

The “Art” of War: The Influence of Propaganda Music During World War II

By Karissa L. Andrews

I have an enormous desire to commit artistic terrorism. – Richard Wagner

Music has the power to soothe a distressed child, amplify the emotional nature of genius or madness, or cause a peaceful crowd to erupt into a riot. Because of the power of music, it is often used for the purposes of propaganda.

This thesis will discuss the power of Wagner's music (and other writings) as propaganda and its influence on Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party during its rise to power before the Second World War.

In order for any propaganda to be effective, the attention of the audience must first be won (Marlin 96). In *Mein Kampf* (1924-26) Hitler proclaims, "The art of leadership...consists in consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary and taking care that nothing will split up that attention...The leader of genius must have the ability to make different opponents appear as if they belonged to one category" (All Great Quotes). Propaganda works the same as advertising in that way. In order for propaganda to work, the faction that it is intended for must be completely focused on the given information.

Randal Marlin states in his book, *Propaganda & the Ethics of Persuasion* that there are many techniques involved in the use of propaganda. There are verbal and non verbal forms of propaganda, dividing into the branches portraying "ethos" or emotions, "pathos" or feelings, and "logos" or arguments (95). Propaganda must have a strong emotional appeal. Marlin explains that the emotional element is especially important in wartime propaganda. If the emotional response is powerful enough it does not matter if the information is true or false. It appeals to the emotions blind logic. Appealing directly to the emotions can distract people from critical thinking necessary to make informed judgments. (Marlin 98). Appeals to the emotions need to be fueled and backed by

credible facts, but if facts cannot be obtained then popular symbols, like myths, may be used (Marlin 98). For example, if a candidate is not able to pull ahead in a presidential race, the candidate is photographed with a famous media figure, like a film star. If a figurehead is not available to help fortify the propaganda, then dramatic words and pictures may be used (Marlin 99). Media images of politicians holding babies or shaking hands with war veterans are usually effective propaganda as well.

Morally evaluative language is another useful propaganda tool (Marlin 100). For example, in the caste system in India, the Dalits have been given the name "Untouchables." Untouchables are outcasts. Untouchables, Mics, Spics and Kikes are derogatory names. The proper ethnic/geographic names, like Dalits, Irish, Spanish and Jewish don't sound as offensive as the derogatory ones used to cast negative moral or ethical aspersions for propaganda purposes.

Music has always been a carrier for any ethnic group's mythology (MENC). Stories that are told through music carry on through many generations. "No society yet studied is without music, neither in the tiny, lost tribe of the Philippine Tasaday, nor in the rigorously censored lives of the eight hundred million Chinese during the Cultural Revolution" (Perris 3). Music constantly surrounds us, but most of the time we do not realize that it is actually there. Background music is floating through offices, businesses, and federal and state buildings as we speak. Movie music soundtracks play on the big screen and on the television at home. If one enters a supermarket, movie theatre, dentist office, attends a funeral, or watches television, music is always in the background. Music may seem like it is there just to fill the silence, but every aria, pop song, and film soundtrack is bursting with deliberate, subliminal messages.

Music accompanies almost everything in society. Music is the language of emotions, and all music carries messages (Perris 4). If propaganda is defined as “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause,” (Merriam-Webster) then *The Star-Spangled Banner* is propaganda. Its direct emotional appeal, through both words and music, promotes patriotism and helps convince US citizens that the United States of America is a strong, resilient nation, a force for good in the world and a major threat to those who go against her. Religious propaganda includes the stirring hymn *Onward Christian Soldiers* moving Christians and non-Christians alike to join forces to fight Satanic evil. Media jingles convince individuals to invest in insurance, attend specific colleges, buy cars, eat name-brand groceries, and all use the tools so clearly identified by Marlin (see above).

Richard Crossman notes, “The art of the propagandist is never to be thought a propagandist, but seems to be a bluff, simple, honorable enemy who would never think of descending to the level of propaganda” (Marlin 95). The easiest way to achieve this would be to use a form of propaganda that is covert. Music is, therefore, a perfect form of propaganda. It is continuously surrounding us, influencing our political and cultural life, deeply in the background. Music is a superior form of propaganda.

Rudolf Bauer, a famous German chamber musician (Bauer Quartet) during the period between the World Wars, was fond of saying, “Music expresses most profoundly the soul of our [German] people” (Etlin 52). Hans Fischer’s book *Ways to German Music* states, “Among the entire cultural assets of the German people, German music occupies first place. It is the most German of all arts. As the most beautiful and purest and most direct, the German soul finds its expression there” (Etlin 53).

World War I losses were terribly difficult for Germany. The German working class was especially struggling and turned towards their music for comfort and continuing values (Etlin 44). Many concert halls stayed open during the fighting war to strengthen morale. Citizens were comforted by daily performances of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Schumann.

Music was the cultural strength behind the citizens of Germany especially during the period between the two World Wars. Hans Joachim Moser, a German musicologist said, “The dazzling history of our music calls out to us ‘Quand meme-and even so!’ which must again and again be hammered with unconquerable patience into our young people, so as to lift Germany out of the fleeting darkness of shame to new levels of opportunity” (Etlin 44).

Music was looked upon by the German people as the “glue” that held Germany together in the midst of an economic catastrophe. Composers such as Hans Pfitzner, Richard Strauss, Max von Schillings, and Paul Graener were very popular. Their music expressed German nationalism and fundamental values of the people. These composers and many others were known as conservatives. Conservatives firmly believed that music was interwoven into politics and could not be separated. Hans Pfitzner expressed, “It is not, I believe, possible to consider the essence of an art without also considering the issue of nationality” (Etlin 45).

