wide range of musical heritage, beginning with the opening bars of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*, Op.47, as the narrator comments, "In Manchester today, they still respect the genius of Germany – the genius of Germany that was..." This opening salvo gets right to the point, one that is not only central to Jennings' work but can be found in the films of Powell and Pressburger, and in the attitude to Germany and German music adopted by composers such as Vaughan Williams. As one commentator has put it, "It is through the music of Beethoven, Mozart and Handel that Jennings suggests that not all Germans are bad, or always were, but rather that it is the seed of evil, Nazism, that should be combated. If this was not subtle propaganda, what was?"³⁹

In *Heart of Britain*, following a series of images of the landscapes of Yorkshire, Lancashire and the Lake District, Jennings introduces what Kevin Jackson has called an "almost astonishingly civilized" thought in "this piece of militant wartime propaganda" – a cut to Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting the Hallé Orchestra playing the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth which by the time the film was made in 1941 had become an aural icon in British popular culture, familiar to many.⁴⁰ Cutting to images of bomb-damaged Coventry while the voiceover narrative is suspended for more than a full minute, Jennings – brilliantly – allows the audience to reflect on the meaning of the images. As Jackson comments, this is a "devastatingly powerful passage," and is one of Jennings' greatest "realizations of what emotional peaks may be reached when the right music is married to the right image."⁴¹ Following a cut to a woman talking about drinking tea (a classic Jennings touch), the narrator takes up his commentary: "And even now in Yorkshire, the people still find the time to sing..." Jennings takes us to one of those institutions of British music making – the Huddersfield Choral Society singing Handel's Messiah. "People who sing like that in times like these cannot be beaten. These people are slow to anger, not easily roused," the narrator continues. The quote, from Proverbs, implies

³⁹ Kassel, 2006: 157

⁴⁰ Jackson, 2004: 238

⁴¹ Ibid.

the Christian ideals of fortitude and patience.⁴² Here, the music, which continues beneath the narrative voiceover, supports the idea of “hitting back” with all the resources at the people’s disposal: and that skill, tradition, “fire in their hearts” and industry “will answer the German “challenge.” Finally, while the chorus sings the climatic “King of Kings, Lord of Lords”, images of fighting aircraft, the bombed out cathedral and of the moors are juxtaposed, tacitly implying that fighting in Britain, beautiful Britain and historic Britain are on the side of triumphant Christianity: “And the Nazis will learn – once and for all – that no one with impunity troubles the heart of Britain.” This finale, which features a bomber climbing into the sky as the final *Hallelujah* swells is, for Kevin Jackson, “ferociously powerful warmongering,”⁴³ and in his famous essay on Humphrey Jennings, Lindsay Anderson has similarly commented on this powerful passage:

The Huddersfield Choral Society rises before Malcolm Sargent, and the homely, buxom housewives, the black-coated workers, and the men from the mills burst into the Hallelujah Chorus. The sound of their singing continues, and we see landscapes and noble buildings, and then a factory where bombers are being built. Back and forth go these contrasting, conjunctive images, until the music broadens out to its conclusion, the roar of the engines joins in, and the bombers take off. The sequence is not a long one, and there are unfortunate intrusions from the commentator, but the effect is extraordinary, and the implications obvious. Jennings has found his style.⁴⁴

This, then, for Anderson, is the pivotal moment in Jennings’ creative output, and, though unlike much of his other work in its militancy is one which seems to set the tone for much of his later work, particularly in his deployment of music to convey meaning (Kevin Jackson comments that most of his work was essentially humane in its implications.)⁴⁵ The development of this use of music can be witnessed in all Jennings’ output, from his early GPO films until his untimely death in 1950 when he had in preparation a film about the workings of a major London orchestra. Indeed, it seems to be somewhat of an obsession with him.

From September 1939 John Grierson’s GPO film unit was taken over by the MoI and was renamed the Crown film Unit in 1940. *London Can Take It* was Humphrey Jennings’ first film under this banner, with Harry Watt as co-director. Footage in *The First Days* (1939), one of the

⁴² Proverbs 14:29, 16:32. “The Lord is Slow to Anger...” appears in many other places in the Old Testament

⁴³ Jackson, 2004: 238

⁴⁴ “Only Connect: Some aspects of the work of Humphrey Jennings” (*Sight and Sound*, Spring 1954) Lindsay Anderson

⁴⁵ Jackson, 2004: 238

GPO Film Unit's last films and directed by Humphrey Jennings, Pat Jackson and Harry Watt, shows an empty National Gallery – before it has been “requisitioned” by Myra Hess. The film talks of the very first week of the war. There is, though, little music in the film – the silence of London's streets a particular feature. “It's a Long Way to Tipperary” and other WWI songs are used to provide some reference to twenty years before. A comment on the closure of theatres – for the first time since the Puritans three hundred years before; though a barrel organ can still be heard on the street. Finally, an inspiring and rousing soundtrack replaces the narration. At this early stage, the genius of deploying Beethoven for propagandistic means had not yet been realised. For example, made just before the outbreak of war in 1939, and another of the GPO Film Unit's last films before it was incorporated into the MoI film Division as the Crown Film Unit, *If War Should Come* was “designed to instil calm and reassurance at a time of uncertainty.”⁴⁶

Featuring a “soothing” Elgar soundtrack, the film begins with the first “Pomp and Circumstances” March, the music fading before it reaches its famous “big tune” theme. Returning again, following a series of instructive advice, the fade is repeated. This advice becomes direct instruction as the film progresses. As the film closes, instead of the “big tune” of the march, the music unexpectedly changes as the narrator speaks the following exhortation:

No-one in this country wants war, but if war should come, don't be alarmed.

Keep a good heart. Whatever happens, Britain is a nation prepared.

As he speaks those words, a series of images – factory, office, shipyard, radar installation, and farm – are presented over another of Elgar's rousing themes: “Nimrod,” in a clear attempt to swell the heart in support of the film's message. This was a rather “obvious” choice of music but this was still 1939; it would not yet have seemed obvious or contrived to a British public that was not easily manipulated and before civilian casualties brought home the real and present danger. What might be described as jingoistic music thereafter (and using Elgar in this way would have seemed so) makes the later use of Beethoven all the more intriguing. Indeed by the time Humphrey Jennings began making *Diary for Timothy* (1946), which was begun just before the end of the war in October 1944, Beethoven was an established feature of British wartime propaganda. It is a useful contrast to *If War Should Come*, as it marks the birth of a baby precisely five years after the war began, just as the GPO film was being shown in cinemas countrywide. The use of German music in particular to create a message or, rather, to pose a

⁴⁶ Katy McGahan, in the accompanying notes to the BFI *Land of Promise* DVD collection (p.21). The film was revised shortly after its first release and given the title *Do It Now* and shown in two thousand cinemas in the week beginning 18 September 1939.

question, was to appear increasingly in Jennings's films. Between them, they make explicit the importance of music but, intriguingly, though Vaughan Williams' commentary in *Dim Little Island* (1948) explains the significance of the British music tradition, the question of German music is merely raised in the other films and, rather than providing a direct answer, Jennings instead simply allows the music to speak for itself. This of course is especially the case in his film *Myra Hess* (1945) in which he uses material shot for *A Diary for Timothy* in a film that simply demonstrates Jennings' ability "to step back quietly and subordinate himself to his subject."⁴⁷

The music of George Frederic Handel is also featured in *Words For Battle* (1941), Jennings other project for the Crown Film Unit in 1941, though in this case, it is possibly the tone of Handel's *Water Music* rather than the ethnic background of its composer that is more significant here. What Lindsay Anderson has called Jennings's "pivotal moment" in *Heart of Britain* is further explored in the closing passage of *Words for Battle*, which contains an image of Abraham Lincoln's statue in Parliament Square, again allowing Handel's music to speak following a rousing narration by Laurence Olivier. The device has now become an established feature of Jennings' output, and Jennings' next film took the idea to its extreme: "As if taking its cue from the success of this wonderful passage, Listen to Britain dispenses with commentary altogether..."⁴⁸ The opening titles of *Listen to Britain* (1942) feature a fanfare. Images of a violin, a stave of music – and of the barrel of a gun – begin this "sound picture", which, as the film titles themselves explain, are "blended together in one great symphony:"

the music of Britain at war. The evening hymn of the lark, the roar of Spitfires, the dancers in the great ballroom at Blackpool. The clank of machinery and shunting trains. Soldiers of Canada holding in memory – in proud memory – their home on the range. The BBC sending Truth on its journey around the world. The trumpet call of freedom, the war song of a great people. The first sure notes of the march of victory as you and I Listen to Britain.

Originally intended as a portrait of one of Myra Hess's lunchtime concerts at the National Gallery in a film about music in wartime (in Jennings own words, "quite a possible subject"),⁴⁹ there are plenty of musical allusions in the opening words of *Listen to Britain* and, as Kevin Jackson has noted, the film pays "respectful attention to people of all classes and to music of

⁴⁷ Quotes all from the notes to the 2002 DVD issue by Image Entertainment of Jennings' wartime documentary propaganda

⁴⁸ "Only Connect: Some aspects of the work of Humphrey Jennings" (*Sight and Sound*, Spring 1954)

⁴⁹ Jackson, 2004: 248

all genres.”⁵⁰ The first experience of music proper is at a dance at Blackpool – complete with “Roll Out the Barrel;” then, as promised the Canadian soldiers singing “Home on the Range,” in a kind of yodelled version. All this interspersed with the sounds of the land, of trains, planes and farm machinery. Then, at an ambulance station, a solo singer at the piano plays, while the waiting crew listens. Musically, nothing is yet out of the ordinary, but Jennings introduces a number of what I have called aural icons: some juxtaposed BBC announcements, the chimes of Big Ben and a few bars of “The British Grenadiers:” all sounds of Britain to which we are exhorted to listen. Some keep-fit music follows, and children in the playground dance a round as a piano accompanies them. Over the tannoy at a factory, the signature tune of “Calling All Workers” is followed by a few seconds of the girls singing “Yes, My Darling Daughter.” Flanagan and Allan appear on stage in the canteen with hundreds whistling along to their song, “Underneath the Arches.”

And then, finally, in the longest sequence of the film Myra Hess plays the full introduction to the Mozart G Major Piano Concerto Op.17 (K.453), accompanied by the Orchestra of the Central Band of HM RAF conducted by Wing-Commander R.P. O’Donnell MVO at a lunchtime concert at the National Gallery in the presence of the Queen. Apart from the shots of the soloist at the piano, the images here are of sandbags, and of the empty spaces in the gallery where the pictures used to be. As the first movement develops, heroic images of the area around Trafalgar Square – including Nelson’s Column – appear. Following a cut to images of a tank factory at work, a military band leads a march through a street; more factory shots follow together with images of fields, factory stacks, and a chorus of women singing “Rule Britannia” as the film ends, its closing titles matching those of the beginning, the notes on the stave of Thomas Arne’s anthem. The synthesis of this film is of a nation at war encapsulated with its everyday work highlighted, in particular, with heroic imagery, popular culture and Mozart: all that is uplifting, upright and positive, the film’s unashamedly patriotic message that we will overcome. “It is full of surprising juxtapositions of subject-matter, strange quirks and accidents,” writes Kevin Jackson, for whom the playing of “German” music is one of these surprising elements.⁵¹ There is none of the idealizing rhetoric” found in so many propaganda films, he observes and, indeed, the film “at once fulfilled and transcended its official function of propaganda, and became Jennings’s first unblemished masterpiece,” and “What’s more, he was about to equal, or even surpass it.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Jackson, 2004: 252

⁵¹ Jackson, 2004: 252

⁵² Ibid., 254

William Alwyn wrote the original music (with Muir Mathieson conducting) for *I Was a Fireman* (1943) (also known as *Fires Were Started*), which begins with a kind of fine tone-poem as the firemen gather from their separate walks of life to the 14Y fire station. But a lone penny-whistle is heard on the street as the men gather; seen once, we hear him from time to time throughout the film in the trademark poeticism that characterises Jennings' films. Popular musical touches include "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life," "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone," and the Edwardian ditty "I do like to be beside the seaside," all further reflections of the common touch present in his other films. But Alwyn's music should resonate with the industry and dedication of the squad; their activities, purpose and focus. The character of the music is that of a feature film: a substantial score using the standard features of the film narrative to underscore dialogue and direct emotion. Mostly diegetic, the piano played in the waiting period is also used extra-diegetically as images of boats and the river are shown. This section of the film demonstrates the camaraderie and warmth between the men: "One Man Went to Mow" providing a cue for a sing-a-long around the piano as a kind of set of variations – ending just as the air-raid warning sounds – at dusk.

As the action begins, a fire alarm sounds and the spirited rendition of "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" sung by all the men, is promptly abandoned when the remaining squad are called out to a fire in Trinidad Street. And yet there is still time for another song – this time by the driver of the fire engine as they hasten to their duty. The camera moves from the face of one fireman to the next to show something of what they might be feeling: though not combatants – this is the home front – they are every bit a part of the war and Jennings helped to solidify this idea in his depiction of their heroism. Throughout the film, music helps to elevate the film from its documentary basis into something of a compelling drama, and thus it could be considered an early "docu-drama." Being out in an air-raid would have been frightening enough – but if there was relative safety back at the base, this idea was shattered a near miss: everyone is vulnerable. The drama becomes all too real when one of the men is injured on the burning rooftop. As he is winched to safety another man is killed as the building is engulfed by flames – a few bars of music marking the tragedy. The fire is finally brought under control – the efforts to do so marked with a full orchestral resumption of the tone poem – now heroic but not without a tragic tone. The "all clear" is sounded and a skyline image of London marking the end of an exhausting night. As the men clean up their equipment at dawn, music again marks the mood; dialog unnecessary as the helmet of the fallen comrade is discovered.

Humphrey Jennings increasingly took up the subject of music in the years that followed his early collaboration with Myra Hess. During the filming of *A Diary for Timothy* (1946), so much

footage of Hess at the piano was available that he made a self-contained film, known simply as *Myra Hess* (1945) in which she plays Beethoven's *Appassionata* piano sonata, Op.57. The film is not propaganda in the strictest sense, but it does throw some subtle light on Jennings' attitude towards music. The concert that is filmed is advertised for Tuesday 10 October, and is repeated the following day in a celebration of the fifth anniversary of the National Gallery concerts, which had begun in October 1939. Though *Myra Hess* depicts an attentive and appreciative audience, shots that are excluded from *A Diary for Timothy*, there is a link to the subject of the latter film, that is to Timothy himself, who in 1944 was also five years old and the idea for the film might well have been inspired by the fifth birthday celebrations of the concerts.

It was begun in October 1944, way before the outcome of the War was secure and, at last, Jennings asks the question that must have been in the minds of many. "Did you like the music that lady was playing?" asks the narrator of Timothy. "Some of us think it is the greatest music in the world. Yet it is German music and we're fighting the Germans. That's something you'll have to think over later on." Perhaps Jennings did not, at that stage, have an answer for Timothy and the question is thus left tantalisingly hanging in the air, Jennings leaving it to others to tackle. Indeed it is also raised in several other memorable films of the time. In *Millions Like Us* (1943), Beethoven features prominently and Powell and Pressburger also pressed home the qualities of German music in both *A Canterbury Tale* (1942)⁵³ and in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), Deborah Kerr asking the question explicitly on their behalf in the latter, as we shall see.

