

The Continuation of Music as a Propaganda Tool After the Nazis

Yingting Qin*

University of Missouri Kansas City, Kansas 64110, United States

*Corresponding author: Yingting Qin, qinyingting688@gmail.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract:

This paper examines how music can be utilized as a propaganda tool, tracing its history and contemporary applications. Propaganda is defined as the manipulation of public opinion by governments or individuals, and the use of music to evoke emotion and unite the masses has a long history. This study examines the Nazis' music policy, organizations such as the RKK and the RMEO played a key role in controlling music distribution and propagating Nazi ideology. Contemporary music parallels this, illustrating how music continues to influence public opinion. The analysis emphasizes music's dual role as an art form and propaganda tool that can influence social norms and reinforce dominant ideologies. The study calls for a critical approach to the music consumed, emphasizing the need to recognize the potential value of music.

Keywords:

Music as propaganda
Nazis
Ideology
Control
Contemporary influence

Online publication: September 12, 2024

1. Introduction to music as propaganda

Propaganda refers to the manipulation of the masses' minds and social control carried out by a government, organization, or individual through various means ^[1]. Throughout history, governments have used it to shape public opinion and behavior, and today, this method has spread to various companies and individuals who employ various means to introduce themselves and the ideas they want the public to embrace. In modern history, the most striking example is the use of music by the Nazi regime. The music itself is highly capable of stirring individual emotions, and by manipulating the emotions

of the masses, it can unite large groups. Therefore, music became a powerful tool of Nazi propaganda, which they used to cultivate national identity and obedience to the party's ideology.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of music as a propaganda tool by studying the specific policies adopted by the regime regarding music distribution, the organizations established, and the individuals in charge of management. Meanwhile, this article will analyze "Walkürenritt" by Wagner, "Sing a Mountain Song to the Party" by Zhu Jian'er, The Olympic Fanfare and Theme by John Williams, and Coca-Cola and

McDonald's jingles. This method affects both the public sphere and the private realm of individual psychological experiences. Through this exploration, this study reflects on the broader implications of using music and culture to manipulate social values and behaviors, a practice that is not limited to the past but is relevant to various forms in the present.

2. Nazi policies on music

The Nazis controlled what they called German purity by elevating and denigrating different composers and specific musical works. Evans' book mentions that Mendelssohn, Mahler, and Schoenberg were symbols of "degeneracy"^[2]. On the other hand, Wagner was highly praised by the Nazi government. By categorizing different composers, the Nazi government organized different concerts and performances, promoting works that aligned with their interests while denigrating those that could not represent their ideology. For example, in the "Degenerate Music" exhibition in 1938, the Nazis displayed some modernist, non-nationalistic, and Jewish composers' works with the purpose of humiliation.

On the other side, Hitler was keen on opera, "In fact, the Nazi regime identified with the ceremonial, as leading state dignitaries attended especially State Opera functions beginning in 1933 on "the day of Potsdam," when Hitler had insisted on Furtwangler conducting *Meistersinger* at the Berlin State Opera, while GMD Karl Bohm conducted *Lohengrin* in Hamburg at a KidK-sponsored program which featured Alfred Rosenberg as a speaker"^[3]. Consequently, the regime actively encouraged the creation and performance of new operas, of course, with the caveat that these works had to adhere to the restrictions imposed by the regime.

3. Institutionalization and figures of musical propaganda

In addition to formulating policies, the Nazis established a series of organizations to implement these ideas and exert greater control over the direction of music development. The Nazis attempted to equate certain types of music with German music, but the actions of various organizations that with political overtones, as well as the information

disseminated by those in charge of managing these organizations, revealed that this was merely a pretext for the Nazis to exert greater control over music and use it as a means of promoting themselves.

The establishment of the RKK in 1933 marked the short-term political victory of Goebbels, and from that point on, radio became a propaganda window for Nazi ideology^[4]. The leadership change at the RMK in 1935 led to stricter monitoring of recordings within Germany, compared to the deposed Strauss, Raabe was clearly a more resolute Nazi ideology enforcer^[5]. The *Reichsmusikprüfstelle* reviewed all works and decided whether they could be retained, and the deciding factor was whether they supported the needs of Nazi propaganda positively^[6]. Schools were also infiltrated, modernist music systems and theories were denied, and only pure, non-critical German music elements were allowed to be retained. All of this was done to unify people's thoughts and make them more loyal to the party, although these loyalties came from fear. Such poor techniques, of course, would lead to rebellion, but the result of the rebellion would be the disappearance of the works and articles from the public eye, forced resignations, or even exile abroad.