Music was an important element of national identity during the First World War and also after the war was over, throughout the reconstruction period of Germany’s economy. The working class inspired young composers to write new music. This music was anti-nationalistic and anti-romantic and it inspired a massive conflict. “Serious”

music was taken apart and pieced together to become a new kind of “everyday music” (Etlin 44). This music could be listened to at dances, on the radio, in films, and sung by choirs. Music was not only for the elite or those that could afford to attend concerts. It should be easily accessible for all.

Germany was not the only country with this musical epiphany. This musical revolution was happening internationally. Music began to connect countries together. It became an exciting form of communication between cities, countries, and continents. This did not impress the politically conservative. They firmly believed music should be nationalistic and should be used only to express the values within a certain country. If this new music continued to exist, Germany’s values and ideals would be threatened. The conservatives knew that music “played an important part in education and, indeed, in national politics, [so] the discussion about music immediately took on a political dimension” (Etlin 45).

As the new generation of music in Germany became more popular, especially atonality and jazz, the conservatives became more threatened. Music was being consolidated with non-German, or foreign influences, and this infection needed to be stopped before it poisoned German nationalism.

In 1924-26, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). This book discusses how people of Germanic heritage should naturally take great joy in the struggle to keep their nationality pure. This purity included race, politics, food and the arts.

Influenced by *Mein Kampf*, Alfred Rosenberg in 1928 formed a Combat league for German Culture, which became closely associated with the Nazi Party (Etlin 49). This group’s mission was to make the German culture, including music and the arts, pure

once more. From this organization “race researchers” emerged. The German art that emerged from the Combat League had “racially determined characteristics” (Etlin 49). The researchers determined that the “perfect triad” and some well-known religious melodies were the “purest expression of the Germanic essence” (Etlin 50). Extreme chromaticism and atonality were not, in their view, a part of German tradition and were forbidden.

An influential man in the Combat League for German Culture was Hans Severus Ziegler. He was the deputy head of the Nazi Party and was in charge of making cultural policies. He stated in *Against Negro Culture for German Heritage*,

For years now, in nearly all areas of culture, the influence of alien races has been prevailing and threatening to undermine the moral strength of the German people. Prominent among these have been things like music for jazz bands and percussion, Negro dances, Negro songs, and Negro play, which glorify Negro doings and are a slap in the face of German cultural sensibilities. To do all that is possible to forestall these signs of decay lies in the interest of preserving and strengthening the German nation (Etlin 52).

This was one of the Nazi’s first attempts at musical genocide. As a result of this kind of thinking, violence erupted and the Combat League took a leadership role in the spectacle. Foreign musicians, as well as Jewish artists lost their jobs. This was just the beginning.

This relationship between German politics and music was extremely important. Music was a fundamental component, not only of German politics, but also of German culture and society. Hitler understood how imperative it was to use music as a propaganda technique in order to purify the nation. Hitler believed art to be “heavenly revelation” (Etlin 54). He frequently attended concerts and operas publicly. Whatever

impressed Hitler, he thought, should impress the masses and respectively, whatever Hitler disliked should be eradicated from public access. One of Hitler's coworkers described Hitler's musicality,

Before coming to power, facing the most difficult political negotiations or most exhausting tactical battles, [Hitler] would sit alone or with a couple of companions in the evening, somewhere unnoticed in the loge of a theater, and out of the intensely heroic measures of a Wagner music dramas, find harmony with his political being (Etlin 52).

Hitler encouraged musicians to focus on the power of art. He advised artists to distance themselves from intellectual affairs. Hitler said, "It is not the intellectual understanding that should be godfather to our musicians, but rather an overflowing musical temperament. If anywhere, the basic rule must also apply here, that the heart should be so full that it flows out of the mouth" (Etlin 54).

Hitler immediately showed favor to certain composers and demonstrated harsh disapproval of others. German art, at that time, was seen as the pure "racial soul" (Etlin 62). This is why foreigners, Jewish artists, and people of color were excluded from the process of creating and performing music. Hitler stated, "Like every other art music also arises from mysterious and profound powers, which are rooted in the National character. It can therefore only be produced and managed by the 'children of the national character' according to the needs and the intractable musical urge of the nation" (Etlin 62)

The Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, followed Hitler's lead. He voiced his opinion about the Reich and music during the first *Reichsmusiktag*, or Reich's Music-Days, in Düsseldorf. He named music as the "most sensual of all the arts...For this reason music affects the heart and emotions more than that of intellect. Where then could the heart of a nation beat stronger than in the huge masses, in which the heart of the

nations has found its true home?" (Etlin 54). Goebbels believed that music was like a strong drug. Its effect is strong and needs to be controlled. Goebbels insisted on state control of art to prevent the disintegration of National character.

From 1933 until 1938 Goebbels saw one of his priority tasks as promoting the return of "proper art" to the people of Germany (Herzstein 128). German music, he said, must rid itself of the diseases that are outside influences and return to the pure ways of the nation. He planned to control Aryan cultural institutions and use their products to fuel the Germans with the correct nationalistic thoughts. He stated, "The purpose of both art and propaganda is to bring about a spiritual mobilization of the German people" (All Great Quotes). Goebbels worked hard to promote pure and acceptable art to the German people. Goebbels provided the working class with free concerts and cheap radios thus encouraging its support of the Nazi regime. He also created the Reich Culture Chamber in 1933. There were seven chambers within this organization, including: music, fine arts, theater, literature, press, radio, and film (Herzstein 133). Every aspect of German culture was dissected and only those that were of appropriate nationalistic intent were allowed to flourish.

There were specific rules for music. Major keys and brisk tempos not exceeding the allegro marking were encouraged, and specific instrumentation was prohibited including "instruments alien to the German spirit." Cowbells, brushes, plucking of the stringed instruments, and mutes for brass were outlawed since these would corrupt the "noble sound" into a Jewish "yowl" (Perris 56). Through threats of death or the concentration camp, the Reich Culture Chamber foreign and minority artists were black-

listed, operas were edited and only acceptable music in the eyes of Goebbels was performed.

