

Music in world war two



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The response, through music, to World War Two, particularly in the concentration/death camps throughout Europe The Second World War was a very sensitive time in the world, especially Europe, but one of the few benefits was the music that came out of it, there was the music that was written about certain events of the war, the music that evolved during the war, and the music by the Jewish community (i. e. The Holocaust), especially in the concentration camps. The Holocaust was unequivocally the most tragic event to occur in World War Two, being the genocide of over 6 million Jewish people along with other " minorities" like gypsies, homosexuals, and handicapped people. The slightest shimmer of hope to shine through after the terrible events of World War Two was the response. Not only were there books like *The Diary Of a Young Girl* or *the much later Night*, but there was also a turning point in the way music was written and a great many stupendous pieces that were written either during World War Two or directly after in response to it. There was one particular type of music that evolved during World War Two, and that was jazz. It became very popular during the war and was used as a source of morale for the troops overseas and for the worried citizens of the soldiers' home countries. World War Two was also a very important time for the realm of classical music. Many different composers, such as Dmitri Shostakovich, wrote classical music directly correlating to events within World War Two, or just a response to the war itself about their feelings about what is happening in the world. There were even composers in the camps writing music and premiering it in front of prisoners, utilizing the existing orchestras within the camps to accomplish this. Music was a vital part of the Second World War, being a source of morale and joy in dark times but also as a sign of hope and prosperity for the

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world. There were many pieces that were written about certain events within the war, but there were also many that were written just about the war in general, as an emotional response. Dmitri Shostakovich was a fine Soviet Russian composer who wrote during World War Two and until his death in 1975, and he was a revolutionary composer in the romantic and modern eras of music, particularly in his later years. He wrote his Symphony No. 7 in 1941 about the defense of Leningrad, in Russia (Wood). Even though this particular event took place in World War One, it still reflected his current thoughts and feelings about World War Two. He was also a Soviet activist, but when the Soviets decided to ally with Hitler, he spoke out about it and was deported to Germany for his "crimes" (Wood). Richard Strauss is another famous composer who wrote during World War Two, and died shortly after the end of the war. Strauss is infamous for his ties to the Nazis, originally being a supporter but changed his mind when his wife and two daughters were threatened (Richard). He composed an orchestral piece called *Metamorphosen*, Study for 23 Solo Strings about his feelings of remorse for the victims of World War Two (Richard). It can be seen as a sort of Requiem, similarly to what Mozart was writing when he died. The Romantic era included many great pieces that reflected romantic themes and quaint melodies, like *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker* both by Tchaikovsky. The Modern Era, however, includes many modern themes that can be seen as strange or even otherworldly, like the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* by Ralph Vaughn-Williams, the *Helicopter Quartet*, and the *Outdoor Overture* by Aaron Copeland. Not only was the music composed during World War Two the end of the Romanticism and the birth of the modern era, the existing music also evolved extraordinarily. The existing forms of music

evolved into something different, like the existing popular music jazz and the future popular music rock and roll. Jazz was the music of World War Two, being that jazz and the popular music were enharmonic in a sense of being equivalent. Jazz was almost exclusively an American phenomenon during the years leading up to the war and during the war itself, but by the end of the war it had spread throughout most of the world, becoming a source of many derivative forms of music, such as bebop (Wood). Another form of music, that began to rise from its roots in rhythm and blues (a. k. a. R&B), was rock and roll (Wood). Rock and roll was never particularly existent during World War Two, but it would later become the music of the Cold War. The popular music at the time of the Korean and the Vietnam Wars was rock and roll, and would remain so until the rise of funk, disco, and even later pop (Pierpaoli & Fasanaro). During the Vietnam years, there was a clear distinction between jazz and popular music, that is, rock and roll (Wood). In addition to the turning point in classical music and the evolution of the popular music at the time, there was a lot of music composed specifically in World War Two, but even more specifically the concentration camps. Also, there were several pieces written about the concentration camps in Europe, some even from within the concentration camps themselves. There was composition coming from inside the concentration camps during the war. One such example was the Quartet for the End of Time (1941) by Olivier Messiaen that was premiered on January 15, 1941 in Stalag at the GÅrlitz concentration camp before an audience of fellow prisoners of war (Wood). Another would be Ullmann's opera Der Kaiser von Atlantis (1944) that was composed at Terezin concentration camp and was in rehearsal before the Nazi officials in charge of the camp (the SS and the Gestapo), with direct orders from a high

ranking Nazi general, shut the performance down shortly before deporting the composer to Auschwitz concentration/death camp where he later was killed by being put in the gas chambers and later the furnaces where his body was burned and never found again (Wood). Music was also very big in the camps, being a regular part of the prisoners' routine. There were orchestras and music groups, such as wind ensembles or string quartets, within the camps (Browder & Soumerai). Amateur and professional musicians among the prisoners formed these orchestras, which were either ordered by the camp administration or tolerated by the disciplinary officials within the camp. The position in the orchestra was their job, and they got special privileges, such as free time and heftier portions when it came to food and drink (Browder). The orchestra members got to have less physically demanding duties among the grounds of the camps or in the factories, which allowed many of the orchestra members to survive the war mostly unscathed. The orchestras were also used as a message to the outside world, as a cover to what was actually happening in the camps and what their true purpose was. The response through music to World War Two was seen in several places and times, but the most important part is the message that the music relays, the remorse and raw feeling portrayed. The effects that World War Two had on the music at that time were very large and influential. The Romanticism era of classical music, which included composers such as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, effectively ended during World War Two. This event marked the beginning of the Modern Era (or 20th Century Era depending on the source), which included the composers such as Copeland and Vaughn-Williams. The feelings of sadness, grief, and remorse caused by the war were set to music by some very influential

composers, like Shostakovich, and it is through this music that we can remember and let go of the events that happened so many years ago. We are all ashamed about it, but we can't live in the past, we can only look ahead to the future and hope that it will be bright and joyful.