Ironically, for a director so engrossed with music, the "problem" of German music was raised in one of Humphrey Jennings' last films. This time, however, the problem is tackled with the help of none other than Ralph Vaughan Williams. *The Dim Little Island* (1948) uses a reworked *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus*, which had been Vaughan Williams' contribution to the New York World's Fair in 1939, thus linking his work for the British Council to a "melancholic" film which, in Kevin Jackson's words is an elegy for British things lately lost or about to be lost⁵⁴ reminding us too that though the director had "deeply patriotic feelings about England", he could also admire the culture "of what he called 'the true Germany', the Germany of Heine and Beethoven, temporarily betrayed and caricatured by National Socialism."⁵⁵ But in his

⁵³ The performance of J.S. Bach's well-known *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* is given on the organ of Canterbury Cathedral.

⁵⁴ p.58 of the accompanying booklet to the 2008 BFI collection *Land of Promise: The British Documentary Movement 1930-1950*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 78

treatment for the film, Jennings challenges the legend that the British did not really have any fun, or taste – or music:

And here we will appeal to a man whose judgment and performance are beyond dispute. Do you think, says Vaughan Williams, that the English of Shakespeare's day weren't musical? Or as late as the time of Samuel Pepys? Of course they were. The secret was that in those days they made their own music for themselves. Pepys was rowed down the Thames in a boat decorated with green boughs and in which all the company were expected to play and sing. And then what happened? The real villain curiously enough is Handel.⁵⁶

Jennings, who had a great passion for and knowledge of music history, writes that in the 18th Century music became a foreign luxury and making music became "unworthy" of the ordinary Englishman. Despite the nationalistic flavour of his compositions, Handel had introduced an inevitable German influence, and remained a towering figure throughout the nineteenth century, as we have seen. Purely English music, he claims was finally killed off by *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and the 1870 Education Act. However, the "darkest hour" came just before dawn when the twentieth century folksong revival linked the composers of modern England to the Elizabethans themselves, who experienced "a great revival of national consciousness which expressed itself in their poetry and music," and it is largely the efforts of composers such as Vaughan Williams that helped revive English music culture in the early twentieth century.⁵⁷ At the outset, Jennings visualised a musical pyramid – at the top the solo musician, below him the "quartets and the orchestra," and below them the mass of people who feel the need for music. He leaves the task of explaining this pyramid to Vaughan Williams himself, one of four narrators employed in the film.

The working title of the Central Office of Information's *Dim Little Island*, "a Short Film composed on some thoughts of our Past, Present and Future from Four Men," was "Awful Old England" (a reference to a poem by Rudyard Kipling) "and four answers to it" by cartoonist Osbert Lancaster, industrialist John Ormston (of Vickers Armstrong), Vaughan Williams and James Fisher, the naturalist:

Me that 'ave been what I've been –
Me that 'ave gone where I've gone –
Me that 'ave seen what I've seen –

⁵⁶ Jackson (ed.), 1993: 114

⁵⁷ Ibid.

'Ow can I ever take on
With awful old England again...

The opening titles are set against the image of a white horse – typical of the English landscape – accompanied by Vaughan Williams' music, which is based on two folksongs "Pretty Betty" and "The Pride of Kildare." James Fisher begins the voiceover narrative: "Wild nature in Britain," he asks, "What's the use of it? I'll tell you; it's interesting. We learn from it." The music begins again as Fisher narrates pictures from the coast of Scotland. These images are briefly contrasted with industrial architecture before returning to a Pennines scene. An unaccompanied baritone sings "Dives and Lazarus" as the camera pans over bright skies and reeds in water. As the orchestra joins the soloist, a deliberate association is made with music and landscape in another example of the connection between music and landscape in the English tradition of music. The arrangement of "Dives and Lazarus," composed in B Modal Minor, is directly responsible for creating this effect. Evocation of the past is at the heart of Vaughan Williams' narrative, which follows:

Listen to that tune. It's one of our English folk tunes. I knew it first when I was quite a small boy. But I realised even then that here was something not only beautiful but which had a special appeal to me as an Englishman. It dates from a time when people, of necessity, made their own music and when, as has been well said, they made what they liked and liked what they made.

The image on the screen has by now changed to an Elizabethan woodcut, and then to a stylised still-life image of a lute on the sill of an open leaded window; to some sheet music next, then organ pipes; a conductor:

I like to think of our music life as a great pyramid, at the apex of which are the great virtuosi performers and composers of international renown. Then, immediately below this, come those devoted musical practitioners: true artists who by precept and example are spreading the knowledge and love of music in our schools, our choral societies, our musical festivals.

Then comes the next layer of our musical structure: that great mass of musical amateurs who make music for the love of it in their spare time and play and sing for their own spiritual recreation in their homes. And then below that again as a foundation, we have those great tunes which, like our

language, our customs, our laws, are the groundwork upon which everything must stand.

Music is *forte* again, the image moving to industry, a reference to the shipbuilding which was the early subject of the film, suggesting – by association – another kind of foundation, and back again to the lute:

So perhaps we are not so unmusical after all. Nevertheless our music has lain dormant. Occasionally, indeed, a candle would shine like a good deed in a naughty world: Byrd, Purcell, or Arne. And lately the candles have become more numerous.

Images of the title pages of contemporary scores follow: Elgar's *Enigma* variations, Vaughan Williams' own *A London Symphony*, Bax; *Tintagel Overture* and Britten's *Peter Grimes*:

For people have come to find in our music, a special message which that of other nations, however skilled and imaginative, cannot give them.

The naturalist resumes his narrative again, with a message to learn and preserve, lest we lose our heritage, his words again accompanied by Vaughan Williams' music and set against alternate images from Jennings' *Fires Were Started*. Vaughan Williams takes up the final narrative section of the film which summarises his true feelings about music in wartime in several revealing statements:

So, the fire is ready to be kindled and now we require a match to be lighted to set the whole ablaze: some great upheaval of national consciousness and emotion.

The Elizabethans experienced this. As a result they produced poetry and music that has never been surpassed. Have we not also experienced lately such a national upheaval? And is not this the reason why during the late war those who had never taken music seriously before began to crowd the concert halls from Kensington to Haringey to hear a symphony concert? Today our music, which so long had seemed without life, is being born again.

As if to underpin the joy and realisation of the reality of the revival and vibrancy of music in Britain, Humphrey Jennings pursued his interest in the subject with a major new project, a documentary on the London Symphony Orchestra, the first sketches for which were made in December 1948 in a series of diary entries made at the Royal Albert Hall during rehearsals. He spent much of the following months attending recording sessions, rehearsals, broadcasts and

the occasional performance about which he made extensive notes. In June 1949 he was commissioned to make a film for the Festival of Britain and he spent the rest of the year, and into 1950, working on what was to become *Family Portrait*, his last film. On 29 June that year, he died in an accident while filming in Greece, leaving the LSO film unmade, though with the extensive treatment intended for its completion.⁵⁸ The idea for the film, however, seems to have been born during the war, when a film about the importance of music in wartime London was tantamount in his mind. Music was a recurring theme in much of Jennings' propaganda films and, had it been made, his film on the LSO would have thrown much light on his wartime work.

Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards have commented that, both in terms of background music and music played within *Millions Like Us* (1943), there are significant parallels with Jennings' *Listen to Britain*, both of which draw on a variety of musical traditions "to create an inclusive musical mosaic as an epitome of the nation."⁵⁹ The "precise analogues" to the earlier film include similar aerial shots, as well as the canteen and Hippodrome concerts, the latter paralleled in the National Gallery concert portrayed in *Listen to Britain*. In fact *Millions Like Us* also seems to take its cue from *Night Shift* (1942), a Ministry of Information short about armaments production and the women that are employed there, and which opens with the words "Nearly 2000 of us girls work in this [armaments] factory". Music is present from almost the very beginning. At dinner time (one o'clock in the morning) a pianist strikes up a tune which becomes a sing-along and dance, and a second is led by a soloist singing "One of these days, you're going to miss me," who carries on singing as the canteen empties, her voice fading as we return to "get cracking" on the factory floor. Like *Listen to Britain*, much of the film is given over to the ambient sounds of the factory with little dialogue or commentary. A sing-song on the bus on the way home rounds off the film, emphasising again the joys of communal singing depicted in the Jennings film. Like the documentaries I have mentioned, the "experience" of music is often showcased in *Millions Like Us*. "Music While You Work" is on the factory loudspeakers, there is a music concert following the death of the heroine Celia's (Patricia Roc) love interest; and a panning shot of the workers' canteen (an example of ENSA's work) becomes a turning-point leading to the rallying song towards the end of the film and thence to the music which marks this film out from its contemporaries. The opening titles of the film are accompanied by Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, in a sequence that makes it clear that the symphony is going to feature especially. Here, its use is to emphasise the romantic, particularly the *tragic*, signifying Patricia Roc's emotion at the Hippodrome concert depicted

⁵⁸ "Working Sketches of an Orchestra" was published by the Naldrett Press in 1954 in *London Symphony: Portrait of an Orchestra*, edited by Hubert Foss and Noel Goodwin.

⁵⁹ Aldgate & Richards, 2007: 309

towards the end of the film. It is thus not only significant as an item in a concert of popular classics, but is used formally in the film to stir emotions as a fleet of bombers fly over the Hippodrome, in much the same way as Jennings uses the *Hallelujah Chorus* in *Heart of Britain*.

German Music in Feature Film

A major concert of one kind or another was a standard device in many war-time films, not least in Gainsborough's *Love Story* (1944), which featured its very own "Denham Concerto." The most famous of these compositions was, of course, the *Warsaw Concerto* from *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941), the film's climax coming at a concert performance at the Royal Albert Hall which also features two other works on the programme before the performance of the famous concerto – both German: Schumann's A Minor piano concerto, and Beethoven's "Emperor" concerto. *Love Story* also features new music in the same style (Hubert Bath's *Cornish Rhapsody*) and, significantly, Wagner at the film's concert climax. In a recurring theme, pianist Felicity Crichton's (Margaret Lockwood's Lissa Campbell) manager announces her resignation from playing music (considered by now to be "the best sort of war work she can do") to do something "more directly connected with the war effort." But in her retirement away from London, the *Cornish Rhapsody* theme occurs to Lissa as she contemplates the roar of the sea against the rocks and the cry of seagulls in a programmatic inspiration for its composition. Later in the film she is asked to play "Beethoven's Sonata in G" by an eager listener in a crowd of appreciative fans. The request for Beethoven in the script is testament again to his popularity amongst ordinary people. Returning to music at the film's denouement, Lissa's Royal Albert Hall concert sequence in the scene before she goes on to play, features music from the concert hall as it is heard in the background. Diegetic, it serves also as underscoring to the scene which concerns Lissa's emotional state. Even so, the director (Leslie Arliss) can hardly have randomly chosen the prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin*. *Love Story* ends with Lissa patriotically waving to a RAF flypast following her marriage to and pact with Kit (Stewart Granger) to "live for the day and hope for tomorrow."

Yet another concert is featured at the heart of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), a legendary production of "The Archers," Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. *Colonel Blimp* uses the friendship between the British officer Wynne-Candy (Roger Livesey) and the German officer Kretschmar-Schuldorff (Anton Walbrook) to explore the realities of "modern" warfare. It is a film about methods of barbarism, mistrust and the rules of war, which, the film seeks to demonstrate, is no longer a "game" played by gentlemen. *Colonel Blimp* showed that "total

war” meant dispensing with the scruples of previous conflicts. Earlier prerogatives in the war were for “straight news” instead of propaganda and for no retributive action. Towards the end of the film, Major-General Wynn-Candy is booked to broadcast a “Sunday Night Postscript” on the subject of “Dunkirk – Before and After,” but in a neat treatment of replacement of the originally-intended broadcast, which in the opinion of the “authorities” was “ill-timed, better postponed,” J.B. Priestley is substituted in his place. Legendary within weeks, our idea of Dunkirk has been, almost from the beginning, framed by secondary accounts of it. The treatment of the evacuation in the Hollywood-produced *Mrs Miniver* (1942) could have been made twenty years later for its glorification and myth-making qualities, which was arguably necessary at the time. Dare we have told the real horror of Dunkirk, when only two-thirds of the men returned? J.B. Priestley’s first “Postscript” on 5 June 1940, the subject of which was, of course, Dunkirk, did not mention the one-third that did not.

Ian Christie regards it as Powell and Pressburger’s first masterpiece, Anton Walbrook’s character one of a long line of “sympathetic Germans” in the Archers’ films.⁶⁰ That the MoI opposed the film and Churchill hated it was an open secret at the time of its release though, as distributor, J. Arthur Rank supported it. The cabinet’s concern was that it was “derogatory” to the British army but, as the minutes of the War Cabinet reveal, the War Office, having seen this “V. dull film,” no longer considered it “likely to bring Army into disrepute,” and therefore proposed to “let it go” as it was likely to do “neither harm nor good.”⁶¹ An earlier scene in *Colonel Blimp*, one which can be said to be the central message of the sequence and certainly an important one of the entire film, Kretschmar-Schuldorff is at a lakeside concert in a Derbyshire Prisoner-of-War camp at “Hardleigh Hall” in July 1919 where he is interned. Schubert’s *Unfinished* symphony is being played. A cut to inside the hall follows, and as the symphony is ending, in a close-up shot – a remarkable camera treatment that emphasises the point – of Colonel Candy’s wife Barbara Wynne (Deborah Kerr), she comments:

I was thinking. How odd they are. Queer. For years and years they are writing and dreaming beautiful music and beautiful poetry. All of a sudden they start a war. They sink undefended ships; shoot innocent hostages and bomb and destroy whole streets in London, killing little children. And then they sit down in the same butchers’ uniforms and listen to Mendelssohn and Schubert. Something horrid about that. Don’t you think so?

⁶⁰ Christie, 1994: 44

⁶¹ TNA CAB/195/2, 10 May 1943 (67th Meeting)



Deborah Kerr in reflective mood in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943)

To further emphasise her question, which, like Jennings's in *A Diary for Timothy*, does not receive a direct reply, we then hear an excerpt from Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* overture.

German music continued to feature in many other war-time propaganda films. *Cottage to Let* (1941), which invokes the spirit of Sherlock Holmes in another feature film that taps into the theme of enemy agents, spies and "careless talk," contains a few bars of the overture to *Die Meistersinger* played in the listening booth that provides cover for members of a German spy ring in a kind of clue to their true identity. Documentary, too, continued to feature German music. *Transfer of Skill*, (1940) a Ministry of Information film which showcases the use of peacetime artisan skill for the technical requirements of war, used Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, *They Also Serve* (also Mol, 1940) used J.S. Bach's *Sheep May Safely Graze* and *Tomorrow is Theirs* (1940) begins and ends with that composer's third Brandenburg Concerto. *Second Battle of London* (1944) concerns the response to the V1 flying bomb attacks and uses Beethoven's 7th Symphony as well as other orchestral sound. The montage of newsreels and Churchill's speeches from the early days of the war which begins the BBC's 2005 documentary *1945: The Real Story* is nearly all underscored by Beethoven's Fifth from original films. The association with Britain's War and Beethoven's music is thus maintained through the editing of this documentary, in recognition of its contemporary use but also in its continuing latter-day association.