Goebbels did not choose which specific musical pieces were considered acceptable; this was Hitler's job. Though there were many composers that Hitler found acceptable, including Anton Bruckner and Ludwig van Beethoven, there was one composer in particular whose works guided Hitler politically during World War II. This composer was Richard Wagner.

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Germany in 1813. He was not a musical prodigy like Mozart, but he participated in lessons and progressed like an average student. He was so average at music, in fact, that his music tutor said that "he would musically amount to nothing" (Music with Ease). Due to his lack of inspiration and focus in the field of music Richard Wagner became increasingly interested in literature and later on in his life wrote many essays on a variety of issues including politics, race and anti-Semitism.

It was not until he attended a concert of Beethoven's Symphony that he realized he was destined to be a musician. Wagner was quoted as saying, "I fell ill of a fever and when I recovered I was a musician" (Music with Ease). Wagner enrolled at Nicolaischule in Leipzig in 1828, and began to receive refined musical training and immediately became increasingly focused on music. He began taking lessons in music theory and composition and emerged as a young composer. He started to attend operas by Beethoven and Carl Maria von Weber, among others. At the age of seventeen he began to write music and was encouraged by his mother to attend Leipzig University as a composition student.

He studied with Christian Theodore Weinlig, who was a famed theorist at the time, and began composing very seriously. In 1832, Wagner began conducting his works in public. Between 1832 and 1836 he wrote his first two operas, *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*. Around this time he began his career as a writer of prose. He joined a society called the “Young Germans” and wrote essays that were occasionally political and controversial.

In 1834, he accepted a post as the music director for Heinrich Bethmann’s Magdeburg theatrical company. His opera *Das Liebesverbot* was first produced and performed in Magdeburg. It was so unsuccessful that it caused the theatre company to go bankrupt (Vargas). In 1834, he married the actress Minna Planer. They had a troublesome marriage right from the start, but managed to remain married for twenty years.

In 1836, Wagner moved away from Magdeburg and became the music director in Riga. He conducted operas of other composers and continued to compose. Wagner and his wife lived life very lavishly and Riga did not renew his contract so Minna and Wagner escaped to Paris and avoided the German debt collectors.

Wagner lived in Paris three years, from 1839 to 1842. He was terribly in debt and was discouraged by the fact that his musical ambitions were thwarted in Paris. Minna became the breadwinner in the family by acting in local theatres. Wagner translated many of his operas to French and he wrote a new opera, *Rienzi* in 1840 in hopes he would be successful, but still the French were not interested. He had to take on many odd jobs to stay afloat, but he never stopped writing. Luckily, for Minna and himself *Rienzi* was accepted at Dresden and the couple packed up and left Paris.

Rienzi was a huge success in Dresden despite its length. The opera lasted over five hours (Vargas). Long length became one of Wagner's operatic trademarks. In Dresden, Wagner got the opportunity to perform many of his operas and was encouraged to compose more opera. His ideas for his works and music in general began to change as he gained more experience with opera. His work became more complex, personal and controversial. During this time of personal and musical change, Wagner's political views became more radical. He began to incorporate these views in his operas.

During the years of 1845 to 1848, Wagner began to focus on his heritage and German roots. He researched German epics and wrote many pieces that would change how he was viewed in the future. He composed *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg*, *Parsifal*, and *Lohengrin*. These pieces are some of Wagner's best. In 1848 there was a revolution in Germany and Austria and Wagner was forced to leave Dresden because an essay he wrote supported the uprising.

It was at this time, while living in Switzerland, Wagner expanded his writing career. He wrote: *Art and Revolution*, *The Artwork of the Future*, and *Opera and Drama*. He grew musically as well. He became more innovative and was eager to show his new musical creations. In 1850, *Lohengrin* was premiered at the Weimar Court Theater. It was a huge success and he won the affections of "Mad Ludwig," Crown Prince of Bavaria. The Prince commissioned Wagner to write *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865 and helped Wagner build the opera house at Bayreuth.

In 1862, Wagner had parted ways with Minna and had become involved with Cosima Lizst, the daughter of Franz Lizst. Cosima was married to Hans Von Beuhlow, a close friend and professional colleague of Wagner. Much to the King's dismay, Wagner

was soon forced again to leave Munich, because of debt and politics. Cosima and Wagner married and eventually had three children.

After moving to Switzerland in 1862, Wagner focused on finishing his four opera "Ring" cycle. Wagner wanted the complete cycle to be performed in a specially-designed opera house and he decided that Bayreuth would be the perfect spot. The Wagner family moved there in 1871 and location work soon began. Wagner traveled and conducted to raise money to build the opera house, but most of the funding came from the King of Bavaria. In August 1876, the Ring cycle was premiered in the newly built opera house.

In 1877, Wagner set to work on *Parsifal*, the last opera he would write. In addition to this work, he was writing more radical political and cultural essays, focusing on religion and art (8 Notes). *Parsifal* was completed in four years, during which time Wagner was extremely ill. It was premiered at the second Bayreuth festival in 1883. After the festival Wagner and his family went to Venice and there he died of a heart attack. He was buried in Bayreuth.

Richard Wagner was a bold man who was never afraid to express his views through literature and art. He believed that he was creating the art of the future. He saw his "universal artwork" as superior to anything ever created, and he wanted every German and non-German alike, to know this. His long, dramatic operas, strong German emotions and ideals demonstrated his skill.