4. Contemporary parallels

This study has already mentioned that Hitler was fond of opera, particularly Wagner. There is a reason for this. Take Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as an example, which glorifies the greatness and sacrifice of German heroes. The "Walkürenritt" in the third act of *Die Walküre* also illustrates the role that musical elements played in the shaping of ideology. The theme of this work is simple, with a foundation in 9/8 meter, consisting of a dotted rhythm and an eighth note for the first beat, followed by two more beats with dotted quarter notes. The melody has no smooth lines, in fact, it is a broken triad. The dotted rhythm itself represents radical hunting, and the melody with third and fourth intervals stacking makes the theme full of power and angularity (**Figure 1**). The proud German nation does not need Mendelssohn's delicate lines, which represent weakness and ineffectiveness. Repeating, inverting, and doubling the theme in octaves, combined with percussion and block chords, can arouse the audience's blood, and make them ready to serve the

Nazi cause with their lives. The brief three minutes of the piece repeat the melody to deepen the audience's impression, making it a work that can be easily committed to without thinking. It evokes battles in the minds of the audience and allows them to imagine themselves as warriors in a heroic struggle. Wagner's music did achieve the Nazis' goal of promoting their positive image through music.



Figure 1. Richard Wagner, "Walkürenritt" from Act 3 of *Die Walküre*, mm. 14–17

This exploitation of music is common today, and not every composer is vehemently against it. In China in the 1970s, the people welcomed the founding of a new China after the agony of war. During this period, people's lives, art, and culture were influenced by the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. Under this new creative environment, some composers lost interest in creating, but more composers developed a new passion [7]. These composers gained fame by composing red songs praising the party. "Sing a Mountain Song to the Party" was thus born. Composer Zhu Jian'er combined folk melodies with Western compositional techniques to make the song memorable. The piece ends on the fifth degree of the major scale, indicating that it uses the Chinese traditional pentatonic scale's Zhi scale rather than the Western major and minor system. Meanwhile, the melody does not exceed F sharp in two-lined octaves, indicating that the song is not aimed at professional singers but at workers and farmers who have no musical education (Figure 2). The lyrics compare the Communist Party to a mother and believe that it has given them a new life and established a truly people's government. This is a denial of all previous governments and is very suitable for the Communist Party to use for propaganda. The founding of the new China was not a smooth process, and until the 1980s, the undercurrents with the Kuomintang could not be calmed,

and some people were confused between the two regimes. As a result, the CCP needed to publicize the party's values through art and culture, and the art of music was an important part of this. The lyrics of the song are shown below.

1=A $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ 唱支山歌给党听 萧萍 词 晓耳 曲

mf 3. 3 $\underline{36}$ | 5. 3 | 5 $\underline{1}$ 6 | 2 - | 5 $\underline{356}$ | 1. 2 | 3 $\underline{5765}$ | 6 - | 1 $\underline{165}$ | 3 $\underline{53}$ | 6 $\underline{123}$ |

唱 支 山 歌 给 党 听， 我 把 党 来 比 母 亲， 母 亲 只 生 了 我 的 身

0 $\underline{13}$ | 6. 5 $\underline{4}$ 6 | 5 - | 4 $\underline{365}$ | 1 - | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0. 7 $\underline{65}$ | 3 $\underline{5}$ | *mf* 6 $\underline{67}$ |

党 的 光 辉 照 我 心 旧 社

5 $\underline{3}$ | 1 $\underline{0}$ 1 $\underline{0}$ | 5 $\underline{310}$ | 2. 2 $\underline{27}$ | 6 $\underline{176}$ | 3 $\underline{56}$ | 5 - | 1 $\underline{12}$ | 3 - | 2 $\underline{2351}$ | 2 - |

会 鞭 子 抽 我 身， 母 亲 含 恨 泪 淋 淋， 共 产 党 号 召 我 闹 革 命，

3. 3 | 5 $\underline{030}$ | 2 $\underline{176}$ | 5. 3 $\underline{56}$ | 1 $\underline{13}$ | 6 $\underline{565}$ | 3 - | 6. 1 $\underline{22}$ | 2. 3 $\underline{55}$ | 0 $\underline{6}$ 2 | 5 - |

夺 过 鞭 子 揍 敌 人， 共 产 党 号 召 我 闹 革 命， 夺 过 鞭 子 夺 过 鞭 子 揍 敌 人。

5 $\underline{50}$ | 5 $\underline{6532327}$ | 6 $\underline{7}$ 6 $\underline{5}$ 3 $\underline{5}$ | 1. 6 $\underline{1105}$ | 1 $\underline{03}$ | 5 $\underline{6}$ | 1 $\underline{06}$ | 1 $\underline{2}$) | 3. 3 | 3 $\underline{6}$ |