Chapter Seven

A British *Magic Mountain*: Original Music in Feature Film Propaganda

*The most enchanting flower of German culture: music*¹

*Music: the tender little flower of our English culture*²

Many British composers wrote for short propaganda documentary film designed for the home audience in particular. William Alwyn, for example, wrote for the short *Summer on the Farm* (1943) and *Land of Promise* (1946), while Richard Addinsell wrote for *Britain at Bay* (1940). The same year also saw the release of *Dangerous Moonlight*. Loosely propagandistic in its telling of the fall of Poland, the film features Addinsell's most well-known film-music, the *Warsaw Concerto*, a work that was instantly popular and which was hastily recorded and released as a gramophone record. As much as the success of war-time films depended greatly on the appeal of such music, they also attracted attention for other reasons.

That Churchill disliked *Colonel Blimp* intensely is well-known. The Hollywood-produced *Mrs Miniver* (1942), on the other hand, was far more to his taste. A contemporaneous *Times* column on the export of British films abroad helps to explain why:

At the outset of the war all concerned with the moulding of opinion expected that the film would play a part of ever-increasing importance. That expectation has been realized. The screen has served as a medium of propaganda... [but in] having to represent the English idea to America and recognizing that it would have to be done largely in terms of entertainment, British makers of films were, it must be owned, somewhat at a loss. British films had had their successes in the American cinema, but American audiences continued to think, not wholly without justification, that their own films of entertainment were better than those received from England. *Target for Tonight*, *Convoy*, *49th Parallel*, and several others may have brought about some modification of this opinion, but even after these admirable productions had been seen the idea persisted that Britain was not doing herself justice.³

¹ Hans Vaaget

² Ralph Vaughan Williams

³ "British Films Abroad" (*The Times* 28 August 1942)

Powell and Pressburger's *49th Parallel* is unique in that it was the only officially-sponsored propaganda feature film of the War. Its other claim is that it was the film that allowed Ralph Vaughan to contribute meaningfully to the war effort; a role he struggled to find but which, once discovered, he relished. Muir Mathieson is credited with persuading him to write for the films, of which his score for *49th Parallel* was the first. As well as providing extensive analysis of Vaughan Williams' work, Jeffrey Richards has examined at length the circumstances between the composer and Muir Mathieson at the outbreak of War that led Vaughan Williams to write music for the cinema. He has also pointed out the connection between the films and the Ministry of Information's criteria of "why we fight" (the purpose of *49th Parallel*), "how we fight" and "the need for sacrifice if the war is to be won."⁴ Writing film scores, a genre that would occupy Vaughan Williams for much of the rest of his life, not only gave him the sense of purpose he desired, but are widely regarded as some of the finest music ever composed for the cinema.

William Walton's Contribution

Like Vaughan Williams, William Walton too struggled to find a role during the war. As Susana Walton writes in her biography of her husband, "William's work to help the War effort was hardly successful. He tried driving an ambulance, but found such a heavy vehicle beyond his powers... But, as he had written music for films before – including *As You Like It*, with Laurence Olivier, in 1936 – he was asked to write scores for propaganda films... In the end, this was the only way he knew of really making himself useful."⁵ Walton's score to Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), classic propaganda that uses the Battle of Agincourt as a metaphor for the present strife, is well-known. The film owes much to the epic Battle and Charge scene for which Walton composed characteristic music, but in its more reflective moments, the score can also be contemplative, for example in a quote of the best-known of the *Songs of the Auvergne* ("Baïllèro"), songs which had been collected by Joseph Canteloube during the 1920s. Apart from *Henry V*, the most memorable of his war-time film scores is that written for *The First of the Few* (1942), an extract of which was published as the *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue*, receiving its first performance on 2 January 1943 at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the composer himself. The film begins with a brief

⁴ Richards, 1997: 321

⁵ Walton, 1989: 92. Lady Walton's biography begins in her native Argentina in 1948, where she was on the staff of the Buenos Aires office of the British Council when she met Leslie Boosey (a member of the Music Committee).

history of the War since the Austrian *Anschluss*, and a montage featuring the broadcasts of Lord Haw-Haw, Churchill's speeches and American broadcasts until "Zero Day", 15 September 1940, when the drama begins. Leslie Howard and David Niven starred in this film, which was Howard's last – he went missing in action a few weeks after filming. Geoffrey Crisp (Niven) retells the story of how the Spitfire was invented and the action goes back to 1922 – R.J. Mitchell (Howard) contemplating bird flight at the coast with his wife (Rosamund John). Muir Mathieson conducted the London Symphony Orchestra for the film, the music for which includes an arrangement of the National Anthem, "Pop goes the Weasel", military, dance and "oompah" bands in the sequences that follow which include moments of genuine pathos and sensitivity to the drama that unfolds.

The First of the Few is one of three particularly important RAF films. The hastily-produced *The Lion Has Wings* (1939) was of course the first film to be produced after the outbreak of war, and the other, *One of our Aircraft is Missing* (1941), continued the genre. It features a German song "Ich kusse ihre Hand, Madam" which is heard over the wireless *en route* to Stuttgart, where a bombing raid is to take place. The men's knowledge of a friendly Germany and memories of a kinder culture before the war are evident in their conversation and the film demonstrates again directors Powell and Pressburger's mission to remind audiences of the value of German civilisation in contrast to its present circumstances: "[Elsa] was singing it, I suppose, 'cause she wasn't allowed to sing it in Germany. The composer was a Jew, I believe." Two hours into the film, the Oranje motto "We can take it," appears; a sentiment that the early war-time documentary *London Can Take It* shares. In another neat cross-reference, Googie Withers also uses the "aural icon" Morse "V" as her secret knock which will alert the airmen that it is safe to open the door to her apartment. The film, however, is noteworthy for its *lack* of musical soundtrack (including the opening titles which dispense with music altogether and use instead the sound of aircraft engines only). This is not to say that music is entirely unimportant to the film, both diegetically and otherwise. The Dutch national anthem ("Die Wilhelmus"), played surreptitiously in a church by the organist using the foot pedals in the presence of the Nazi authorities in occupied Holland, is central to the plot, signifying the defiance of the local people.⁶

⁶ An eyewitness account of music in occupied Holland tells of the performances during the war of the country's "finest living pianist" Willem Andriessen, director of the conservatory at Amsterdam. Though the performances had to remain "rigidly clinical and Aryan," they were not "so completely German as to exclude Chopin." What was beyond the control of the Nazi "control" of concert programmes, an "amusing hit-back at the enemy" was the playing, as an encore, the arrangement by Myra Hess ("an English Jewess!") of J.S. Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. "Other surreptitious things were done, but this was the most popular and perhaps the most daring" (Antcliffe, July 1946: 219).

Apart from *The First of the Few* Walton also wrote for *Went the Day Well* (1942), *Major Barbara* (1941), *The Foreman went to France* (1942) and *The Next of Kin* (1942).⁷ Produced by Malcolm Balcon of Ealing Studios and directed by Thorold Dickinson, *The Next of Kin* features a prominent soundtrack where the music plays an important part in conveying messages about the on-screen action, in contrast to *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. The cast included Jack Hawkins, Thora Hird and John Chandos, who appeared in *49th Parallel* the previous year. The opening sequence is set in a church on the coast of occupied France in which members of the resistance (identified by the use of “Le Marseillaise” within the score) have gathered. The richness of the score becomes apparent with a theatre scene which depicts a coy “striptease” act set to a Latin rhythm. The march appears again during a training sequence thirty-four minutes into the film: the obvious connection between the military efforts and the music thus confirmed. Connected to the sleazy striptease is the scene at the Westport bookshop which unashamedly depicts a volume of naked poses, viewed by “Davis” (Mervyn Johns), another enemy agent who is tasked with making contact with the bookshop’s owner Mr Barratt (Stephen Murray), a German spy. Licentiousness, signified by an appropriately risqué style of music, is thus suggested as a signal of degeneracy and potential espionage, with the striptease act Miss Clare (Phyllis Stanley) turning out to be an enemy agent. Intermittent underscoring, diegetic and otherwise, is heard throughout the film, which contains many of the hallmarks of classic narrative scoring. The closing titles are accompanied again by Walton’s “big tune.” Ernest Irving, musical director at Ealing, conducted the score (his counterpart at Korda’s Denham studios was Mathieson). The film takes its title from the broadcast after the raid; “the next of kin” have been informed of the heavy casualties sustained because of “bad security”. Far from jingoistic propaganda, the realism of the film and the consequences of “careless talk” were, for Churchill, a danger to morale and, consequently, too much for him: he wanted the film banned. The propaganda here is to get the message across that “careless talk costs lives.” “After all,” writes Michael Balcon, “the public were just as responsible for bad security – or ‘careless talk’ – which could endanger lives and operations.”⁸ Balcon recalls that *The Next of Kin* “was one of the most important films made in the life of Ealing,” and that Churchill’s objection and feeling that the film’s release should be delayed, was based on the film’s potential to cause “unnecessary alarm and sorrow to a great number of people.”⁹ The ill-fated Dieppe raid of 19 August 1942, in which nearly 3500 mainly-Canadian troops were killed,

⁷ Walton also plays the unaccredited cameo part of a soldier at a security briefing in the film.

⁸ Balcon, 1969: 135

⁹ Ibid., 134-5

captured or wounded,¹⁰ and on which *The Next of Kin* is loosely based, seems to have been on his mind.

Like *The First of the Few*, a fanfare accompanies the opening credits of *The Next of Kin*, but here against a backdrop of a coat of arms: a “big tune,” like that of the *Spitfire Prelude*, follows. Written in the same vein as that in Walton’s *Crown Imperial* coronation march of 1937, the Edwardian “big tune” makes a come-back during the war, not least in Walton’s film scores. The most famous “big tunes” are, of course, Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. “Walton was increasingly seen by the general public as taking on the mantle of Elgar,” writes Robert Mackay. “*The Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* was another spoonful from that pot, brilliantly crafted, tuneful, but essentially music from a past time.”¹¹ Mackay also points out that John Ireland’s *Epic March* appeared at the same time as a complement. Commissioned by the BBC, Ireland’s *Epic March*, the live broadcast of the first performance began with a short introduction by the announcer: “It’s interesting to hear in the opening, more than a passing reference to the now-familiar V-sign,” qualifying his remark by reminding listeners that the work had been begun more than a year previously. Catering to popular taste, the programme also included Rachmaninov’s second piano concerto, Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* and Violetta’s aria “Ah, fors è lui” from *La Traviata* with Joan Hammond as soloist. Conducted by Sir Henry Wood with the London Philharmonic, it was the first prom to be held at the Albert Hall following the destruction of the Queen’s Hall in 1942 in a bombing raid.¹² *The Times*’ reviewer (H.C. Colles, a British Council Music Committee member until his death in 1943) considered the march a “worthy companion to the ‘Pomp and Circumstance’ marches of Elgar and ‘Crown Imperial’ of Walton; it is national in sentiment, forthright in the march section, and tuneful in the trio,” which shares “cousinship” with the latter.¹³ Its main affiliation, however, is with Vaughan Williams with whom the composer is speaking. At the same time that the *Epic March* was written, the British Council was considering the commission of a new march for the RAF. It was Victor Hely-Hutchinson’s view, perhaps with *The First of the Few* on his mind, and expressed in his letter to Pamela Henn-Collins of 29 May 1942 that appears to have put the Music Committee off the idea, and which was consequently to turn its work in a different direction, as we have seen.

Both the march and the “big tune,” however continued to feature in film. In June 1942, Arnold Bax, who had retired to Scotland to write his autobiography and had withdrawn from

¹⁰ Somerville, 1998: 157

¹¹ Hayes & Hill (eds.), 1999: 193

¹² The proms had thus moved to what became their permanent home.

¹³ *Epic March* review in *The Times* – 29 June 1942 – page 6 – Issue 49274 - Col. F

composing altogether, was asked to write for the Crown Film Unit's *Malta GC*. He agreed, and the score was completed in September. The trio section of the heroic march that constitutes the finale was later used in Bax's 1945 *Victory March*. The original music for the film was presented to the people of Malta by Sir Arnold Bax and is now in the National Library in Valetta.

The Film Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams

Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony, completed in 1946, also includes a "big tune" in the first movements and, indeed, uses two themes that had been intended for the war-time *The Story of a Flemish Farm* (1943). Vaughan Williams often found inspiration in his film music for more substantial works. His *Sinfonia Antartica* is the obvious example, which is largely based on his film score for *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948). The prelude to *49th Parallel*, a "big tune" in the Edwardian tradition, was later published as the choral song *The New Commonwealth* in an arrangement with words by Harold Child. The first wartime appearance of Vaughan Williams' music is the unaccredited use in another Humphrey Jennings propaganda short *London Can Take It* (1940) in which a few bars of *A London Symphony* are heard at the beginning and end. He also wrote for documentary during the War such as *People's Land* (1943) and *The Stricken Peninsula* (1944), the latter directed by Paul Fletcher of the British Army Film Unit. He wrote to Ursula Wood in July 1942 to say that he was pleased with the film music for *Coastal Command* (1942), his second project after *49th Parallel*, "though it was all rather against the collar."¹⁴ Like *49th Parallel*, *Coastal Command* was for the benefit of American audiences. The film was released in October. Of the music, *The Times* commented that "Dr. Vaughan Williams has written music which beautifully catches [the] rhythm, and the humour of understatement running through the dialogue fits into it very entertainingly."¹⁵

Vaughan Williams used all his talents as a musician when composing for films. For example, the method by which he could evoke the past was to use the Dorian mode of both Elizabethan and folk music, a technique he uses in *49th Parallel*. In contrast, films made in Nazi Germany tended to use 18th and 19th century music for the same purpose. If somewhat intellectual, the British approach – particularly that of Vaughan Williams – was far more subtle. Vaughan Williams' views on German music have been well documented. Hugh Cobbe remarks that a letter of 16 August 1942 is perhaps the clearest exposition we have of Vaughan Williams' attitude towards the Austro-German musical tradition which, he writes, was "an uneasy

¹⁴ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 342

¹⁵ *The Times*, 15 October 1942

mixture of admiration for its contribution to the art as a whole and disquiet lest its influence might, even after forty years, still pose a threat to the English music revival he had done much to bring into being.”¹⁶ In the letter, Vaughan Williams calls this tradition “the tender little flower of our English culture.”¹⁷ Vaughan Williams had long held the “universal” view of German music. Cobbe explains that the composer was “too large-minded to allow political and emotional considerations arising from the state of war to sway his view of the music of the enemy country.” However, at the beginning of the war he did express the concern in a letter whether people could bear to listen to broadcasts of German music, a concern not expressed in a jingoistic sense, rather “because it would remind them so forcibly of what Germany had been, what it might have been – and what it still may be – and contrast this with what it is.”¹⁸ Vaughan Williams considered J.S. Bach to be the greatest composer¹⁹ (hence, like Mendelssohn a century earlier, his enthusiasm for reviving the *St. Matthew Passion*) with Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner equally important to him.²⁰ The attitude towards German music, which separated present-day Germany from its musical heritage, was shared by everyone involved in the musical establishment in England during the war.