Music is powerful. Music is a language. It bridges the gap between nations, people, and generations. It carries our ideals and traditions through time. It entertains, educates, and expresses all at once. Music is emotionally deeper than language. It reaches into the soul and pulls at the emotions. Wagner wanted to educate his audience

and show them that music was capable of all these things. Hitler realized this. He allowed himself to become part of the music. Hitler internalized and then analyzed Wagner's music. Hitler heard what Wagner was saying, filtered through his own political ambition. Wagner and Hitler are forever united through music, and this connection has important historical consequences. His operas are a mirror image of his ideas, emotions, and his philosophy at the time he wrote them.

One of the characteristics that Richard Wagner is known very well for is nationalism. Nationalism can help to define a nation in "ethnic" terms (Halsall). Wagner promoted the idea that German music best represents German language and culture, and it is superior. He said, "To be German means to do something for its own sake" (Applegate/Potter 41). True German art, in Wagner's opinion, should be free and untamed. German art, especially the music of Wagner, was therefore superior to all others. For Germans, Wagner in particular, art was not only a means of expression, but also a medium used to communicate the national pride and superior ideas of Germany. It is said in *Music and German National Identity* by Applegate and Potter, "Few nations have articulated their self-understanding through music as much as the Germans" (42).

The nationalism in Wagner's works appears in a variety of forms. Wagner's storylines were based on folktales and myths. These tales were known to all Germans and the surrounding nations and formed a kind of infrastructure, the core of German culture, just as the tall tales of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue ox would help establish "being Minnesotan" in Minnesota. These stories helped bind together German philosophies, traditions, myths, and ways of life. They were a perfect backdrop for Wagner's music dramas. Wagner expected his audience to be educated in these tall tales

that were the root of Germany's nationalism. Perris states that "myths and legends characteristically espouse cultural mores: It is their purpose as the heritage of a people" (51). These myths last throughout the generations, not only because the cultural mores are intertwined within the myth, but when present day authors "recast" these older stories in modern settings they continue to "restate the eternal morality of the mythical ancestors" (Perris 51). Richard Wagner wanted his audience to understand these features and respond with positive thoughts. If the audience did not grasp these concepts, Wagner's work might have been foreign to them.

In Wagner's operas, loud, large orchestras accompanied the singers. The works were dramatic and full of pure, major keys to describe German ideals in positive terms. The major key was used to express joy in life rather than the minor key often used in Jewish music (Perris 55). Wagner also took the time to write all of his own librettos, which he worded specifically to spark the nationalistic spirit. When one went to a Wagner opera for the first time a new meaning of music, music of the "future" engulfed the listener. This grand, monstrous production of an opera soon became the apple of Germany's eye and it bred feelings of nationalism and superiority, just as Wagner had hoped.

Wagner's political ideas, specifically his controversial anti-Semitism, are seen most overtly in his literary works. Wagner's radical political ideas were not evident in print until the 1850's. When Wagner was living in Paris and was financially in ruin and homesick, he longed to be part of a "greater unity that is trusted and beloved" (Viereck 97). Wagner felt very strongly about two things politically. First, he had a reverent love for Germany and all that enhanced a strong national identity. In 1848 to 1849 Wagner

made demands to the German National Assembly in order to make a more “unified” Germany.

He demanded a German unity based on equal-sized states. Big states like Prussia must be split up to prevent Prussian dominance over his native Saxony....Arguing that children born in the free Germany will be ‘like unto gods,’ Wagner proclaimed their mission to ‘civilize’ the rest of the world by settling ‘little Germanys’ all over the globe...’The Volk is but one, and there should be but one sole house of the people’s deputies’ (Viereck 103).

He also had an emotionally fuelled dislike for all Jews (Viereck 99), made obvious in the many essays that were published by Wagner, especially *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (Judaism in Music, 1850). When Wagner first wrote this essay he published it under the pen name *K. Freigedank*, which literally translates as “Mr. Free-thought” (Evlon). In this article, first published in an issue of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Wagner expresses his harsh feelings and opinions toward Jewish people and their influence on art. He describes how unfit they are to create art works, based on their physical appearance, sound of voice, crude language, and lack of emotions. Wagner states, “The first thing that strikes our ear as quite outlandish and unpleasant, in the Jew’s production of the voice-sounds, is a creaking, squeaking, buzzing snuffle; add thereto an employment of works in a sense quite foreign to our nation’s tongue, and an arbitrary twisting of the structure of our phrases”(Wagner 7).

He goes on to describe how song and music are corrupted by the Jewish culture. “Just as words and constructions are hurled together in this jargon with wondrous inexpressiveness, so does the Jew musician hurl together the diverse forms and styles of every age and every master. Packed side by side, we find the formal idiosyncrasies of all the schools in motleyest chaos” (Wagner 13). *Judaism in Music* was written around the

same time that Wagner was working on *The Ring of the Nibelung*. He also had the essay republished in 1869, naming himself as the author, when *Die Meistersinger of Nurnberg*, was first performed in 1868.

When one considers the power of Wagner's music and his political views, it is evident why Hitler was attracted to Wagner. Was there a defining moment when the Wagner-Hitler connection was made? One might conclude that the writings of the late Richard Wagner were what inspired Hitler to proceed as he did politically, but that is not entirely true. It was more likely a combination of essays and music that inspired the young Hitler.

Sometime during 1904, a young Czech musician, August Kubizek, befriended Hitler and attended several Wagner operas with him. Hitler became obsessed with Wagner and boasted that he had read and listened to everything Wagner had created. He planned to attend all the Wagner productions no matter the cost or inconvenience (Solomon). In the following passage, Kubizek describes Hitler and himself going to see *Rienzi*.

