



SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON MUSIC  
DURING WORLD WAR II  
IN THE UNITED STATES  
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Writing a book about music in the United States during World War II at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin may seem counterintuitive at first glance. After all, my primary and secondary materials were located across the Atlantic, and the book's audience will probably be predominantly American. Yet my year at Wiko proved the essential significance for this project, on the one hand, of the international and interdisciplinary discussions at the Institute, and on the other, of a reflective perspective from the German capital with its intellectual depth. Indeed, these international discourse networks – both formal and informal – reshaped profoundly what was my already unique view of the topic as a German expatriate living and teaching in the US. Instead of my transatlantic (and hence binary) scrutiny of musical life in America, Wiko opened a global, multi-perspectival ap-

proach both through the generosity of its current staff and my Co-Fellows, and through the accumulation of research in its Fellows' library. Moreover, with the Institute's library service making books and articles appear like magic on my shelves, I could pursue at my leisure any intellectual detour and expansion of perspective as my vision of the project started to shift.

I had come to Berlin with a fully prepared outline for the book on my computer, and with boxes and disc drives filled with copied and scanned documents to sustain me away from the riches of the Library of Congress and the American National Archives. This was going to be a monastic year of concentrated writing, carefully planned out according to my sequence of chapters. Yet life at Wiko intervened: seminars, workshops, and concerts started (and still continue) to change my telling of the story of music in the US during the last global war. I soon joined a year-long workshop on "The Fatigue of Avantgarde Movements and the Emergence of New Paradigms in Art and Culture in the 1930s", led by Boris Gasparov and Galin Tihanov. While we focused on the decade leading up to World War II, the workshop proved vital for the book project because of its interdisciplinary and international approach to a global cultural phenomenon. Along similar lines, I organized an international three-day symposium on music during World War II, where brilliant colleagues from home and abroad shared their insights into wartime music within and across different national boundaries. The two workshops opened an international perspective on cultural development in both Axis and Allied nations, tracing similarities, exploring reciprocities, and identifying differences.

In the course of the year, my original outline evolved, and the story I had planned gained complex facets. Instead of the monastic writing discipline I had anticipated, life at Wiko offered the gift of communal learning and exchange. Lunchtime conversation about Subaltern Studies, medical politics in India, Soviet cultural policies during the Stalinist era, and dolphin communication opened new questions and offered different models of thought. Furthermore, giving lectures across academic institutions in Berlin added its own layer of questions: addressing the age-old issues of music and emotion in the context of my inquiry into World War II at the Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung, for example, moved historical inquiry into the realm of individual response to music during crisis. My work is not finished, but it has attained increased depth and breadth in a process wherein I changed my emphasis and shifted my focus to embrace both the local and the global.

What stories, then, will I tell in this book? Just as my text is work in progress, this report will have to remain fragmentary. But so far I have recounted how individual musicians faced the challenges of the war: in the armed forces, as civilian entertainers, as apparent enemy aliens denounced to and persecuted by the FBI, as philanthropists, and as bureaucrats. Celebrating Walter Levin's eighty-fifth birthday at Wiko and encountering his highly individual experience as a musician in exile during the war sharpened my awareness for each individual destiny as resisting the grand, sweeping narrative. Such musicians as Marc Blitzstein, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Yehudi Menuhin, Lily Pons, and Kurt Weill each had their very own experience with the war, whether at home or abroad, whether stationed with the armed forces or working for the United Services Organization. Writing their stories meant straining to hear their individual voices out of the rich counterpoint of wartime narrations and focusing not only on the what but also on the why. Yet their stories unfold in the context of sometimes overpowering institutions within which (or even against which) these musicians worked: the Office of War Information, the State Department, and the armed forces themselves. Revealing the inner working, agendas, and programs of these juggernauts tells a story about a cultural war that was fought as passionately and as committedly on the air waves and in print as the military combat raged on the world's battlefields. Who owned music's past from Bach and Beethoven to Wagner and Brahms, and, even more importantly, who would decide on the future of music, became hotly debated issues across the globe. Just as Goebbels's propaganda machine tried to ridicule American culture, so US agents worked to prove Nazi Germany's cultural bankruptcy. Never before had classical music in particular received such concerted state funding in the US as during the war years – and when American soldiers finally “captured” the German hit song, “Lili Marleen”, it made the national news as a cultural victory.

I am now telling the story of American music itself during the war: of valiant attempts to rewrite its past, of heroic work at racial integration through music in a deeply segregated nation, and of blatant musical chauvinism that put musical Americana in competition with Allied and Axis works alike. I also talk about musicians in exile and their complex musical identities. Whereas Darius Milhaud could celebrate, in 1944, his French identity in the composition of the high-school band piece, *Suite française*, his German colleague, Kurt Weill, emphasized his American credentials by setting Walt Whitman to music. Whether Henry Cowell in his *Philippine Return* (a work based on Southeast Asian folk songs) or Aaron Copland in his overtly American ballet, *Rodeo*, American responses

to the war echo those across the world from Soviet Russia to Imperial Japan. Wiko opened a global perspective for telling in particular a story of musical composition that engages with both the intrinsic and the extrinsic interfaces between American music and the rest of the world. This story is unfolding right now under my fingers, but it has been indelibly altered and enriched by the year in the Grunewald. *Fortsetzung folgt ...*