But it was important for Vaughan Williams to establish a political disconnect between his art and the Shakespeare prize awarded him in Germany for which he travelled to Hamburg to receive in 1938. On the question of whether it was appropriate for him to accept the prize from a country which made the lives of artists difficult, his conscience was clear: “I belong to more than one English society whose object is to combat all that the present *régime* stands for.”²¹ Seen with the benefit of hindsight, Vaughan Williams’ willingness to accept the prize could be seen as “an honourable but unfortunate lack of judgement.”²² But in his essay on the subject, Alain Frogley has written that the prize was also a more “subtle piece of propaganda work than some other Nazi interventions in the cultural domain,” that must be seen in the light of the broader picture of relations between Britain and Nazi Germany in the months that led up to the Munich agreement of October 1938. Earlier candidates for the prize, including J.B. Priestley and the Poet Laureate John Masefield, had emerged as early as 1935 but it was imperative that for the prize to succeed in its propaganda purposes, it had to be ensured that a “genuinely major figure travelled to Germany to receive the award.”²³ The decision to present

¹⁶ Frogley (ed.), 1996: 96

¹⁷ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 344

¹⁸ Frogley (ed.), 1996: 90, 92

¹⁹ Vaughan Williams, 1996: 2

²⁰ Frogley (ed.), 1996: 89

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Brüstle & Heldt (ed.), 2005: 117

²³ *Ibid.*, 120

Vaughan Williams with the prize was not taken until March 1937. A musical award, it was felt by the committee of trustees responsible for bestowing it, “was perceived as being less vulnerable to the kind of political problems entailed by literature,” and for Germany to award a British composer would be enormously gratifying to the British, and that the opportunity would be afforded for a rare performance of a British musical work in what would be considered “a rare and unusually prestigious event.”²⁴

As propaganda, this was shrewd, writes Frogley, even if “the condescension implied [was] hardly attractive.”²⁵ Vaughan Williams’ hesitant acceptance of the prize must be seen in the context of ever-increasing efforts of finding a peaceful solution to the European political situation. “Appeasement has become a dirty word,” writes Frogley. The need to explain its logic “in terms of political, military, and economic realities of the time,” can be aided in light of the attitude of the “high-level British political, intellectual, and cultural opinion of the time” including that of the British Council, not least in the Music Committee’s short-lived enthusiasm for music tours of Germany immediately after Munich.²⁶ In any event, Vaughan Williams’ music was soon to be banned in Germany by the Nazi regime as a result of his work on the refugee committee which began soon after War had broken out. His efforts secured the release of the composer Robert Müller-Hartmann, by “pressing the Home Office to include music in its definition of ‘work of national importance’ which in terms of its white paper on the internment of foreign nationals would make this possible.”²⁷

By the Second World War Vaughan Williams “was the established leader of British music (in World War I it had been Elgar),” remarks Alain Frogley. “Furthermore, the fight against Nazi Germany was a cause to which a socialist could give himself wholeheartedly.”²⁸ During the War, Vaughan Williams’ music was overtly patriotic rather than implicitly nationalistic, he writes, particularly in his scores for propaganda films. As mentioned in the introduction, Victor Hely-Hutchinson had made the distinction that the spirit of the present times required music of a pastoral and romantic outlook to emphasise the England that was being fought for, as opposed to the military outlook of the spirit of England in the Great War. As we have seen, the score for *49th Parallel* could depict Canadian landscape, use “l’Alouette” and a German hymn for a patriotic cause, the music having no direct nationalistic meaning in terms of an English music, but could speak of what England was fighting for, and what it meant to be British. This, of course, was the emphasis of all the foreign publicity organised by the British government

²⁴ Brüstle & Heldt (eds.), 2005: 121

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 122

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 129

²⁷ Frogley (ed.), 1996: 93

²⁸ Frogley (ed.), 1996: 19

and its agencies, including that of the British Council. Jeffrey Richards has mapped all Vaughan Williams' film music to the imperatives of the Ministry of Information's 1940 guidelines for propaganda. *49th Parallel* speaks of "why we fight," the documentary *Coastal Command* (1942), of "how we fight," and *The Flemish Farm* (1943) of "the need for sacrifice." All of the films, writes Richards, are accompanied by "The People's Music" in which Vaughan Williams "draws freely and joyously on hymns, folk songs, marches and dances to celebrate their efforts" in an attempt to present his belief in democracy, Britain's shared heritage and civilized values.²⁹ A believer in a united Europe as well as the idea of commonwealth, Vaughan Williams' film music can thus also be said to represent his political views, and perhaps even more:

The idea of the island race fighting a lone battle against Fascism reinforced elements in the national self-image that had already become strongly associated with Vaughan Williams, and his music became an important point of emotional focus for many listeners of the time, even to the extent of being credited with a prophetic message.³⁰

49th Parallel

In the remainder of this chapter I will explore how Vaughan Williams applied this message in his film music, which until *Dim Little Island* (1948) was always tacit rather than explicit. In March 1940, plans were well under way for *49th Parallel*, which was to be the Ministry's only feature film production of the War. The film tells the story of the remaining crew members of a destroyed Nazi U-boat commanded by Lieutenant Hirth (Eric Portman), who travel across Canada in the hope of reaching the (neutral) U.S. border, the 49th parallel of the film's title. The film uses their exploits on the journey to tackle various aspects of Nazi ideology; its racism and its attitude to democracy, religion, the arts and to freedom itself. By April Sir Kenneth Clark was in charge of the Ministry. John Sutro of Ortus Films wrote to him with the schedule of costs relating to the preparatory trip to Canada. The reply stipulated that the film should be "of the usual feature length," and specific reference was made to the importance of securing an effective distributor in Canada and the United States. In addition, the Minister of

²⁹ Richards, 1997: 322

³⁰ Frogley (ed.), 1996: 19, quoting Michael Kennedy

Information should be “entitled to exercise a measure of control over the filmic interpretation of the story.”³¹

The circumstances of Vaughan Williams’ introduction to composing for film are now legendary. Muir Mathieson, who is credited with recruiting him, retells that when he went to see the composer at his home in Dorking in the spring of 1940, “I found him strangely depressed at his inability to play a fuller part in the War. He felt that the musician had done little to express the spirit and resolve of the British people... I told him the story of *49th Parallel* and tried to show how the cinema could help to achieve those very objects for which he was striving. His enthusiasm was wonderful.”³² The introduction had been possible through Arthur Benjamin, a contact with whom Vaughan Williams had worked at the BBC before the War in a dramatized version of the Christopher Columbus story. Vaughan Williams recounts the telephone call one Saturday evening when Mathieson told him that he had “until Wednesday” to write the music.³³ He relished the challenge and by August was well on the way with the score. He had spent some time at Denham Studios in July, which he “thoroughly enjoyed,” and was even ready to work on another film but was very frank with his publisher Hubert Foss at Oxford University Press about conditions, which were that he “liked the subject,” he received “good money” for his efforts, and, especially that he had a say “as to when and how the music should come in.”³⁴ This seemed to be particularly important with him as, like other “serious” composers, none wished to compromise his musical integrity. None were to write music under the same conditions that prevailed in the Hollywood studio system, which demanded a far greater influence on film scores than in Britain, where composers “enjoyed a greater level of artistic autonomy.”³⁵ However, Vaughan Williams wrote in a letter that he was “prepared for anything,” even “writing in seconds to the stop watch,” which he found “rather fun,” composing and scoring extra bars during the rehearsal interval.³⁶

Vaughan Williams tended not to reveal much about the creative process of writing music or his inner thoughts and ideas and what he ultimately wanted to achieve. After the Sixth Symphony, which was widely interpreted as a post-atomic picture of desolation, he famously complained “why a chap can’t just write a piece of music,” and objected to it being referred to in *The Times*

³¹ Correspondence between MOI and Ortus Films Ltd., 10 April 1940 ff (TNA TS27/485).

³² Huntley, 1947: 56. There is some confusion whether this was in the spring of 1940 or 1941. John Huntley’s book states 1940, and references to the film in Vaughan Williams’ letters are dated 1941, though marked with a question.

³³ Huntley, 1947: 177

³⁴ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 322

³⁵ I have written on these contrasting approaches to film music in chapter two of my MA Thesis on music in British film melodrama of the 1940s (University of Cape Town, 2008).

³⁶ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 323

as the “war symphony.”³⁷ However, because his score to *49th Parallel* was written with the images and scenario in mind it is possible to analyse each passage of music in the context of the sequence for which it was written, although again nothing in his letters reveals directly what his intentions were. Some of the musical allusions in the film are obvious, such as the use of *l’Alouette* to denote the cultural background of Laurence Olivier’s character, a French Canadian, the printed score for which Vaughan Williams requested from Hubert Foss in June 1941.³⁸

Many commentators have provided an analysis of the score. By far the most comprehensive is Jan Swynnoe’s.³⁹ Of the Prelude, she writes that “It is almost impossible to write a theme that adequately suggests the resistance of a free democracy to the fanatical delusions of Nazism.”⁴⁰ For Jeffrey Richards, it is a “broad, stately theme which musically encapsulates the breadth and majesty of Canada.”⁴¹ However, because this grand theme does not return until the end of the film – over two hours later – it does not therefore “serve the customary purpose of main titles music of advising the audience about the principle dramatic threads of the forthcoming diegesis. There is no hint in this music of the threat posed by the Nazis, or of their confrontations with a people possessing a very different ideology.”⁴² And despite suggesting the expansiveness of the landscape and people of Canada, the theme, for Swynnoe, is “unmistakably English.”⁴³ Meanwhile, in their survey of Muir Mathieson’s career in film music, S.J. Hetherington and Mark Brownrigg have noted that “through the use of a pastoral model to suggest the good, and an inversion of this to depict evil, Vaughan Williams’ music posits Canada as a rural idyll, an eternal Eden that can both endure the war and prevail over the forces of evil.”⁴⁴ Canada is thus a metaphor for *all* free nations and so too, by association, is this music.

³⁷ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 389

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 321

³⁹ *The Best Years of British Film Music, 1933-1958*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002

⁴⁰ Swynnoe, 2002: 91

⁴¹ Richards, 1997: 292

⁴² Swynnoe, 2002: 92

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 160



The opening titles of *49th Parallel* (1941) showing the Canadian backdrop against which Vaughan Williams' stately theme is heard

The prologue, with its “Suitably Holstian, invert pedals on the high strings with gnomic, questioning clarinets describing abstract motifs beneath,” provides the cue for the main sequence which begins with the voiceover narrative and a map of North America.⁴⁵ Here, writes Swynnoe, “the clue is thrown out immediately that the main concern is not with the dramatic imperatives of the film, but with its message.”⁴⁶ The drama begins with the surfacing of a German U-boat and the four-note motif that accompanies it announces the presence of the Nazi evil. It is a “dark-toned” version⁴⁷ of the Lutheran chorale *Ein’ Feste Burg ist under Gott*. Representing the Nazi regime it appears twice more, on both occasions to underscore the impact of Nazi ideology.⁴⁸ Vaughan Williams’ views on the tune are illuminated by a letter he wrote to John Welch, in charge of broadcast religious services at the BBC. He “could hardly believe his ears,” when on D-Day after the 7.55am sermon the hymn sung was *Ein’ Feste Burg*.⁴⁹ In his reply Welch explained that the hymn tune and others like it of German origin were, to those that knew their origin, the possession of the whole Church rather than any one nation. An exception was Haydn’s tune “Austria,” the German national anthem, which it was felt would be confusing to continental listeners who did not know English. In contrast to this, Welch wrote of *Ein’ Feste Burg* that it was “essentially in Church history the hymn of believers in freedom struggling against tyranny,” citing the example of when the leading Norwegian pastor was dismissed by the Nazis, who had put a quisling in charge of the Church, “the congregation assembled outside the Cathedral with the dismissed pastor, and sang to the Nazis’ dismay and anger *Ein’ Feste Burg* in Norwegian.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid., 161

⁴⁶ Swynnoe, 2002: 92

⁴⁷ Richards, 19907: 292

⁴⁸ Swynnoe, 2002: 94

⁴⁹ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 378

⁵⁰ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 379. The same letter reminds Vaughan Williams that the BBC had “not allowed the German origin of great [orchestral] music to weigh against our broadcasting it.”

Jeffrey Richards has connected the music of *49th Parallel* to the composer's second String Quartet, which was a product of the same time. The menacing staccato phrase on the brass depicting the Nazis was adapted for the scherzo of his second string quartet in 1943. "The bleakness and cruelty of War" embodied in this theme "is transcended ultimately by the faith and spirituality" of the quartet's final movement, he writes.⁵¹ Besides *Ein' Feste Burg* to denote the Nazi element throughout the film score there are references to many more musics – "O Canada" in the prologue, *l'Alouette* to represent the French Canadians, a Viennese waltz (in the Winnipeg sequence), and another German theme, known as "Anna's Lied," to highlight the peaceful nature of the local German Hutterite communities, as well as the modal tones of the music depicting the indigenous North American population. All of these are musical testaments to "good" German communities in Canada. The use of the oboe in the wheat harvest sequence, which is accompanied by a "lilting, rustic theme" is a further indication of the pastoral – and therefore "good" – of the Hutterite community.⁵² The sequence that concerns the German Hutterites is designed to demonstrate democracy and Christian love, and for "Anna's Lied," Vaughan Williams uses the German tune *Lasst uns das Kindlein Wiegen*, a traditional Christmas folk-song, which is first introduced as a soprano solo and then treated as a full orchestral prelude.⁵³ In his 1912 study of the origins, evolution, and meaning of Christmas rituals and practices of many nations, *Christmas Customs and Traditions: Their History and Significance*, Clement Miles describes this ancient carol, heard in the Rhineland,

⁵¹ Richards, 1997: 295. The first performance of the Quartet took place at the National Gallery concert on the composer's 71st birthday, Thursday 12 October 1943. Dedicated to Viola player Jean Stewart, the work is unusually scored for the instrument. Mirroring the recent Symphony's four movements – Prelude, Romanza, Scherzo and Epilogue – the work is testament again to "the enormous versatility of the composer's later years" (*The Times*, 13 October 1944), the music speaking "with an inner tranquillity which has characterized the composer's most recent works." And even if the quartet "says nothing new," asserts *The Times*, "it reiterates quiet and lovely things which the listener will never tire of hearing" (*The Times*, 20 November 1944). Coming between the serenity of the Fifth Symphony and the turbulence of the Sixth, which was just beginning its gestation in the composer's mind, the first three movements of the work are permeated with a restlessness which found full expression in the Sixth Symphony. The scherzo's first theme (marked "theme from the 49th Parallel" in the score) is the Nazi motif taken from the film's first major sequence, and the final movement, subtitled "Greetings from Joan to Jean," refers to music intended for an un-made film on the life of Joan of Arc, based on George Bernhard Shaw's *St. Joan*. It is music of the utmost serenity and echoes the benedictory quality of the Fifth Symphony.

⁵² Leon Goosens' writing on the oboe and English pastoral style (he was first oboist in the Queen's Hall Orchestra during the War) discusses the instrument's affinity with the early reed pipes used in ancient folksong – itself linked to the pastoral in the listener's mind. By using the oboe together with Impressionistic techniques and folksong to depict the rural, British composers were able to establish a new style of music that could free itself from German influence

([http://idrs/coloradu.edu/Publications/DR/DR11.2/DR11.2.Perkins.html](http://idrs.coloradu.edu/Publications/DR/DR11.2/DR11.2.Perkins.html), accessed 7 April 2007.