I cannot repeat every word that my friend [Hitler] uttered. I was struck by something strange, which I had never noticed before, even when he had talked to me in moments of the greatest excitement. It was as if another being spoke out of this body, and moved him as much as it did me. It wasn't at all a case of a speaker being carried away by his own words. On the contrary; I rather felt as though he himself listened with astonishment and emotion to what burst forth from him with elementary force. I will not attempt to interpret this phenomenon, but it was a state of complete ecstasy and rapture, in which he transferred the character of *Rienzi*, without even mentioning him as a model or example, with visionary power to plane of his own ambitions. But it was more than a cheap adaptation. Indeed, the impact of the opera was rather a sheer external impulse which compelled him to speak. Like flood waters breaking their dykes, his words burst forth from him. He conjured up in grandiose, inspiring pictures his own future and that of his people....But now he was talking of a mandate which, one day, he would receive from the people, to

lead them out of servitude to the heights of freedom. It was an unknown youth who spoke to me in that strange hour. He spoke of a special mission which one day would be entrusted to him, and I, his only listener, could hardly understand what he meant. Many years had to pass before I realized the significance of this enraptured hour for my friend (Solomon).

When Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany in 1933, he recalled this moment: "It was in that hour that it all began" (Solomon). The statement of Hitler that "With the exception of Richard Wagner, I have no forerunner," shows how important Wagner was to Hitler and how Wagner's ideals seemed to speak directly to him (Solomon).

Hitler learned as much as he could from Wagner, whom he called his "master." He visited Wagner's family several times during his reign as German Chancellor and became a close family friend. He read all of Wagner's writings, including his diaries and letters, and he always tried to attend every performance of a Wagner opera. As a result, Hitler absorbed Wagner's anti-Semitic beliefs and expanded upon them. According to Larry Solomon in his essay titled *Wagner's Racist Operas, the Blinding Truth*, some, but not all of those beliefs include:

1. Race is based on appearance, language, nationality, and blood.
2. An Aryan white race is the foundation of racial purity, beauty, and goodness.
3. Germans (the Volk) are destined by an urgent need (Noth) to rule the world.
4. All other races are inferior.
5. A struggle for racial survival is inevitable.
6. Conscience is an evil Jewish invention that must be purged.
7. Jews and other foreigners were contaminating German blood.
8. Jews are physically unattractive.
9. Wagnerian Art would save the world.
10. Condemnation of Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn and non-German art in general.
11. Jews believed they were infallible.
12. Jews were extremely ethno and egocentric.

In Hitler's mind, if Wagner's music could influence him in such a powerful way, then he assumed that all Germans would feel the same way. To Hitler, Wagner's music was the highest artistic symbol of German nationalism. It illustrated the superiority of the German race.

When the Nazi party took control of Germany in January of 1933, the State Opera was ordered to give a performance of *Die Meistersinger*. When Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, saw the production he wrote in his diary, "As the great 'Awake' chorus begins, you feel the stimulation in your blood. Germany too will soon feel the same and be called to an awakening. We must attain to power" (Perris 55). Hitler became the dictator under the slogan *Deutschland erwach!* (Germany awake!).

Wagner was now the musical mascot of the Nazi regime. Hitler stated, "Whoever wants to understand National Socialistic Germany must know Wagner" (The IB Holocaust Project). Hitler and Goebbels, among other Nazi officials realized that there were different strategies they could use to win this "revolution." Goebbels stated,

You can go on shooting up the opposition with machine-guns until they acknowledge the superiority of the gunners. That is the simpler way. But you can also transform the nation by a mental revolution and thus win over the opposition instead of annihilating them. We national Socialists have adopted the second way and intend to pursue it" (Balfour 48).

Wagner's music was played during book-burning ceremonies and later, when concentration camp victims were being put to death. In 1933, Hitler ordered that every Nuremberg Rally must begin with a performance of the Overture to the *Meistersinger of Nuremberg*, and he ordered all officers to attend, later opening these rallies to the public so they could also hear Wagner's stirring overture. Wagner's music was used so often at Nazi events that it became known as "Hitler's Music."

There are at least three reasons why Wagner's music was preferred by Hitler. Hitler was first attracted to this music because of its undeniable drama. Wagner refused to call his works "opera." Instead he referred to them, collectively as "music dramas," and specifically as *Gesamptkuntsverke*, or "universal art works." He disdained opera of his time as nothing more than a "display of voice, and pretty costumes, and graceful action in love-duets" (Music with Ease). Before Wagner, opera existed to show off beautiful voices to entertain audiences. Wagner wanted his creations to do more. The text, voices, music and scenery of a music drama must come together for a "common purpose, each indissoluble from the other" (Music with Ease). He wanted the music drama to be woven together, indestructible. One tool he used to obtain this integrity was the "leitmotif." A leitmotif, or signature melody, is a short melody that represents a character, feeling or plot element. It is easily recognized and is used whenever its element is on stage.

Another characteristic of Wagner's music is that he liked to exhaust the possibilities of a key or tonality through the use of chromaticism (Rooman). His works were all about constant musical shifting of mood, similar to James Joyce's "stream of consciousness," except using thematic transformation and shifting of key to achieve the same effect.

Wagner's "universal art work" combined all of the arts, including visual (sets and costumes), aural (poetry and music), and acting and dancing. This called for massive amounts of study and expense. Productions were long in preparation and long in length, full of exceptional singing, dancing, acting and virtuoso playing in the huge orchestra that accompanied it all.

Although many poets sent Wagner stories for operas, Wagner wrote his own libretti, rejecting all but his own work by saying, “they might just as well send me a girl to fall in love with,” (Music with Ease). It is original libretti, dramatic and long performances, and complex harmony that gives Wagner his trademark styles. His orchestrations and characters were, like mythological elements, larger than life.

The final thing that makes Wagner’s music good for the purposes of propaganda is his unfailing ability to find the nationalist flow in his characters and music. Thomas Mann said of Wagner, “It is the Volk-soul that speaks through Wagner; he is only its mouthpiece” (Viereck). Wagner believed his operatic works could unite Germany and free it to become a great and powerful nation.

