

German National Song in the Third Reich: A Tale of Two Anthems

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Introduction

The following overview of German national song forms the basis of several lectures I presented in an unconventional “classroom”: a senior living center. This addition to my teaching load (I refer to it as “musical enrichment programming”) has grown from humble beginnings to its current state, a sizeable curriculum that I eagerly offer to a population whose knowledge of twentieth-century political history is profound, and whose love of music is unmatched. These retirees—my students—defy stereotypes of what it means to be in the late stages of life. They want to deepen their connections with others, stay intellectually active and engaged, and pursue their curiosities and passions. In my teaching at retirement facilities, which now extends to three separate communities and a host of smaller organizations, I see a growing demand for educational offerings that optimally challenge participants and promote an atmosphere of inquisitiveness and deep contemplation. Simultaneously, I have also noticed that the quality and depth of current enrichment options for seniors seem to be off the mark. Recreation coordinators at many living centers misjudge the wisdom and sophistication of their venerable customers, offering them activities that would only be appropriate for young children or the developmentally disabled. This unfortunate truth has created a need for rich educational opportunities within a segment of society whose lived experience includes some of the most intriguing musical and political phenomena of the modern era.

I would not characterize my adventures discussing German national song and Nazi propaganda with seniors as “instruction”; I tend to think of it as “illuminating,” or, perhaps more appropriately, “augmenting” the prior knowledge and experiences of these lifelong learners. As a person born years after the end of the Vietnam War attempting to speak authoritatively about World War II, I was constantly mindful of my students’ superior, deeply contextualized understanding of the topic: they actually *lived* it. A few of my regular lecture attendees hail from Germany and Austria, and with some encouragement, they provided vivid stories of their experiences during Hitler’s rise and World War II. I quickly modified my plans to allow ample time for sharing and storytelling, which fostered rapport and ultimately produced a truly inspirational experience for me personally. I also learned that traditional lecture, which has been cited as one of the least engaging and effective pedagogical techniques, is actually preferred by most seniors over more active teaching methods. Even so, judicious use of multimedia and alternative learning modalities (e.g., kinesthetics) only enhances lecture content, allowing the instructor to attend to individual differences in learning style and motor/sensory functioning. And since they are not hampered by, among other things, many of the electronic distractions common to younger generations, golden-agers might be the most attentive lecture audience available to today’s educators. It is worth

mentioning that some seniors' enthusiasm for politics can spark feisty debates, and not always along stereotypically conservative lines. A balanced presentation of divisive political issues is recommended to avoid potentially uncomfortable or vitriolic confrontations.

As a nascent genre of education advancing the fusion of music and politics, enrichment programming for seniors is not without challenges:

- *Access*- Too many senior living facilities underestimate the intellectual needs and capabilities of their constituents, rendering resident access to quality programming difficult if not impossible.
- *Accommodation*- Educators working with seniors must identify the most developmentally appropriate material and methods for each instructional venture, and should seek out techniques for mitigating the effects of diminished sensory and motor functioning common to this population.
- *Assessment*- Even in nontraditional contexts, superlative teaching demands reflection and evaluation. How is this best accomplished with senior citizens as students?

These are not insurmountable challenges. In exchange for thoughtful attention to these and other minor deviations from typical classroom teaching, educators offering musical enrichment programming to seniors can expect joyous experiences that will easily rank among the most rewarding of their career.

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To be perceived, propaganda must evoke the interest of an audience and must be transmitted through an attention-getting communications medium.

– Joseph Goebbels

Nowhere is the national identity of a country forged more resolutely than in its art. Theatre, visual art, dance, architecture, and music have come to represent the sophisticated sociocultural constitution of nations, providing an engaging and enlightening glimpse into the history, traditions, and tastes of a particular ethnicity. Nationalism is embedded in many musical traditions and is often viewed through the lens of a complex and contentious field of musicology that intermingles politics, cultural and social theories, and historical perspective atop artistic underpinnings.¹ However profound national art music might appear to scholars and critics, the vast majority of *bourgeois* and *proletariat* citizens in most modern cultures probably experienced musical nationalism in a less august way: namely, through performances of their country's national anthem at school or civic events, starting at a young age. This rite of passage seems

¹ To be sure, musical nationalism is a broad and oft-contested area that cannot be fully explicated within the confines of this educational overview. For excellent perspective on the rise of this phenomenon in nineteenth-century Europe see Philip Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Benjamin W. Curtis, *Music Makes the Nation: Nationalist Composers and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2008); and Harry White and Michael Murphy, eds., *Musical Constructions of Nationalism* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).

to reach every citizen of most nations at some point in life; yet, very few conceive of the potentially profound manipulative power that nationalistic song can wield until it is fully propagandized in a campaign of hatred and intolerance. Such manipulation existed in Germany during the rise of the Third Reich, specifically with “Das Deutschlandlied” and the “Horst Wessel Lied.” In this educational overview, I provide an account of how it happened—and how national song has been partially reclaimed for the German citizenry.