⁵³ Like *Ein' Feste Burg*, the carol's origin is Lutheran. It is translated as "Let us rock the Child."

sung “very slowly, in unison, by vast congregations, and very beautiful in its mingling of solemnity, festive joy, and tender sentiment:”⁵⁴



Lasst uns das Kindlein wiegen,
Das Herz zum Krippelein biegen!
Das Kindlein benedeien:
O Jesulein süß! O Jesulein süß!⁵⁵

Here German music is again “appropriated” – in this case an old German hymn, like so many in the English Hymnal edited by Vaughan Williams – for the purposes of propaganda.

As I have mentioned, great justice has been done to the analysis of the score in the work of several authors, and it would be fruitless here to recount the score analyses of these authors except for a curiosity that appears towards the end of the film. The oddity concerns the final non-diegetic cue before the end titles which begins as the Germans approach the mountain campsite of Philip Armstrong-Scott (Leslie Howard). This sequence, in which an English aesthete (Howard) is confronted with Nazi attitudes towards culture is lent, write Hetherington and Brownrigg in their analysis, “a surreal edge with the inclusion of banks of Debussyesque piano arpeggios.”⁵⁶ The cue revealed after four minutes of this music is, for Swynnoe, “confusingly empathetic” as the implied source of music is a wireless in Scott’s tepee.⁵⁷ But, as the former authors explain, “The conjunction of Impressionistic pianism on the soundtrack and images of [Leslie] Howard... clearly marks the director’s identification with this character.” Here, they write, “Modernist high culture is allowed to stand up against the philistinism of the Nazis.”⁵⁸ In this analysis the music is “marked as decadent and degenerate,” and described by Jeffrey Richards as a “tranquil, impressionistic piece, which opens with an English pastoral melody.”⁵⁹ After its elaboration, the melody returns and develops “the air of

⁵⁴ Miles, 1976: 109

⁵⁵ “Let us rock the Child and bow our hearts before the crib! Let us delight our spirits and bless the Child: sweet little Jesus! Sweet little Jesus!”

⁵⁶ Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 166

⁵⁷ Swynnoe, 2002: 97

⁵⁸ Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 167

⁵⁹ Ibid., 166

menace” which, in the context of the film, signals the arrival of the Nazis in the “hitherto peaceful location.”⁶⁰ Here again is a presentation of the pastoral together with its inverted form to present the opposite.

In closer analysis of the context in which the music is heard, however, a further clue as to the message being conveyed, is discernible. The most obvious aspect of the music – apart from its apparent source – is that it hardly penetrates the *mise en scène* at all and the piano cannot really be fully appreciated because of other diegetic sounds and the rather dense dialogue. In fact, in contrast to the rest of the score, its scoring for solo piano marks its significance for very specific – though unspoken – reasons. In April 1942, six months after the film’s release, Vaughan Williams had prepared a manuscript for the music which he called “The Lake in the Mountains,” but which he did not yet want published.⁶¹ Its impressionistic credentials were thus only apparent many years later and Vaughan Williams’ full intentions were thus only revealed in the subsequent publication of *The Lake in the Mountains* in 1947. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* remarked at the time of the film’s re-release in 1984 that “the choice of the Hutterite community and Philip Armstrong-Scott’s camp as settings for the two main intervening episodes reveals the ‘why we fight’ questions in terms that most audiences must have found decidedly eccentric...”⁶² The camp sequence deals explicitly with the “degenerate” painting of Matisse and Picasso as well as the literature of Thomas Mann, but has to contend with a roundabout commentary on “degenerate” music, in the context of other artistic modes of expression so detested in the Nazi ideologies, and a quote from Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* which, under scrutiny, implies a great deal.⁶³

Nazi beliefs about music were ideologically opposed to Impressionism, which relies on suggestion and atmosphere rather than strong emotion, and which grew in reaction to the excesses of German Romanticism. Based in France, musical Impressionism was led by Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. It also “gained a foothold in England, where its traits were assimilated by composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, and Frederick Delius. Vaughan Williams in particular exhibited music infused with Impressionistic gestures – this was

⁶⁰ Richards, 1997: 294

⁶¹ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 336. The music eventually appeared in 1947 as a solo dedicated to the pianist Phyllis Sellick.

⁶² Synopsis and review from the *Monthly Film Bulletin* Vol.51 No.610 November 1984 p.356-358. (The film was originally reviewed in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* Vol.8 No.94 1941 p.129)

⁶³ Henri Matisse (1869-1954) was a contemporary of the novelist (Thomas Mann was born in 1875 and died in 1955), and though his art was not exhibited as part of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich, Matisse’s work was destroyed by the Nazis, his impressionist credentials sufficiently “degenerate” for Hirth to despise him, and Lohrmann to throw the painting into the fire. Indeed, most 20th century artistic movements, including Dada, Cubism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Impressionism, New Objectivity, Surrealism, and Bauhaus were condemned by the Nazis as degenerate.

not coincidence, as he was a student of Maurice Ravel. Vaughan Williams' music utilizes melodies and harmonies found in English folk music, such as the pentatonic scale and modes, making it perfectly suited to the polarity-breaking ideals of the Impressionist movement, which began moving away from the Major-minor based tonality of the Romantic composers."⁶⁴ The Nazis did not ban Debussy, though his music was revolutionary and in many ways the beginning of the Modern. In fact during the Third Reich, performances of his music increased.⁶⁵ Despite this, Walter Gieseking, the German pianist famous for his post-war recordings of Debussy's piano works who had been a high-ranking cultural official in the Third Reich, banned the music of what he considered non-Aryan composers from his recitals before and during the War, including that of Debussy and Ravel. The Nazis were certainly inconsistent in their attitudes to music. "If it was by no means easy for the Nazis to decide what kinds of music they did not like, and what kinds of conductors and composers they did not want, it was even more difficult reaching any kind of consistent policy on what kind of music they did wish to encourage," writes Richard Evans.⁶⁶ This helps to explain the contradictory attitude towards Debussy and the Impressionists, when it would be expected that the Nazis would have instead expressly hated the musical "expressionism" of composers such as Arnold Schoenberg. So, despite the "Debussyesque" style of what was to become *The Lake in the Mountains*, what is important is that, in contrast to the rest of the score, this piano music is symbolic of the music that the Nazis would have considered "degenerate." Any music written for the purpose would have in any case been symbolic, in the context of the sequence in the film. The only direct route available would have been, for example, to use some of Schoenberg's music.⁶⁷

Following a period of study with Ravel in 1908, Vaughan Williams began to explore a way to counter the Teutonic imperatives in music that, to his mind, rather overwhelmed composition in England. By embracing Impressionism, he was able to free himself and his music from this "tyranny." "Despite many outward divulgements of character and temperament Vaughan Williams and Debussy had much in common," writes Christopher Palmer.⁶⁸ "Both composers rebelled against the tyranny of the major-minor key system, and both sought salvation in modality – Vaughan Williams turning to English folk-song for melodic emancipation and as a foundation on which to build a new nationalistic tradition..." Indeed, during his career,

⁶⁴ Wikipedia entry on Impressionism

⁶⁵ Evans, 2005: 201

⁶⁶ Ibid., 198

⁶⁷ Mendelssohn would have done just as well, though the allusion to the Modern would have been lost. Vaughan Williams' contribution to *Music and Letters'* tribute to Schoenberg after his death in 1951 also illuminates this point: "Schoenberg meant nothing to me-but as he apparently meant a lot to a lot of other people I daresay it is all my own fault" (*Music and Letters*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Oct., 1951), pp. 305-323).

⁶⁸ Christopher Palmer, "Delius, Vaughan Williams and Debussy," *Music and Letters* 1969 (L) 4: 475-480, p.476

Vaughan Williams “paid tribute to a number of facets of the Debussyan ethos,” in his use of Impressionist techniques, continues Palmer.⁶⁹ *The Lake in the Mountains* is certainly “impressionistic.” Debussyesque or even Ravel-like, it is the aesthete’s music, and in the context of the film, it is meant to signify Armstrong-Scott’s refinement by its relative erudition. The piece is “episodic and descriptive,” writes John Barr. “The succession of phrases and sections are off-set by contrasting keys... [which] seem to mingle the images of the lake, the mountains, and the local Indian culture.”⁷⁰ Music is the most abstract of all the arts. Whereas in *49th Parallel* the screenplay can refer directly to the written word (and even quote from it in the script) and the director can show images of the paintings of Matisse and Picasso, the film relies on abstract references to music to make the equivalent point. Scott could have stopped them to listen to the music on the wireless – “Listen to that! Debussy!” – but instead we must be content with oblique references. The piano solo stands out from all the other uses of music in the film – it is semi-diegetic in the way music is at the Banff festival of the previous sequence – but here it serves to underpin the subtle references to the “modern art” so loved by Scott.

Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*

Scott’s “sophisticated” tastes also reveal themselves in his liking for lobster Thermidor and red Bordeaux. His, the aesthete’s perspective, is summed up in his motto: “Wars may come, wars may go, but art goes on forever.” Scott is writing about tribal leadership and comments on Goebbels and Hitler himself on methods of persuasion and propaganda, and the practices of the Blackfoot tribe of Red Indians whose warlike habits equate with those of Goebbels and Hitler, the latter’s tactic of “endless repetition” is singled out as a shared approach to the question. He is not yet aware of his visitors’ true identities. But to Eric Portman’s Hirth, Leslie Howard’s affable Philip Armstrong-Scott is a weakling: “soft and degenerate all through.” Hirth (Eric Portman) hates “talk” and what he perceives as cowardice.⁷¹ Scott’s reading matter condemns him even further: the American Hemingway’s “latest,” and “one of my pets” – Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924), from which he quotes the briefest of passages: “Sein Alter wäre schwer zu schätzen gewesen” (his age would have been difficult to estimate).

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.477

⁷⁰ “The Solo Piano Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams: an Introduction” in the *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, Issue 46, October 2009

⁷¹ The prevailing mistrust of the intellect in Germany is summed up in a British Council memorandum of 6 October 1938 which quotes Walter Rathenau, “one of the most sensitive observers of German character in modern times.” The intellectual was weak, he claimed. A strong man, on the other hand, “strong in upbringing, character and soul,” had no need to resort to “any such subterfuge” (TNA BW32/1).

Apart from the music heard on the soundtrack, the closest reference to music is via this short quote from *The Magic Mountain*. The Rocky Mountains setting, while perhaps the most convenient explanation of *The Magic Mountain's* inclusion in the script, is not sufficient. There is, of course, the trivial connection between the sequence in the Canadian Rockies and the book's title. But Scott is also conducting his own self education, just like the novel's protagonist Hans Castorp. As tension mounts (after Portman reveals his identity) and a confrontation takes place, Scott's prized paintings and the novel are thrown into the fire. Scott later "proves" himself by taking up a weapon to deal with the runaway Nazis, faces their bullets, and beats up one of his attackers, Lohrmann (John Chandos).⁷² This is a parallel to the fate of Mann's character, Castorp, who faces his enemies on a First World War battlefield at the end of the novel, following his lengthy sojourn at the *Berghof*, a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps near Davos. Indeed, Scott would have been aware of the parallel. Emerging from the cave where he has dealt with Lohrmann, Scott and his men seem shocked at what he has done: "Well, he had a fair chance," says Scott. "One armed superman against one unarmed decadent democrat. I wonder how Dr Goebbels will explain that?!"



Philip Armstrong Scott (Leslie Howard) reading from *The Magic Mountain* with Lieutenant Hirth (Eric Portman) looking on in *49th Parallel* (1941)



Note the change of expression in Portman's face, who has heard the words from the novel

⁷² It is possible to detect a further reference to Scott's "degeneracy" when, even though Lohrmann had been first to point a gun at him, Scott tells him at this point that he "hoped it was the other fellow," which may be interpreted as reference to the earlier scene in which Scott asks a prone Lohrmann "Interested?" The German simply stares at Scott without saying a word in response to this question, Scott's meaning made somewhat ambiguous by Lohrmann's response.

The quote mentioned above is, at first hearing, apparently arbitrary. The words introduce the character Settembrini and are from the beginning of the section “Satana” in the novel’s third chapter. The Italian intellectual Settembrini, “the proud advocate of the Western humanist tradition,” is the vehicle through which Mann first attempts to discuss the relationship between music and politics.⁷³ Mann left Germany in 1933 amid a growing controversy around his anti-fascist stance and was exiled in Switzerland until 1938 and thereafter in California. During the War he broadcast attacks on the Nazi regime, considering himself to be representative of the true German spirit, a recurring theme of *49th Parallel*. Mann despised tyranny, both the German and Soviet varieties. *The Magic Mountain* (1924) was his first attempt to explore the “catalysts of catastrophe – nationalism, militarism, capitalism, anti-Semitism” focusing on “the most enchanting flower of German culture: music” to do so.⁷⁴

Chapter three of the novel discusses the intellectual nature of literature as opposed to “emotional” music: “That it can under certain circumstances be dangerous for segments of a whole nation to be transported into musical-emotional passion was proven, for instance, in Nazi Germany. The Nazis enthusiastically extolled the operas of Richard Wagner with their ancient Germanic sagas and highly emotional music.”⁷⁵ Mann believed that there was a self-destructive element in the “musical” or “aesthetic” soul, and the preference of music over literature was a particularly German characteristic, with Goethe being the only figure in German literature of the calibre of Shakespeare or Dante.⁷⁶

Chapter four describes a Sunday morning concert on the terrace of the sanatorium. In the section “Politically Suspect,” a phrase which Settembrini applies to music when leading the short discussion, he makes his views known about literature and music and writes Hans Vaget in his recent commentary on music in *The Magic Mountain*, “since emotions inflamed by music can easily be channelled towards patriotic, religious or supposedly therapeutic ends, Settembrini quite cogently regards music as ‘dangerous’ and, indeed, as ‘politically suspect’.”⁷⁷ Whereas the Word is “the bearer of the spirit, the tool and gleaming ploughshare of progress,” music is dubious, irresponsible and insensible: the “half-articulate art... Music, as a final incitement to the spirit of men, is invaluable – as a force which draws onward and upward the

⁷³ Vaget (ed.), 2008: 126. Mann’s 1947 novel *Doktor Faustus* concerns the connection between music and politics, and deals explicitly with the post-Wagnerian crisis in German music. Begun in 1943, it appeared, coincidentally, in the same year as the publication of *The Lake in the Mountains*.