Using German myths guaranteed interest and encouraged nationalism. Because Wagner's operatic characters are mythological they seem magical (many have superhuman strength, can fly, cast spells, speak to and understand animals, etc). In *A Communication to my Friends*, Wagner said, "All of our wishes and burning instincts carry us forward into the future, and to these we seek to give recognizable form by means of images from the past [myths] and thus to invest them with a form that the modern present cannot provide" (Borchmeyer, 180).

To understand more specifically how Wagner's political ideas were translated into music and how Hitler used these ideas for propaganda, it is fascinating to make these correlations in Wagner's great "Ring Cycle" and Germany’s National opera *Die Meistersinger von Nurnburg*.

Die Meistersingers is a three-act opera and is one of the most frequently performed of all Wagner operas. It was first performed in June of 1868. This is the only

comic opera of Wagner's that was performed. Its story was based on the ancient guild of the *Meistersingers*, a group of amateur musicians and poets. One of the main characters, Hans Sachs, is based on a historical figure.

The opera begins with a young girl, Eva, a daughter of a goldsmith, who has caught the eye of a knight, Walther von Stolzing. He begins to talk to her and realizes that tomorrow she is to be betrothed to a winner of a Meistersinger contest. Hans Sachs thinks that Eva should have some say in the matter so they decide that he can reject the winner as her husband, but she must marry a Meistersinger or no one at all. Walther decides to attempt to become a Meistersinger to win Eva's hand. He tells this to the Masters, and Beckmesser overhears. Beckmesser is the town clerk and seen as a greedy, jealous and evil man. He also wants to win Eva and immediately dislikes Walther.

There were strict rules about how to compose a song. At the preliminary before the contest, Walther sings a tune that is free in sound, but breaks most of the rules. He is rejected by the board of Masters and leaves in a fury. Sachs, however, seems to like this song of Walther's and it lingers in his mind.

Meanwhile, Eva hears the sad news on how Walther fared and is distraught. She visits Sachs and discusses it with him. To be kind, she says that if Sachs were to win the contest, she would be perfectly content, but it is obvious to Sachs that her true feelings are for Walther. Later in the evening she and Walther decide to elope. They are caught by Sachs and he urges them to not to do anything rash. Beckmesser decides at this moment to serenade Eva in her garden, but he winds up singing his ugly song to her nanny Magdalene. Just as Beckmesser begins his serenade, Sachs breaks in with his song. They agree that they can both sing their songs to "Eva" and Beckmesser sings first.

Sachs will mark any broken rules of style with a cobbler's hammer. This constant racket of the hammer wakens David (Magdalene's lover) who becomes jealous when he hears two men singing love songs to Magdalene. A fight between David and Beckmesser ensues and Sachs takes this chance to remove Eva and Walter to a safe place.

In the last act, Sachs will forgive David only if he recites the verses for St. John's Day. While this is happening, Walther tells Sachs that he has dreamed of the perfect prize song. Sachs helps Walther write it down. During a moment of confusion Beckmesser appears and steals the song.

Eva comes later that day to get her shoes repaired and Walther steps into the shop to sing the complete prize song. Eva is momentarily torn between her love for Sachs and her love for Walther, but Sachs sadly turns her towards Walther and they leave together for the song competition.

At the contest, Beckmesser tries to perform the stolen song but he forgets the words and ruins the tune. Everyone laughs at him. Beckmesser stumbles off and misses hearing Walther's rendition of this song. The crowd loves it and Walther wins Eva's hand. Sachs presents Walther with the medallion and Eva gives the victor's wreath to Hans Sachs.

Although many parts of *Die Meistersingers von Nurnberg* are historically accurate, both Wagner and Hitler believed it was more relevant to the future of the German people than their past. Modern-day Meistersingers existed in Germany. They were composers, poets and artists of the German "race." Wagner thought of himself as Germany's Hans Sachs. He "associated himself with the tradition of the German masters" (Salmi 134). In his personal correspondence, Wagner would often sign "Sachs."

When the score of the opera was completed he wrote to a friend: "This evening at 8 o'clock precisely the final C will be written down. Please celebrate with us in silence. Sachs" (Salmi 138). It is probably also true that he thought of the German nation as Walther and the Jewish culture as Beckmesser. Salmi explains in *Imagined Germany: Richard Wagner's National Utopia*, that the Meistersingers had to protect themselves against "cultural influences." Wagner and Hitler believed Germany needed to protect itself from the dangerous influences of foreign cultures. In their shared view, the future of the country depended on it.

The beating of Beckmesser and his embarrassing attempt to perform Walther's song is a thinly veiled representation of Wagner's attitudes about the Jews, and this attitude is consistent, as mentioned above, with his essays about race and religion. Hitler read these essays over and over and was able to quote from them. Barry Millington writes about Wagner and *Die Meistersinger*, "I have never claimed the Beckmesser is Jewish or that the character was intended to be understood as a caricature of a Jew. What I have argued...is that anti-Semitism is woven into the ideological fabric of *Die Meistersinger* and that the representation of Beckmesser incorporates unmistakable anti-Semitic characteristics." Wagner tries to make imagining Beckmesser and Eva together comparable to imagining Germany as a degenerate nation because of Jewish influence. Hitler obviously agreed. Beckmesser has to be stopped. Sachs understood that Eva (the mother of pure Germans) belonged with Walther (the pure German man). Wagner's Beckmessers and Hitler's Jews were corrupting Germany.