唱 支 山

5. 3 | 5 $\underline{16}$ | 2 - | 5 $\underline{356}$ | 1. 2 | 3 $\underline{5}$ | 7 $\underline{65}$ | 6 - | 1 $\underline{165}$ | 3 $\underline{53}$ | 6 $\underline{12}$ | 3 | 0 | 2 $\underline{3}$ |

歌 给 党 听， 我 把 党 来 比 母 亲， 母 亲 只 生 了 我 的 身， 党 的

6. 5 $\underline{46}$ | 5 - | 4 $\underline{361}$ | 2 - | 0 $\underline{53}$ | 5. 6 $\underline{12}$ | 3 - | 3. 0 | 4 $\underline{5654}$ | 5 - |

光 辉 照 我 心， 党 的 光 辉 照 我 心。

Figure 2. Zhu Jian'er, "Sing a Mountain Song to the Party"

Lyric:

唱支山歌给党听，我把党来比母亲；
母亲只生了我的身，
党的光辉照我心。
旧社会鞭子抽我身，
母亲只会泪淋淋；
共产党号召我闹革命，
夺过鞭子揍敌人。
共产党号召我闹革命，
夺过鞭子，夺过鞭子揍敌人！
唱支山歌给党听，
我把党来比母亲；
母亲只生了我的身，
党的光辉照我心。
党的光辉照我心。

Sing a folk song to the party, I compare the party to my mother;

My mother only gave birth to my body,
 The glory of the party shines in my heart.
 The old society whipped me,
 Mother will only cry;
 The Communist Party called on me to make
 revolution,
 Seize the whip and beat the enemy.
 The Communist Party called on me to make
 revolution,
 Take the whip! Take the whip and beat the enemy!
 Sing a folk song to the party,
 I compare the party to my mother;
 My mother only gave birth to my body,
 The glory of the party shines in my heart.
 The glory of the party shines in my heart.

Note: Zhu Jian'er, "Sing a Mountain Song to the Party",
<https://youtu.be/D9ZxT17p6gc?si=1QCAIzzMqp5ushr>

So, besides governments, are there any other
 organizations that use music as a tool for propaganda?

The answer is yes. Today, if one can afford the price,
 they can hire a composer to create a custom piece for
 them. Meanwhile, diverse promotion channels such
 as television, the internet, and social media can easily
 disseminate this work. By constantly presenting this
 work to the public, it can subtly or indirectly influence
 people's thoughts about certain things or ideas. The
 Olympic Fanfare and Theme from 1982 by John
 Williams introduced the brass ensemble in the opening
 and introduced percussion shortly thereafter (**Figure
 3**). This grand music depicts the fierce competition of
 the games and the athletes' high spirits. The tradition of
 using brass and percussion at celebrations can be traced
 back to the British royal court in the distant Baroque. It
 can be concluded that it is not a certain musical element
 that represents a certain ideology, but that these musical
 elements are always fixedly associated with certain things
 or objects, leading people to associate a specific musical
 piece with them and thus generate specific associations.
 This association can make people passively submit to a
 certain ideology because music can affect or disrupt their

The image shows a page of a musical score for 'The Olympic Fanfare and Theme' by John Williams. The score is for a large ensemble, including woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The title 'OLYMPIC FANFARE AND THEME' is prominently displayed in the center. The composer's name 'JOHN WILLIAMS' and the arranger 'JOY BOCCOOK' are also visible. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of 'Moderato (♩ = 94)'. The page number '1' is at the bottom left, and the measure numbers '1', '3', and '5' are indicated at the bottom. A handwritten number '1.343' is written at the top left of the score.

Figure 3. John Williams, The Olympic Fanfare and Theme, mm. 1–5

thoughts as soon as it is played.

In the realm of popular music, this phenomenon is even more apparent, such as in Coca-Cola's "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" and McDonald's "I'm Lovin' It." "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" composed by Roger Cook and Roger Greenaway has a straightforward melody and is designed to be sung more easily by a wide audience. Its repetitive structure ensures that the listener will recall the tune after listening to it once or twice. The song uses a basic harmonic structure, with no borrowed chords. At the same time, it usually takes a major chord, allowing the audience to only receive happy and optimistic emotions and associate them with the company or product. The song's tempo is also steady, it is neither too fast nor too slow, and it does not require the listener to be professional. The original version uses guitars and soft percussion instruments to match the theme for an approachable feel. The lyrics revolve around peace and unity, reinforcing the image of Coca-Cola as a global brand.