⁷⁴ Vaget (ed.), 2008: 125

⁷⁵ Czermak, 1969: 15

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Vaget (ed.), 2008: 127

spirit she finds prepared for her ministrations. But literature must precede her. By music alone the world would get no further forward.”⁷⁸ Settembrini also knows that music “can be put to less than high-minded purposes and serve reactionary ends,” something that is of course borne out in its use in certain modes of propaganda.⁷⁹

A major theme of the novel is the passing of time. Music – by “breaking it up” or “filling it in” – therefore becomes a measure, informing awareness of its passage; but can work against action and progress, too, dulling us into “lethargy, inertia, slavish inaction, stagnation.”⁸⁰ It is not until towards the end of the novel that we realise Hans Castorp has been at the *Berghof* for seven years, though his intention at the outset had been to stay for just three weeks. In the section entitled “Fullness of Harmony,” a new “acoustical instrument” is brought out: the “newest model,” the “latest triumph of art... [an] A-1, copper-bottomed” gramophone: “German made, you know, we do them far and away better than anybody else. The truly musical, in modern, mechanical form, the German soul up to date.”⁸¹ The first record played is an Offenbach overture. An aria from *The Barber of Seville* follows, and another from *La Traviata* and, finally, a Viennese waltz, before Hans Castorp takes over the gramophone himself ending with the Barcarolle from *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Later he is able to explore the collection of music recorded by “famous orchestras” and “famous prima donnas:” *Lieder*, opera, chamber music and orchestral, and spends much time with the new machinery, exploring the records and, in particular, *Aida*. “He understood perhaps not every word they said, but enough, with his knowledge of the situation, and his sympathy in general for such situations, to feel a familiar fellow-feeling that increased every time he listened to this set of records, until it amounted to infatuation.”⁸²

Hans Castorp favours five highly romantic pieces of music – Verdi (*Aida*), Bizet (*Carmen*), Debussy (*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*), Gounod (*Faust*) and Schubert (*Der Lindenbaum*), all of which in some way concern death. For example, in the three operas, each end with the death of the heroine: Aida and Radames are entombed in *Aida*, Marguerite dies at the end of *Faust*, and Carmen is murdered. But it is *Der Lindenbaum*, in particular, that has great meaning for Castorp who has indulged in many evenings of recorded music: “To him the song meant a whole world, a world which he must have loved, else he could not have so desperately loved that which it represented and symbolized to him,” though, the narrator adds, he “might have had a different fate if his temperament had been less accessible to the charms of the sphere of

⁷⁸ Mann, 1999 [1]: 111

⁷⁹ Vaget (ed.), 2008: 135

⁸⁰ Mann, 1999 [1]: 542, 112

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 637

⁸² *Ibid.*, 643

feeling, the general attitude of mind, which the *Lied* so profoundly, so mystically epitomized.”⁸³ Furthermore, the recording to which Castorp returns has another significant quality:

And now we come back to the fifth and last piece in his group of high favourites: this time not French, but something especially and exemplarily German; not opera either, but a *Lied*, one of those which are folk-song and masterpiece together, and from the combination receive their particular stamp as spiritual epitomes.⁸⁴

Here is a sentiment that Vaughan Williams would have understood. “Once again, a highly subjective perspective prevails, as Castorp interprets the linden tree’s promise of rest as a projection of the fictitious wanderer’s desire for death. *Der Lindenbaum*, which symbolises humankind’s only transcendence from the paradox of life and death – the longing for love, peace and beauty, and triumph over lust and dissolution in the struggle for self-conquest – is, to Castorp, worth dying for and it is this *Lied* that Castorp himself sings on the battlefield as he is felled by shelling in the horror of a rain-soaked and muddy battlefield.

The novel, a *Bildungsroman*, has been seen as written in the tradition of the Grail romances, the quest legend – like *Parsival* – with the *Berghof* as a kind of Venusburg. Mann uses Wagner’s *Leitmotiv* technique (for example in his use of the Schubert *Lied* as well as non-musical ones such as a pencil, or the switching on of a light), which links the past with the future: “There is no better proof of the affinity he felt with music than his use of the leitmotiv technique.”⁸⁵ Mann also refers to Mahler and Schoenberg, the music of whom was also to be banned by the Nazis as “degenerate,” as we have seen. Modern music, representative of reality, is rejected by Castorp in favour of music that would gloss over reality; the conservative “backward-gaze” of the late Romanticism preferred to the “dissonant here and now of the modern world.” The character Hans Castorp thus represents this “backward gaze.”⁸⁶ Thomas Mann “came to think of himself as the literary heir not only of Nietzsche but also of Richard Wagner.”⁸⁷ In an essay written by the author, *The Making of the Magic Mountain*, which was first published in English, in the *Atlantic*, January 1953, Mann asks his readers to read the novel twice, in order to “penetrate and enjoy” its musical ideas:

⁸³ Mann, 1999 [1]: 651

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 650

⁸⁵ Czermak, 1969: 39

⁸⁶ Dowden (ed.), 1999: 80

⁸⁷ Vaget (ed.), 2008: 124

The way in which the book is composed results in the reader's getting a deeper enjoyment from the second reading. Just as in music one needs to know a piece to enjoy it properly, I intentionally used the word 'composed' in referring to the writing of the book. I mean it in the sense we more commonly apply to the writing of music. For music has always had a strong formative influence upon the style of my writing... To me the novel was always like a symphony, a work in counterpoint, a thematic fabric; the idea of the musical motif plays a great role in it.⁸⁸

The use of Thomas Mann in *49th Parallel* then, is to obtain a subtle reference to music, as part of the ideological journey on which we are taken – through the ideas of liberal democracy and Christian values alluded to in the earlier part of the film, what Britain was fighting for (what was best in civilization, against the brutality and philistinism of Nazi Germany) – and how politics relates to the Arts. It is far from explicit, though. The music in the Leslie Howard scene is deliberately subdued and unemotional. There is no Wagnerian bravado, and despite its drawing on impressionist techniques of the past, this is no “backward gaze” – how could it be?

The film ends – after over two hours – with a reprise of the opening Prelude. As if to underpin Vaughan Williams' democratic credentials and his political beliefs, this “big tune,” akin to one of Vaughan Williams' hymn tunes, became the “secular hymn” *The New Commonwealth* set to words by Harold Child, librettist of Vaughan Williams' opera *Hugh the Drover*, with whom the composer had collaborated for over thirty years. That he was willing to collaborate in a choral version illuminates his beliefs and what he fought for. If at the beginning of the War this was unclear to him, by the time *The New Commonwealth* was published, he had no such doubts. As we have seen, the term “commonwealth” itself and the idea of a democratic commonwealth of nations was a concept unknown in Germany.⁸⁹ It is a British idea, one in which Vaughan Williams believed. As Jeffrey Richards writes:

Its optimistic and uplifting sentiments stress international brotherhood, the triumph of faith, hope and love over hate and fear, and emphasizes the tune's hymnlike properties, underlying the vision of the war as a struggle for Christian civilization.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Mann, 1999: 724

⁸⁹ In the House of Commons 1938 Debate on Commonwealth and Democracy (col.1929) Harold Nicolson said of the Totalitarian states that “They do not understand what the Commonwealth idea is.”

⁹⁰ Richards, 1997: 293

Judging by his letter to Harold Child of 18 May 1942,⁹¹ Vaughan Williams was keen to ensure that the librettist had every possible means at his disposal: “Here is the 49th / 1 tune with a nonsense verse attached to show the metre and suggested rhyme scheme,” he wrote. To fit the tune, Vaughan Williams wanted something “rather high falutin’, noble and sentimental – like about Canada or Unity of Nations (‘Parliament of man the Federation of the world’)” [sic].⁹² This reveals something more of his own (political) views of the theme. Never one to dwell on too serious matters, however, Vaughan Williams’ often rather wicked sense of humour emerges in the words he provides to Harold Child “to show the metre and suggested rhyme scheme:”

Now I have made a beast’-ly tune
You’ll probably hate it.
May be t’will prove a pre-cious boon
To you and me.
When the fat cheques keep moun-ting up
We’ll dine and sup
And bless that whose fate it was to earn so soon
Such £. s. d.

Not so frivolously, the composer took care to spell out the phrasing and time signature, and he was keen to suggest three verses. In the event, Harold Child produced just two:

See where the beacon fires of Faith
 Fling glory to guide us.
There lies man’s upward way o’er death,
 O’er hate and fear.
Trust we the light that burns so dear,
 And lift our eyes
Whose Faith sees what heavenly host of great allies
 March on beside us.

Hope we have won from our despair
 And joy out of pining.
Fast anchored safe in waters fair

⁹¹ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 338

⁹² Hugh Cobbe has this as “to fit the time.” Vaughan Williams’ handwriting was notorious.

We've lain at rest
Hark from afar on wider quest
Life calls us now.
Then up on anchor, spread the sail
And point the prow
Where hope is shining.

While the text of this “remarkably moving song” may today seem anachronistic it is “reminiscent of the idealism of John Addington Symonds, but Vaughan Williams’ glorious, noble, hymn-like melody carries all before it.”⁹³ And the Prelude’s appearance at the 2007 BBC Proms, as well as on Armistice Day – in its arrangement for brass band – at the Cenotaph ceremony on the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War, as wreaths were laid by the last of the surviving veterans, is testament to its enduring appeal.

⁹³ Sleeve notes to Albion Records’ 2008 recording entitled “Where Hope is Shining.”

Chapter Eight

Music's Enduring Instrument

*The old reproach that Britain was das Land Ohne Musik is dead, and everybody knows it is dead*¹

This study, through the examination of the politics of cultural propaganda, live music performance, broadcasting and film-making – both documentary and feature film alike – has shown that rather than a “land without music” Britain in the 1930s and 40s was musically rich in every way, and even more so than the land that emphatically had always been a land steeped in music: Germany. “Who is to tell this to the world?” asked *The Times*’ columnist, who at the end of 1945 wrote the confident words quoted at the head of this chapter. The reply highlights the wartime work of the British Council which, as we have seen, played a significant role in publicising the British point of view:

Broadcasting does a good deal, but like the sower in the parable it casts its good seed on soils of varying degrees of responsiveness. The problem of making ourselves known to others not only in arts but even in social and political affairs was so uncongenial to our temper, that only reluctantly did the British Government found the organization now known as the British Council, to do the work of making known abroad the British ‘way of life’.²

The British Council's Legacy

Summing up the achievement of the British Council, the article ends by concluding that in inventing a means of exporting music (and acknowledging that the distribution of commissioned recordings was its most effective device for the purpose), the Council was left to devise its own means of “stating the facts without boasting, educating without propaganda, and winning the ear of the world without special pleading.”³ By now, as this article shows, observers like *The Times*’ columnist were already beginning to distance themselves from the use of the term “propaganda.” The term “cultural propaganda,” as I have mentioned, fell out of use soon after the war ended, with the term “soft power” now favoured and the British

¹ *The Times*, 14 December 1945

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Council referring to “relationship-building.”⁴ Its work continues, however, and the Council can be justly proud of its wartime achievements.

Music in Britain

Apart from its recording legacy, the British Council was also keen to educate. The eighteenth in Longman’s series *British Life and Thought*, and effectively the prevailing attitude of the British Council Music Advisory Committee, *British Music*, was published for the Council in 1944. In this slim volume committee member J.A. Westrup “tells of the brass bands, the competition festivals, London Concerts, the revivals of Tudor polyphony, Bach, and folksong, the work of our educational institutions and the vagaries of our opera, the things in fact which do not get into the history books, but are essential for the foreigner to know if he is to understand our music.”⁵ The name of Bach, in this list of “British music,” stands out. We have already seen the place and regard for the music of Bach and Beethoven in British musical life. Westrup’s book, published when assurance of an allied victory was a matter of time is written in the positive tones of a nation confident of its future. The book accordingly looks forward to making the most of the wide range of musical activity in Britain, hope for the future encouraged by comparing “the present state of music in England with its condition a hundred years ago.”⁶

The publication of *British Music* and the other numbers in the series was not a new concept in wartime publishing. *English Music* by W.J. Turner,⁷ published in the less confident days of 1941 was part of a series of books published by Collins that sought to record and present various aspects of the British way of life which were in danger of being swamped forever in the face of what was widely believed to be an imminent invasion. It begins with the familiar complaint: “The common fallacy that we are not a musical nation has persisted so long that we have almost come to believe it ourselves.”⁸ Turner immediately seeks to explain the origins of the fallacy: “An enquiry into the history of English music will enlighten us because it will show the close connection between the life of the people and the music they make,”⁹ he writes. This is the same line that Humphrey Jennings and Ralph Vaughan Williams took in *Dim Little Island* (1948), and Taylor concurs that throughout most of the nineteenth century “academic

⁴ The term “soft power” is used in a *Financial Times* editorial of 29/30 January 2011 to describe the role of BBC World Service broadcasts, “One of the most potent tools of British diplomacy.”

⁵ *The Times*, 4 August 1944

⁶ Westrup, 1944: 33

⁷ Australian-born Walter James Redfern Turner (1889-1946) was a poet, writer and critic, whose works include biographies of Berlioz, Mozart and Beethoven.

⁸ Turner, 1941: 7

⁹ *Ibid.*

musicians of the nineteenth century were still under the influence of Handel,"¹⁰ accepting that "English music was at its nadir."¹¹ The revival of music at the end of the century, however, was due to a strong amateur choral tradition and the emergence of talented professionals from the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, with Parry, Stanford and Elgar taking "a more important place in the European musical history of the period."¹²

The great strides in music in the earlier part of the last century were reinforced by the many festivals of music held in London between the wars, which "became the most important in the world,"¹³ with the annual opera festival at Glyndebourne rivalling that of Salzburg¹⁴ and some performances of ballet at Sadler's Wells "of a standard not to be surpassed anywhere else in the world at the present time."¹⁵ Turner has great faith in the importance of music. He concludes by remarking that although "the future of English music [and that of music in other European countries] now depended on the social conditions existing after the present war," the chief hope of music lay "in a renewal of the general unity in civilization which once prevailed throughout the western world."¹⁶ The recurring reference to music and civilization can be found in many guises. As Nick Hayes has written in *Millions Like Us?* "A belief certainly existed among cultural elites that Britain was fighting for what was 'best' in European civilization"¹⁷ and, as we have seen, British propaganda corralled culture to make as much of this idea as possible. In every cultural institution and department of state the message was one of reminding people what was at stake, and why the struggle needed to continue. Even the War Cabinet took a view:

German unity was born of blood and iron. Its purpose was power: that power has been abused. The Germans themselves have reaped death and disaster twice from it, and under the blighting influence of the power lust, German poetry, music, literature and philosophy, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led all Europe, have withered beyond recognition.¹⁸

One of the most evocative arguments for music is surely found in Barbara Wynne-Candy's words in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), which, as we have seen, addresses the subject directly: "They sit down in the same butchers' uniforms and listen to Mendelssohn and

¹⁰ Turner, 1941: 43

¹¹ Turner, 1941: 44

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Turner, 1944: 45

¹⁴ Turner, 1941: 47

¹⁵ Turner, 1941: 48

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hayes and Hill, 1999: 28

¹⁸ TNA, CAB 66/35/44, War Cabinet, *The Future of Germany*, 8 April 1943

Schubert. Something horrid about that.” Although the sequence involves German prisoners of war in 1919, the film is very much relevant to the concerns of the day and a product of its time. The music sequence can be seen to represent the common attitude that prevailed: namely that German music was of the very best quality, was symbolic of the greatest in European culture, but that somehow it did not belong to the aggressive and retrograde spirit of a militant Germany, in whatever period. Powell and Pressburger’s preoccupation with culture – as seen in the mountain sequence in *49th Parallel* – appeared in many guises. *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) drew on the memory of Chaucer’s pilgrimage and their hallmark images of the English countryside provided a unifying symbol of what the British were fighting for. This is the same spirit identified by Victor Hely-Hutchinson that was required for new music commissions of the British Council – the pastoral and romantic; the idea of an eternal England, the rural idyll. Powell and Pressburger succeeded in capturing this eternity which they found in the timelessness of the English landscape, and the music of composers such as Vaughan Williams was steeped in this spirit. In fact music is a key element in their filmic process and no other composer was better qualified to do this justice than Vaughan Williams, “whose principal definition of Englishness in his films as elsewhere in his work lay,” writes Jeffrey Richards, “...in the pastoral and in the visionary.” Vaughan Williams’s great achievement “was to unite the two.”¹⁹ This is particularly evident in the post-war *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947). Although in essence a romantic melodrama, the film also “seeks to evoke life in Edwardian Romney Marsh” where director Charles Frend was able to recreate the rhythms of farming life, changes of season and, in particular, the haunting beauty of the English landscape, elements that Vaughan Williams “responds to and sees as quintessentially English.”²⁰