At the end of the opera, Sachs sings a grand aria to the honor and glory of Germany's past. Sachs (Wagner, the composer of both words and music) warns that if Germany is to rise again, the nation must rid itself of all impure and foreign influences:

Beware! Bad times are at hand
 For when bow German folk and land
 To spurious foreign pomp, ere long
 No prince will know his people's tongue
 And foreign thoughts and foreign was
 Upon our German soil they'll raise.
 Our native Art will fade from here
 If none no longer hold it dear.
 So heed my words:
 Honors your German Masters
 If you would stay disasters!
 For while they live in every heart,
 Though should depart
 The pride of holy Rome,
 Still thrives at home
 Our sacred German Art!
 Hans Sachs, Act Three, Scene Five (Perris 49)

This song clearly articulates “the threat of foreign influence, the sanctifying power of German heritage and the fixation of the Holy Roman Empire” (Analog Arts Ensemble).

Richard Wagner realized that national and emotional messages in his music could be a great source of persuasion. He understood that his great pride in his “artistic achievement” could be used to strengthen political ideology and military strength (Perris 52).

Another opera in which a strong correlation between Wagner and Hitler can be made is *The Ring of the Nibelung*, a four-part opera, 16 hour cycle, loosely based on German and Norse mythology. In the first opera of the Ring, *The Rhinegold*, a dwarf named Alberecht of the race of Nibelung, steals a lump of gold being guarded and protected by the Rhinemaidens and hammers it into a magic ring. To safeguard his

ownership of the ring, Alberect puts a curse on it: Anyone who wears the ring can rule the world but must renounce love into the bargain. Woton steals the ring and promises to give it to the giant Fafner in payment for building Valhalla. Fasholt, Fafner's brother, tries to take the ring from him and Fafner kills him. The curse is working. Hitler's interpretation: The gold represents the pure German soul. Albrecht and later his son Meme represent the Jews, whose greed (lust for gold) corrupts the world and causes untold suffering and death (Perris 51). Wagner wrote the voice parts for Alberecht and Meme in a high, unnatural register, reflecting his opinion of the Jewish voice (previously noted, see page 15). The "jumbled blather of the chorus accompanying the Nebulung's arias were meant to imitate Yiddish, described by Wagner as "a wholly foreign and arbitrary distortion of our national idiom" (Perris 51).

In the second opera of the Ring cycle, *The Valkyre*, Wotan tries to steal the ring and all of the rest of the treasures of the Nibulung, now being guarded by a fierce dragon. Wotan's daughter Brunhilde finds a hero, Siegmunde, to kill the dragon but she foolishly allows him to die in the attempt, leaving her alone and pregnant. Corrupted by contact with the ring, he renounces everything he loves and betrays whoever trusts him. Hitler's interpretation: The Jewish curse of corruption and greed is the cause of Germany problems. Wotan is furious at his "ungrateful" daughter and surrounds her with a ring of impenetrable fire after putting her into a deep sleep.

In the third opera, *Siegfried*, Brunhilde's niece Sieglinde gives birth to a child who will, according to prophesy, grow up to be a great hero. He is named Siegfried. He will rescue the ring, subdue the dwarves and take the Nibulung's treasure horde, putting the "ecology" of Valhalla back into balance. Hitler's interpretation: Siegfried was Hitler, the

Furher, a superman and hero-savior. *Mein Kampf*, referred to earlier, concludes with Hitler's summary of the first Nazi party meeting; "A fire was kindled from whose flame one day the sword must come which would regain freedom for the Germanic Siegfried and life for the German people." (Perris 53). Alberecht's son Meme helps Siegfried make a magic sword. He kills the dragon and takes the treasure, including the ring. Hitler's interpretation: Siegfried represents German culture. Alberecht and Meme represent Jewish culture. Meme is referred to by Siegfried as "shuffling and slinking, eyelids blinking." He asks, "How long must I endure this sight? When shall I be rid of this fool? I'd like to catch you and end your shrinking and stop your blinking! (Siegfried, Act I). In *Know Thyself*, Wagner wrote about his anti-Semitic intent in *Siegfried*:

If gold here figures as the demon strangling manhood's innocence, our greatest poet [Wagner] shows at last the goblin's game of paper money. The Neibelung's fateful ring becomes a pocket-book, and might well complete the eerie picture of the spectral world-controller. What comes to pass beneath the benediction of this? Credit we now are witnessing, and seem inclined to lay all blame upon the Jews. They certainly are virtuosi in an art which we but bungle" (Solomon).

Siegfried wanders lost in the forest until a bird leads him to Brunhilde, sound asleep on a rock. Using his magic sword he easily penetrates the ring of fire, awakens Brunhilde with a kiss. The couple fall madly in love and run away together.

In the last opera, *Twilight of the Gods*, Wotan plots to kill Siegfried and take the ring. A magic spell is cast on Brunhilde so that she falls in love with Gunter whose friend Hagen (brother of Meme and son of Alberecht) kills Siegfried in a hunting "accident." Eventually coming to her senses, Brunhilde mourns the loss of her lover and decides that the only remedy for her father's treachery is to throw the ring back into the Rhine, lifting Alberecht's curse. Brunhilde, carrying the ring, rides her horse onto Siegfried's funeral pyre, lights it with a torch, the Rhine overflows its banks and Valhalla

and everyone in it is destroyed. Hagen, greedy to the end, plunges into the river to get the ring back, but he is pulled under and drowned by the Rhinemaidens. Thomas Mann, in a letter written in 1949, observes that "There is in Wagner's bragging, his eternal ranting, his "solo conversations," his desire to enter every discussion about everything, a nameless insolence which foreshadows Hitler; clearly there is much Hitler in Wagner." (Henze 67).