"I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing", by Roger Cook and Roger Greenaway: https://youtu.be/ib-Qiyklq-Q?si=52DpZ_wGcsHL1xCH

"I'm Lovin' It" composed by Pusha T and sung by Justin Timberlake is like the Coca-Cola jingle, but it incorporates hip-hop elements. As a result, it is more contemporary than "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" and can appeal to a younger audience. The harmonic background remains simple and repetitive, with groove-oriented and syncopated rhythms that make the listener sway uncontrollably.

"I'm Lovin' It", by Pusha T: https://youtu.be/-IHcp8PI_X4?si=RUXhILxGJEGBISpm

The lyrics of the two songs are few and repeated many times, mainly focusing on the slogan itself, which directly expresses the enjoyment and satisfaction of consuming the related products of their brands. Meanwhile, people will subconsciously memorize the music because it is so simple and can even be hummed without thinking about it. In this way, these businesses have won the public's impression through music promotion^[8]. All the music discussed in this article share a common feature, a simple and interesting theme, and a constant repetition and reinforcement of that theme. In other words, if one needs people to remember a concept,

simplify it and repeat it. This approach also meets the needs of propagandists, who seek to homogenize the public's thoughts.

5. Conclusion

In examining the role of music as a propaganda tool, this paper traverses the historical landscape from the Nazi regime to contemporary environmental issues, revealing the powerful role that music plays in shaping ideology and mobilizing collective consciousness. Because music has inherent emotional connections, it can be an effective medium for disseminating political and ideological information. The Nazi regime meticulously planned policies for promoting and suppressing different musicians and works, establishing organizations to implement these policies, and dispatching loyal political supporters to monitor and manage music professionals. This form gradually evolved and fragmented into modern music industry practices, such as custom-made works for the Olympics and subtly shaping consumer behavior through corporate advertising. The role of music in propaganda is multifaceted and profound. The analysis of different musical works underscores that music is both a reflection of its era and a tool in the hands of power entities, whether states, organizations, or corporations^[9-11].

Furthermore, this exploration indicates that, while the context and intentions may differ, the principles by which music influences public perception and behavior are consistent. Repetition, emotional appeals, and cultural resonance are all factors that contribute to music's powerful propaganda impact. These elements enable music to be remembered, hummed, and internalized by different listeners, thus normalizing the ideology it carries. The strategic application of music is not merely an artificial product of a certain historical period, but a living practice that evolves with social change. As time progresses, the dual nature of music becomes increasingly apparent, serving as both a source of art and emotional expression and a tool for ideological dissemination. Therefore, this article not only helps to understand the historical role of music as propaganda but also emphasizes its ongoing relevance in contemporary society, where music continues to influence people's minds and thoughts, shape social norms, and reinforce

the dominant ideology of the time. Therefore, it calls on the public to be vigilant and critical about the music they consume and reminds them that the purpose of music

is not limited to education, entertainment, or emotional catharsis, but is a complex contradiction ^[12–15].

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Perris A, 1983, Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China. *Ethnomusicology*, 27(1): 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/850880>
- [2] Evans RJ, 2005, *The Third Reich in Power: 1933–1939*. The Penguin Press, New York.
- [3] Meyer M, 1991, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich*. Peter Lang, New York.
- [4] Levi E, 1994, *Music in the Third Reich*. St. Martin's Press, New York.
- [5] Kater MH, 1997, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- [6] Potter PM, 2016, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- [7] Singh VB, 1968, China's Cultural Revolution. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 29(4): 329–334. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41854291>
- [8] Cowell H, 1948, Music as Propaganda. *Bulletin of the American Musicological Society*, 1948(11/12/13): 9–11. <https://doi.org/10.2307/829258>
- [9] Fackler G, 2016, *Music and Power in the Third Reich: Cultural Expression, Ideology, Propaganda*. Routledge, London.
- [10] Fosler-Lussier D, 2020, Music and Media in the Service of the State, in *Music on the Move*. University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 120–148. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9853855.13>
- [11] Kater MH, Riethmuller A, 2005, Music and Nazism: Art Under Tyranny, 1933–1945. *Central European History*, 38(1): 163–165.
- [12] Adorno TW, 2002, *What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts (1945)*. University of California Press, California.
- [13] Broszat M, 1981, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich*. Longman, London.
- [14] Mittler B, 2008, Popular Propaganda? Art and Culture in Revolutionary China. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 152(4): 466–489. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40541604>
- [15] Spotts F, 2003, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*. Overlook Press, New York.

Publisher's note

Art & Technology Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.