In his first film, *49th Parallel*, the composer was already experimenting with these ideas, which coincided happily with Powell and Pressburger’s preoccupation with landscape. The standard of British film music probably owes its greatest debt of gratitude to Ralph Vaughan Williams, something recognised as early as 1947: “Introducing Vaughan Williams to the cinema undoubtedly ranks as one of Muir Mathieson’s major achievements as the musical casting director of Denham Studios.”²¹ Approaching seventy years of age at the time, Vaughan Williams’ foray into film music was really part of his contribution to the war effort, desperate to find some meaningful contribution, though he did once reveal that “he wouldn’t mind a shot at writing for the films.”²² In 1940 Muir Mathieson gave him four days to come up with the music for *49th Parallel* (Mathieson was the director of music for Alexander Korda’s London

¹⁹ Richards, 1997: 289

²⁰ Ibid., 311

²¹ Huntley, 1947: 57

²² Vaughan Williams, quoted in Jameson, 1997: 71

Films). “Film composing is a splendid discipline,” said Vaughan Williams, “and I recommend a course of it to all composition teachers whose pupils are apt to be dawdling in the ideas, or whose every bar is sacred and must not be cut or altered.”²³

The Spirit of England

Throughout the war, the Ministry of Information, via the media of both film and music, sought to encourage the depiction of an eternal unshakeable England, an England worth fighting for; even dying for. Since Vaughan Williams was particularly keen at the outset of the war to do his bit, he jumped at the chance to write for the movies and his film scoring was for him one concrete way in which he could contribute to the “war effort.” A more subtle form of propaganda than Goebbels’ rather clumsy direct approach, the idea was not only to inspire and motivate the native inhabitants of the islands but also to rally assistance and support from the Empire and elsewhere. As we have seen, this approach was exemplified in the BBC’s commissioning of Julius Harrison’s *Bredon Hill*, the rhapsody for violin and orchestra based on the poem by A.E. Housman from *A Shropshire Lad*. The score is inscribed with the poem’s opening words:

Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie
And see the coloured counties
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky.

Julius Harrison’s work was part of the wartime campaign to promote an idealised England and was first performed on the BBC’s Empire Service in August 1941, and rebroadcast on the North American service the following month. Harrison, who was director of music at Malvern College, said that the work grew from the scenes of his life in and around parts of Worcestershire which he called “England at its oldest.” In her book on British Film music, Jan Swynnoe points out that just as this music became a symbol for the enduring spirit of England, “so had music for film during the war years acknowledged its legacy from those masters who had sought to eternalise that spirit.”²⁴ In his book on the origins of the English imagination, Peter Ackroyd hints at the connection between landscape and music, the subject which seems to pervade the work of Vaughan Williams in particular, but also preoccupies several of his

²³ Vaughan Williams, 1996: 160

²⁴ Swynnoe, 2002: 155

contemporaries, among them Gustav Holst, Frederick Delius and Arthur Bliss. In particular, writes Ackroyd, Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* embraces "present and past time," a reference to T.S. Eliot's 1935 poem "Burnt Norton," in a musical expression of English antiquarianism, "a form of alchemy [which] engenders a strange timelessness."²⁵ Ian Christie also refers to "Burnt Norton" in his essay on Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale*, made in 1944 when the idea of England preoccupied filmmakers and composers alike. Eliot takes up the same theme, writes Christie, in the last of his *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding":

A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

"Here," Christie continues, "we are again close to that sense of the past made urgent by the present."²⁶ Julius Harrison's similar, deliberate evocation of the past in *Bredon Hill*, written in the same year, is in the full tradition of Vaughan Williams' 1914 romance *The Lark Ascending* which takes its title and which is similarly inscribed with words from George Meredith's poem "Joys of the Earth": "He drops the silver chain of sound, of many links without a break." This unbroken chain, writes Ackroyd, "is that of English music itself,"²⁷ and it appears again in wartime cultural propaganda, linking filmmakers to poets, composers and English spirituality itself. And the emphasis on the timelessness of the English pastoral is evoked again by T.S. Eliot in his poem "Defense of the Islands," words which formed his contribution to the New York Museum of Modern Art's 1941 exhibition "Britain at War":

Let the memorials of built stone – music's
enduring instrument, of many centuries of
patient cultivation of the earth, of English
verse
be joined with the memory of this defence of
the islands

and the memory of those appointed to the grey

²⁵ Ackroyd, 2000: 440

²⁶ Christie, 1994: 83

²⁷ Ackroyd, 2000: 440

ships – battleship, merchantman, trawler –
contributing their share to the ages' pavement
of British bone on the sea floor

and those who, in man's newest form of gamble
with death, fight the power of darkness in air
and fire

and of those who have followed their forebears
to Flanders and France, those undefeated in de-
feat, unalterable in triumph, changing nothing
of their ancestors' ways but the weapons
and those for whom the paths of glory
are the lanes and the streets of Britain:

to say, to the past and future generations
of our kin and of our speech, that we took up
our positions, in obedience to instructions.

“Defense of the Islands” first appeared as a poster designed by E. McKnight Kauffer for a New York exhibition of photographs illustrating the war in Britain in 1940. McKnight Kauffer was working for the Ministry of Information at the time, and the poem is dedicated to him. It next appeared as the preface to the MOMA 1941 exhibition catalogue. Of these words, Eliot himself said that they “cannot pretend to be verse,” but that the date of the poem – just after the evacuation from Dunkirk – had a special significance for him. Britain stood alone and, though not defenceless, was vulnerable. But the spirit evoked in these lines was the spirit shared by Churchill, film makers and music makers alike. All drew on this depth of wisdom to remind, and rally, the people. “Defense of the Islands” is a call to “obedience to instructions,” for the sake of past and future generations. But for what? Glory, yes, but whose paths are “the lanes and the streets of Britain.” No earthly Valhalla, then, just the unchanging ordinariness of a familiar landscape: “music’s enduring instrument.”

Thus, music, landscape and a mysterious England of long-ago are all aspects of an English spirituality, where sometimes music is a metaphor for time, and landscape for music. The

contemporary author Joyce Cary knew of it.²⁸ Cary's description of the Cotswolds, for example, has a musical tone – the fusion again of landscape and music – which perfectly captures the feeling of that part of the country:

It is the chamber-music of landscape, a quartet where the brook sings to the two-acre field, the cottage above is a note that takes its meaning from both of them, and the whole is enclosed by a sky shaped by a stone roof, a smoking Cotswold chimney, a fan-edged clump of beech, and the long curving lines of knolls that echo each other within this horizon like the counterpoint of a fugue.²⁹

Music is even a metaphor for country pub culture, where Cary quotes a friend's comment about a 'woman patron': "She thinks she's at a sherry party, which is meant for duets – she doesn't understand that pubs are for orchestral effects."³⁰ Cary's essay, which first appeared in the journal *Holiday* in January 1955, shares its title with Humphrey Jennings' 1941 film *The Heart of Britain* which, as we have seen, tentatively broaches the subject of music. This was the film that boldly stated that Germany was simply unable to defeat people who "can sing like that." This, another aspect of the indomitable fighting spirit of ordinary Britons, speaks of a quiet confidence and belief in a just cause. *The Heart of Britain* also laments "the genius of Germany that was," using music as its metaphor for the tragedy of modern Germany. By the time Jennings made *Dim Little Island* in 1948, the whole idea of the place and importance of music in Britain – the pyramid of English music as expressed in Vaughan Williams' words – can be retrospectively applied in trying to understand his approach to music – including that for the films. "What is particularly striking about the film music is the recurrence of the theme of the journey," writes Jeffrey Richards. "Celebrated in all his music, in fact this emerges as the spiritual analogue of Bunyan's character who, like the composer himself, is on his pilgrim's progress."³¹ It is significant that in his discussion of John Buchan's *Mr Standfast*, one of the Richard Hannay novels, John Ramsden points out that this one closes "with reference to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, explicitly linking Britain with Christianity and Germany with Satanic evil."³²

As the acknowledged pre-eminent composer of his time, Vaughan Williams was simply living out his own beliefs, and his music was already drawing on the Tudor past, and was thus expressive of the spirit of England. *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus*, offered to the British

²⁸ Joyce Cary (1888-1957), chiefly remembered for his trilogy written during the war, which contains *The Horse's Mouth*

²⁹ Bishop (ed.), 1976: 190.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 193

³¹ Richards, 1997: 323

³² Ramsden, 2006: 110

Council for the 1939 New York World's Fair was, for US audiences, evocative of his earlier pastoral works – particularly the *Tallis Fantasia* – and, of course, there is Tudor polyphony in non-commissioned works of the period, too, particularly the Fifth symphony. However, as the programme notes to a recent BBC recording of the symphony point out, although the “temperate emotional climate” of the Symphony can still easily evoke “scenes of England on a May evening, all Cotswold farms, country pubs, and Three-Counties cathedrals from the air,” this is not enough: “This idea of musical postcards is misleading, and misses the spiritual element. Because his music is not about place. It’s about time: about ancient and modern coexisting.”³³ Here again, then, is the element of timelessness in the English spirit.

Vaughan Williams' Fifth

Following a suggestion by an ordinary member of the public – in a poignantly democratic gesture – the British Council's music committee agreed to include the work in its programme of recordings, thus turning the Symphony into a form of cultural propaganda. Given that the recurring theme in much of the British “publicity” was standing up against the evil of Nazism by persuading audiences that Western Civilisation and Christianity were at stake, that this wartime Symphony went to the heart of the matter is key to the entire body of Vaughan Williams' output, it is a work in which the composer's self-declared agnosticism seems to be at its most paradoxical. It is, however, not only central to Vaughan Williams' output. It is at the heart of everything that the British way of life meant to people during the war and symbolised all that “publicists” sought to do. William Hedley writes:

So simple seems the overall message of the Fifth Symphony that to ask questions as to its meanings seems impertinent. Yet we must not forget that this most radiant music appeared at the height of the war.³⁴

Richard Rodda agrees.³⁵ Of the Symphony's *Romanza*, he writes: “Except to note that the dynamic climax of the movement is achieved by a more animated central section, further analysis is almost an intrusion upon music of such spirituality and rich emotion,” the *Romanza* in particular one of the few symphonic movements “which give the listener the sense that time

³³ BBC Vo.16 #11 (2008) CD Notes

³⁴ “Vaughan Williams, the Symphony and the Second World War” in *Journal of the RVW Society*, No.22, October 2001, p.6. This issue of the Journal provides a comprehensive overview of the composer's output during the War.

³⁵ Liner notes to Andre Previn's 1989 Telarc recording of the symphony. Writer Dr. Richard E. Rodda of Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Music has provided program notes for many U.S. orchestras and ensembles, and has written liner notes for Telarc, Angel, Newport Classics, Delos and Dorian Records.

has ceased to exist and which seem to hover in space without any reference to life on earth. Their serenity and profound clarity mark their composers as belonging to the few transcendently great masters of all time.”³⁶ Here, yet again, is the question about timelessness, and it is Bunyan who is at the symphony’s heart:

“More than just thematically related to the operatic version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the fundamental nature of the Fifth Symphony grows from a peaceable vision of the Celestial City... that is the object of the title character, Christian’s, journey.”

Although the composer later deleted them, he inscribed on the original manuscript of the slow movement words from Bunyan: “Upon this place stood a cross, and a little below a sepulchre. Then he said: ‘He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.’” In this music he distilled all that he knew of English modality – formal Elizabethan music as well as folk – into one sublime movement. What is at its heart? In it “the parallel, organum-like, dark chords heard in the lower wind and strings reflect perhaps the sepulchre in the deleted Bunyan superscription.”³⁷ Does it matter that he scratched out the superscription? Wilfrid Mellers has written that the composer no doubt felt that “the music stood on its own and would be unnecessarily circumscribed by a seventeenth-century text.”³⁸ Regarded by Michael Kennedy as “one of the high peaks of English romantic symphonic art,” at the heart of the *Romanza* lies Pilgrim’s “Save me Lord! My burden is greater than I can bear.”³⁹ This, however, was not to be reserved as an exclusively Christian cry for salvation. Vaughan Williams deliberately did not call the Pilgrim “Christian,” the name given to the hero by Bunyan, in the later “Morality.” Rather, as he revealed in a letter, he wanted the opera, which occupied him for much of his life and which contains much thematic material from the Symphony “to be universal and apply to any body [*sic*] who aims at the spiritual life whether he is Xtian, Jew, Buddhist, Shintoist or 5th [*sic*] day Adventist.”⁴⁰

In his commentary on the Symphony, Hubert Foss points out that in the final movement of the Symphony, “Two tunes of equal attraction and of reversed motion are opposed.”⁴¹ These themes, Foss continues, are then developed and we are given a musical “solution” to life’s problems, but which requires an equal offering from our souls:

³⁶ Rodda quotes James Day.

³⁷ “Vaughan Williams, the Symphony and the Second World War” in *Journal of the RVW Society*, No.22, October 2001, p.7.

³⁸ Mellers, 1989: 181

³⁹ Kennedy, 1992: 282

⁴⁰ Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 485. The letter is probably dated 21 May 1951

⁴¹ Foss, 1950: 149

The coincidence (unnoticed by Vaughan Williams until it was gently put to him) that the resultant curve of the falling upper tune is similar in outline to the German 'Easter Hymn' would not be worth a moment's mention, if it were not that in this finale Vaughan Williams attains an universality that overcomes dates and styles, period and fashions.⁴²

Here, then, Vaughan Williams has, unwittingly, achieved something in his great Symphony that shared more than a passing relationship to the continued use of German musical themes. The attainment of the universality of which Foss writes explains official and institutional attitudes to the appropriation of the German greats, Beethoven in particular, no clearer than it could be expressed. The first recording of the Symphony was made "under the auspices of the British Council" by John Barbirolli in February 1944. "It's a celebrated performance, and rightly so," writes Williams Hedley. "The first movement is full of that particular kind of passion Barbirolli so frequently brought to the music he conducted."⁴³

The Defence of "Christian Civilization"

If Vaughan Williams' Fifth stands out as perhaps the most outstanding British symphonic work of the War, it is the deployment of another Fifth, that of Beethoven, that is perhaps the most remarkable. The successful appropriation of the symphony for the express purposes of propaganda can be seen as the major coup in the appropriation of German music by the British for the purposes of claiming the moral high ground. That what Britain was fighting for was the democratic freedom of all the peoples of the world there is no doubt, but the fight was also in the name of what was often referred to as "Christian Civilization." The Christianity referred to, however, does not appear to be the religiosity of J. Arthur Rank in *The Great Mr. Handel* and the *Hallelujah* chorus, but seems to be the spirituality of Bunyan expressed in Vaughan Williams' "transcendent" and "celestial" Fifth Symphony, as well as the universalism of Beethoven. It is not entirely unrelated to Rank's Methodism. The closing "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" of the *Hallelujah Chorus* in *The Great Mr. Handel* is, perhaps, a very British "cadence," an expression of English nationalism through its association with the Crown and the piety of George II, but one without "the harshly dominant notes of propaganda" and rather akin to one of Lord Lloyd's "less insistent and more reasonable cadences." Audiences hated the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Vaughan Williams, the Symphony and the Second World War" in *Journal of the RVW Society*, No.22, October 2001, p.8.

pious tone of Rank's film, however, which flopped at the box office and was rarely seen after its short run in Leicester Square.