In *Wagner Pro and Contra*, Mann provides a fitting conclusion to this Honors thesis: "I find . . . Nazism, not only in Wagner's questionable literature; I find it also in his music. The Ring emerges from the bourgeois humanist epoch in the same manner as Hitlerism. With its mixture of root in the soil and eyes toward the future, its appeal for a classless society, its mythical revolutionism, it is the exact spiritual forerunner of the 'metapolitical' [Nazi] movement today terrorizing the world." (Henze 71).

Die Meistersingers von Nurnberg and the Ring cycle are blatant examples of propaganda. There is no doubt that Richard Wagner used his music as a breeding ground for German nationalism and anti-Semitism. Hitler used Wagner's music to strengthen Nazi ideology throughout the course of World War II. His use of Wagner's music as propaganda incited a hot musical controversy that is burning today. Richard Wagner's great-grandson Wieland Wagner admits that "Richard Wagner's anti-Semitic writings will always overshadow my life...Wagner himself misused music as a vehicle of propaganda. Where arguments about Wagner are concerned, Germans quickly lose their sense of humor. With Wagner the German soul becomes exalted! Woe betides anyone who questions Wagner" (Solomon).

Bibliography

- Applegate, Celia, and Pamela M. Potter. Music and German National Identity. Chicago: University of Chicago P, 2002.
- Balfour, Michael. Propaganda in War 1939-1945. London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
- Borchmeyer, Dieter, and Daphne Ellis. Drama and the World of Richard Wagner. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Etlin, Richard A., ed. Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich. Chicago & London: University of Chicago P, 2002.
- Evlon, Lili. "The Wagner Controversy." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 16 July 1998. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Library.
<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1998/7/The%20Wagner%20Controversy>.
- Halsall, Paul. Modern History Sourcebook. 1998.
- Henze, Hans Werner. Music and Politics: Collected Writing. Tr. By Peter Lebanyi. London: Faber & Faber, 1982.
- Herzstein, Robert E. The War That Hitler Won. New York: G.P. Putnam _ Sons, 1948.
- "Jazz Music Under the Nazi Regime." Everything2. 17 June 2002. 24 Feb. 2008
<http://everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1318720>.
- Marlin, Randal. Propaganda & the Ethics of Persuasion. Ontario, Canada: Broadview P, 2002.
- Millington, Barry. "Wagner's Anti-Semitism." The New York Review of Books. 10 June 1993. <<http://www.nybooks.com/authors/1296>>.
- Newman, Ernest. The Wagner Operas. Princeton: Princeton University, 1991.
- Perris, Arnold. Music as Propaganda; Art to Persuade, Art to Control. Westport, Connecticut / London, England: Greenwood P, 1985.
- "Propaganda." Def. 2. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.
<http://www.allgreatquotes.com/mein_kampf_quotes.shtml>.

"Richard Wagner's Theories of Music Drama." Music with Ease. 2008.
 <<http://www.musicwithease.com/wagner-music-drama.html>>.

"Richard Wagner." 8notes.
 <http://www.8notes.com/biographies/wagner.asp#Patronage_of_King_Ludwig_II>.

Rooman, Bianca. "Has Wagner Contradicted His Own Theory?" SCPO Newsletter Mar. 2007.
 <http://www.southerncrossphil.com.au/newsletterHighlights/V2_N1_March%202007%20p3-5%20Wagner.htm>.

Salmi, Hannu. Imagined Germany. Richard Wagner's National Utopia. Vol. 29. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. Richard Wagner Archive. 1 Mar. 2008
 <<http://users.utu.fi/hansalmi/meistersinger/meister-eng.html>>.

"Sayings From 'Mein Kampf' by Hitler." All Great Quotes.
 <http://www.allgreatquotes.com/mein_kampf_quotes.shtml>.

"Section Two-Music and World War II." 24 Feb. 2008
 <<http://users.dickinson.edu/~history/product/garrity/section2.html>>.

Shaw, George B. The Perfect Wagnerite: a Commentary on the Niblung's Ring. New York: Courier Dover Publications, 1967.

Solomon, Larry. "Wagner's Racist Operas, the Blinding Truth." Wagner and Hitler. 2002. 18 Mar. 2008 <<http://solomonsmusic.net/WagHit.htm>>.

A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust. College of Education, University of South Florida, 2005.

"The Aryan Myth: Richard Wagner." The IB Holocaust Project.
 <<http://cghs.dade.k12.fl.us/holocaust/wagner.htm>>.

"The Importance of Music." MENC. The National Association for Music Education.
 <www.menc.org/information/advocae/facts.html>.

"The Use of Emotion to Gain Support." CrimeFree South Africa (2001).
 <<http://www.manyfacets.com/dan/propaganda.html#Emotional%20appeals>>.

"Top 10 Famous Quotes About Propaganda." Alternative Reel.
 <http://www.alternativereel.com/includes/top-ten/display_review.php?id=00008>.

Vargas, Vincent. "Richard Wagner (1813-1883) -- an Illustrated Biography." 2004.
 <<http://www.wagneroperas.com/indexwagnerbiportal.html>>.

Vazsonyi, Nicholas. Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation.
 Boydell & Brewer, 2003.

Viereck, Peter. Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler. New
 Brunswick: Transaction, 2003.

"Wagner Interrupted." 22 Nov. 2002. 7 Mar. 2008
 <<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,845515,00.html>>.

"Wagner is Hard." ANAblog. Analog Arts Ensemble. 26 July 2007. 3 Apr. 2008
 <<http://www.analogartsensemble.net/labels/Wagner.html>>.

Wagner, Richard. "Judaism in Music." The Wagner Library. Trans. William A. Ellis.
 1894. <<http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagjuda.htm>>.

Warren, Herbery. New Studies in Richard Wagner's the Ring of the Nibelung. Vol. 20.
 Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 1991.

Weil, Simon. Wagner and the Jews. <<http://members.aol.com/wagnerbuch/intro.htm>>.