As we have seen, official and non-official propaganda alike evoked the spirit of England, without necessarily mentioning it or even deliberately setting out to do so, in the defence of "Christian Civilization." Although this was not the religious kind of spirituality, the kind professed by Rank, it was nevertheless rooted in the Protestant tradition.⁴⁴ It is perhaps, in a more general sense, the evocation of an English Nationalism; not a militaristic one, but a Spirituality of the ancient and mysterious past: the idea of Albion, an England that only really exists in the imagination. By evoking a new spirit of England – the rural idyll and the aspect of timelessness as exemplified in Vaughan Williams' Fifth – and the liberty found in the traditions of the past rather than the militaristic outlook (the contrast set out by Victor Hely-Hutchinson), the British were able to present a symbolism of democratic ideals to counter the corrosive aspects of Nazi ideology. The irony is that by default the British propaganda effort as it related to musical culture was far more effective than anything the Nazis could imagine, particularly towards the end of the War when the German authorities had all but banned anything new, and were left with only the masters of *Mittel-Europa* and the crass compositions of approved official composers. Compared to the new music coming out of England, by 1945 German radio was very limited. Having started out with an ideological policy towards music and the arts, Germany gradually narrowed its scope. In contrast, Britain was forced to react as the need arose and the results were rich. It was adaptability and constant planning that often made the British cultural propaganda effort rather haphazard and both approaches, as we have seen, had their contradictions. This, however, is an aspect of the difference between the totalitarian state and a democratic society.

The government was keen, as the War ended, to continue to promote the values of a democratic society. Thorold Dickinson's first completed post-war feature *Men of Two Worlds* (1946), begun as an original scenario worked out with the novelist Joyce Cary,⁴⁵ has elements of melodrama and features a fine score by Arthur Bliss in a film that sought to promote democratic values and the value of sustaining the idea of Empire. The film opens with one of

⁴⁴ A revealing contrast between the two approaches to Protestant forms of belief and faith is provided by George Eliot in *Middlemarch*. Farebrother's dislike for Bulstrode's "spiritual religion" is summed up in his description of the set to which the latter belongs: "They are a narrow ignorant set, and do more to make their neighbours uncomfortable than to make them better. Their system is a sort of wordly-spiritual cliqueism: they really look on the rest of mankind as a doomed carcase which is to nourish them for heaven." Farebrother, on the other hand, is a different kind of man altogether. Dr. Lydgate prefers his friend's "ingenious and pithy" preaching, like that of the "English Church in its robust age."

⁴⁵ Armes, 1978: 230

the most potent symbols of the war years, a performance – at the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square – of a piano concerto by Kisenga (Robert Adams), an African composer and pianist who has been in Europe for ten years but who is returning to his native Tanganyika. The “Denham” concerto was released as the “concert piece” *Baraza* for piano and orchestra by Decca in 1946 conducted by Muir Mathieson. Dame Myra Hess, however, was not so accommodating. “When Dickinson approached Dame Myra about using the actual setting, she refused; she had permitted no black man to play at any of the concerts, she said, and would not permit one to play for the filming, even if it were for the government.”⁴⁶ The opinions and wishes of Myra Hess carried considerable weight. In the event, a sound stage was used to create three replicas of the galleries of the National Gallery and filming took place in the studio. Though much of the rest of the score has been lost and the film itself is no longer commercially available, Naxos’ recording of what is available reveals a number of important musical elements, particularly the treatment of East African sounds and rhythms in a male chorus which is juxtaposed with the European “discussion in council” in a scene towards the end of the film that depicts an African chief and his tribesmen. In discussing music requirements for the Tanganyika plane journey sequence, Bliss observed that the shot of the snow-capped mountain was “the emotional peg on which the sequence rests:” Kisenga’s plane journey to his home in the north of the country is accompanied by Arthur Bliss’s rich scoring in the strings as Kilimanjaro can be seen from above.

The Experience in Summary

The War offered an incentive to British composers whose music was actively disseminated and widely distributed. Without the War, much fine music would not have been written. Many composers contributed to the War effort directly. Musicians and film-makers too focused on the British message and all saw in music the chance to make a statement. The deliberate use of German music was central to many of these statements and the German greats – Bach, Beethoven and Handel – were specifically tied to English values. Beethoven’s Fifth in particular became an aural icon of the War, its *Wirkungsgeschichte* developing into a rallying cry for an Allied Victory. The LPO’s *Battle for Music* epitomises the cry with the Symphony at its heart. But one must ask whether using Beethoven’s music was a sort of ironic or cynical act on the part of concert organizers, broadcasters, and newsreel and film makers. I think not. All evidence points to the opposite and, once again, it is Vaughan Williams who provides the most succinct explanation. The controversy surrounding the use of German music in broadcasting was for him not a question of “how horrible” Germany had become, but rather a poignant

⁴⁶ Foster, 1968: 374

reminder of “what Germany had lost.” That Beethoven should be “a sentinel against totalitarianism,” and, as Misha Aster has recently noted, “somehow innately attuned to the struggle for freedom, was echoed by figures from Furtwängler to Thomas Mann.”⁴⁷ By claiming Beethoven for all civilized peoples, the British performed a major coup; an ingenious statement that made Beethoven’s music the legitimate claim of the free world. The deployment of Beethoven in films like *Millions Like Us* and *Battle for Music*, its continued use and popularity in the concert hall during the War together with enthusiastic audiences at the National Gallery (who thought nothing of listening to Bach during the Blitz) are a remarkable aspect of musical culture during the period.

The genius of associating Beethoven’s Fifth with Morse “V” and the Victory campaign was so effective that, as we have seen, thirty years later it was still being referred to as the “V Symphony” by Diana Mosley. There was, and still is, a great appetite for story-lines involving codes, including the musical kind. The plot of Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) rests on a tune that must be carried back to the Foreign Office that contains – “in code of course” – the key clause to an agreement between “two European powers” and for which a group of conspirators are prepared to murder Miss Froy (Dame May Whitty). In a more contemporaneous example, central to the plot of *Enigma* (2001), the story of the World War Two code-breakers, is a series of concerts on the lawn of Bletchley Park at which characters Tom Jericho (Dougray Scott) and Claire Romilly (Saffron Burrows) begin their month-long affair. “An evening of Bach by the Bletchley Park Musical Society” is scheduled for a Saturday afternoon in March 1943, with another performance, this time involving the music of Brahms, taking place the following month. The film includes an excerpt from Vaughan Williams’ *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus* and J.S. Bach’s Chorale Prelude No.18, BWV 668, and the Andante from the Brandenburg Concerto No.4, BWV 1049. *Enigma* neatly captures the appetite for serious music that, as we have seen, grew in the war.⁴⁸

An increasing awareness of the place and value of music in England during the War can be attributed to many individuals, among them J.B. Priestley, Myra Hess, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Humphrey Jennings and many other conductors and musicians. The same can also be said of the various institutions – orchestras, the BBC, the British Council, various government

⁴⁷ Aster, 2010: 209

⁴⁸ *The King’s Speech*, winner of the 2011 Oscar for Best Picture, continues the association of Beethoven with Britain’s Second World War experience. The emotional climax of the film, when George VI (Colin Firth) broadcasts to the nation on the outbreak of War, is underscored by the Allegretto from Beethoven’s 7th Symphony and the closing scenes are underscored by the slow movement of the *Emperor* Piano Concerto. (Elsewhere in the film, Brahms’ *Requiem* is featured, Mozart’s overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* is used diegetically and the closing credits begin with an excerpt from his Clarinet Concerto.)

departments – whose legacies reached far beyond the end of the War. Although there were often conflicts and occasionally demarcation disputes, and despite the often haphazard way in which the roles of these institutions were carved out, the various committee members and other functionaries worked towards one aim: to present Britain in the best favourable light. The distinctions made between various kinds of propaganda, together with the different approaches to propaganda in friendly countries and Germany shows that a great deal of thought and effort went into the responses required against what was a much more focused and deliberate effort by the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. The BBC's War and the difficulties it encountered can perhaps be symbolised by the great raid of 15 October 1940 when a 500lb bomb hit Broadcasting House during the 9pm news, exploding in the music library.⁴⁹ The BBC was forced to create a policy – in fact several policies, and often under duress – for music, but when it did it sought to do so with the best artistic intent and always with the democratic principle behind it. The Corporation did not always succeed, but in comparison to Nazi propaganda deputy Hadamovsky's "forces of race and blood", its "creative principle," as penned by Arthur Bliss, was one of ennoblement and respect for humanity.

As we have seen, what was considered *Entartete Musik* had no place in Germany, not least in its film output. Among composers with the required "backward gaze" was Herbert Windt whose musical score for Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* was written in 1934. Brass and horns accompany the words of the film's opening titles; they are expectant, Wagnerian. "In September 1934, twenty years after the outbreak of the World War, sixteen years after Germany's passion, nineteen months after the beginning of the German rebirth, Adolf Hitler again flew to Nuremberg to review the assembly of his faithful followers..." An heroic theme begins in the lower strings, and a bright second theme suggests dawn – an awakening – as Nuremberg appears through the clouds. A third march-like theme is heard as the plane is seen flying over the city, and as it lands, the heroic music is drowned out by the sound of the cries of "Heil!" Another military theme takes up the pace as Hitler's cavalcade rides into Nuremberg; the music building all the time to a fanfare. Incredibly, we are nine minutes into the film, and not a word has been uttered. It is thus far a chiefly visual and musical experience. The style and delivery of this music, I believe, goes a long way in explaining Leni Riefenstahl's divisive film. Meran Barsam provides a useful insight into composer Herbert Windt's reliance on the "audience's familiarity with Wagner," whose musical technique "creates a new heroic score which evokes the Wagnerian world without imitating it."⁵⁰ This is particularly true of the opening scenes which Siegfried Kracauer has compared to Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

⁴⁹ Rankin, 2008: 295

⁵⁰ Meran Barsam, 1975

The content of the opening sequence, said by Kracauer to represent “a reincarnation of All-father Odin [Wotan], whom the ancient Aryans heard raging with his hosts over the virgin forests,” was included for the purpose of reviving an old myth: “To attain their aim, the Nazis endowed their hero, i.e. Nazi Germany, with the traits of the old mythical heroes,” and the romantic, backward-looking nature of Windt’s music supports this idea.⁵¹ The *Ring’s* main character, Wotan, “remains the longest, heaviest and most demanding in the entire operatic repertoire,” writes Brian Magee.⁵² But I believe that it is another Wagnerian character that provides a model for the depiction of Hitler’s arrival in Nuremberg. The opening sequence can also be seen as a retelling of the arrival of Lohengrin, a Knight of the Grail, pulled across a lake by a swan in Act I Scene 3 of Wagner’s opera, “Seht! Seht! Welch’ ein seltsam Wunder!” (Look! Look! What strange marvel is this?). The music is ecstatic: Elsa von Brabant in particular overjoyed at the miracle, but the equivalent spectacle in *Triumph of the Will* is witnessed from Lohengrin’s point of view rather than that of Elsa of Brabant and the assembly. Here, of course, Leni Riefenstahl (intentionally or not) presents Hitler himself in the role of Lohengrin, the mythical figure who appears at Nuremberg in a plane (rather than with the aid of a swan) to rescue Germany (Elsa). This tableau is similar in tone to the Prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin* and seems to be a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a music drama – thus providing the unmistakable connection with Wagner. Musical references in the score, however, are neither to Wagner’s *Ring* cycle nor to *Lohengrin*, but rather to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, naturally, given that opera’s place in the Nazi mythos. As Reimer Volker has written, Windt did not necessarily answer to demands made for a certain kind of music. It did, however, lend itself to “propagandistic purposes,” testifying in his denazification trial that his composition style “was very welcome by the powers that be.”⁵³

Similarly, although a deliberate policy of propaganda for music did not exist in the music scene as a whole in Britain, “serious” music was nevertheless harnessed for the War effort, as it was in Germany. But rather than developing fixed policy, influencers like H.C. Colles as *The Times’* music critic and a member of the British Council’s music committee to 1943, can be said to have shaped opinion through a strict adherence, like the BBC, to artistic excellence and the best principles. It was Colles, after all, who had written that “The business of the concert-room is to bring, and keep, forward the best from wherever it comes, no matter its origin, country or date.” The joy of this knowledge is captured most poignantly in the only officially-sanctioned British propaganda feature-film of the War. That the project involved some of the country’s best actors and its greatest composer – making his film debut – is only part of the appeal of

⁵¹ Kracauer, 1947: 290

⁵² Magee, 2000: 105

⁵³ Stillwell & Powrie (eds.), 2008: 50

49th *Parallel*. That it references the Twentieth Century's greatest German writer in a way that is almost imperceptible is another. Through the tiniest keyhole we are led, if we so wish, into Thomas Mann's most ambitious work – the discussion of the whole subject of music and politics in *Doctor Faustus*. The novel ends with a lament of the state of the author's home country in 1940:

In those days Germany, a hectic flush on its cheeks, was reeling at the heights of its savage triumphs, about to win the world on the strength of the one pact that it intended to keep and had signed with its blood. Today, in the embrace of demons, a hand over one eye, the other staring into the horror, it plummets from despair. When will it reach the bottom of the abyss? When, out this final hopelessness, will a miracle that goes beyond faith bear the light of hope? A lonely man folds his hands and says, "May God have mercy on your poor soul, my friend, my fatherland."⁵⁴

That light of hope, I believe, shines in the music performed in Britain during the Second World War, and in the work of its composers and film-makers. This music historiography began with the statement made by Lord Melbourne in 1834, "God Help the Minister that Meddles with Art," and this was the prevailing attitude adopted by the institutions of public life in Britain for a century. But as Jörn Weingärtner made clear, and whom I quoted at the outset, this was all to change with the outbreak of War. We have seen how cultural institutions and government, as well as individuals such as Myra Hess, Ralph Vaughan Williams, J.B. Priestley and Humphrey Jennings and others in the musical establishment all contributed to the propagation of British values and beliefs. But, surely, the final word must go to the author of a wartime editorial in the *Gramophone* magazine, whose *jeu d'esprit* in a review of the first recording released "under the auspices" of the British Council, neatly captures the unlikely partnership of music and British propaganda during the period:

The God of War brings together some strange bedfellows, but I do not recall any previous instance in the history of our country of respectable official opinion going to bed with the Muses...⁵⁵

Strange bedfellows indeed. But it was through the efforts of the many influencers, officials, musicians, and the redoubtable Pamela Henn-Collins and the other members of the Music

⁵⁴ Mann, 1999 [2]: 534

⁵⁵ *Gramophone* magazine, March 1943

Advisory Committee of the British Council, that the British were able to present, through music, why the battle was worth waging.

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