The establishment of government-sponsored patriotic songs in the name of civic pride dates back to ancient times, when Greek and Roman soldiers employed marching songs and chants during their exploits. The modern concept of a national anthem emerged out of the Dutch struggle for independence from the Spanish in the sixteenth century. An anonymous author (thought to be Philip Marniz van St. Aldegonde) penned “Wilhelmus van Nassouwe” sometime between 1569 and 1572 to vent the frustrations of Prince William of Nassau and his fellow Dutch patriots who stood against the Spanish;² the song is considered the first true national anthem. Later, a wellspring of national anthem activity developed in nineteenth-century Europe. The tumultuous times³ helped to spawn standards such as France’s “La Marseillaise” and the United Kingdom’s “God Save The Queen.” Typically in the form of a fanfare, tuneful song, or hymn, national anthems (the British term “anthem” was applied worldwide in the early nineteenth century) are established through law or tradition. Usage varies by country, but most commonly these songs are performed on holidays, in schools, at festivals, before sporting events, and especially to introduce heads of state. The most widely recognized usage of national anthems worldwide today is during medal ceremonies at the Olympic Games.

The heritage of national anthems in Germany provides a particularly fascinating microcosm of the fate of a nation. Both the pride and misfortunes of Germany are represented in the history of its anthems, chronicling the push for unification in the pre-Weimar era, the downtrodden national psyche after World War I, the reign of terror (and propaganda) during Hitler’s Third Reich, and the elimination of communism with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Throughout the dynamic (and sometimes tragic) development of Germany, one song—“Das Deutschlandlied”—has remained constant. The song’s seemingly ever-changing context has colored the interpretation of its intent, from intensely radical to coolly patriotic. By contrast, the “Horst Wessel Lied,” a fleeting song added as an addendum to “Das Deutschlandlied” by Nazi propagandist-in-chief Joseph Goebbels, was only in place for twelve years yet makes clear its intent within the narrow Nazi context. The intersection of these two national anthems provides an insightful look at the way Goebbels and his Third Reich propagandists created a powerful and entertaining means of delivering their message of German supremacy and pureblooded nationalism.

Most national anthems begin with lyrics in the form of poetry or prose, with music typically added later. Such was the case for “Das Deutschlandlied,” which was penned in 1841 by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798–1874), a Prussian patriot, poet, and university professor who sought to popularize the idea of a unified Germany:

² Gunther F. Eyck, *The Voice of Nations: European National Anthems and their Authors* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 4.

³ The often bloody shift away from monarchical governments toward democracy was underscored by a desire for unity and national identity among many of the most vocal revolutionaries. Although the French Revolution stands as the best-known example, nationalism swept through Germany, Italy, Eastern Europe, and Scandinavia, giving rise to a cultural renaissance focused on a fresh conception of national and folk elements. For a thorough treatment of nineteenth-century European nationalism see Curtis, *Music Makes the Nation*.

“Das Deutschlandlied”

First Stanza

*Germany, Germany above all else,
Above all else in the world,
If it always stands together
Fraternally in defense and defiance,
From the Meuse to the Neman,
From the Adige up to the Belt
Germany, Germany, above all else,
Above all else in the world!*

Second Stanza

*German women,
German loyalty,
German wine and
German song
Shall retain in the world
Their old beautiful chime
And inspire us to
noble deeds
For the length of our lives
German women, German loyalty,
German wine and German song!*

Third Stanza

*Unity, and justice, and freedom
For the German fatherland!
Let us all strive together
Fraternally with heart and hand!
Unity and justice and freedom
Are the guarantors of happiness
Flourish in the luster of this happiness,
Flourish you German fatherland!*

The second stanza provides a caricature of German “women, loyalty, wine, and song,” but, unlike the first and third stanzas, does little to help illuminate the political culture that influenced the anthem’s initial writing and continued usage. Much to Hoffmann’s delight, Germany was unified during and after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. But in the decades preceding this unification, the German political leadership was not ready to receive Hoffmann’s somewhat radical message, and they sharply questioned the intent of his poetry. Hoffmann was suspended from his university position in 1842, and spent the next two decades scratching out a living writing poetry, political satire, and children’s rhymes.⁴ Meanwhile, Hoffman’s publisher Julius Campe searched for an appropriate tune to pair with the “Deutschlandlied” text. To maximize publishing profits, he hoped to find something that spoke to German national identity while also avoiding the expensive payment of royalties to a living composer.

Campe found his ideal melody in the catalogue of an Austrian, not German, master: composer Franz Josef Haydn (1732–1809). Fifty years earlier, Haydn had synthesized the mastery of the Bach/Handel tradition with his own brand of Austro-German folk nationalism, and in the process, became something of a celebrity in Europe. Interestingly, Haydn wrote the eventual “Deutschlandlied” melody in 1797 as a birthday anthem to Emperor Francis II of Austria (“Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser”). This birthday anthem later became the official anthem of the Austrian Empire and was used until 1918, when the monarchy was dissolved.⁵ The melody also appears in the second movement of the *Kaiserquartett* (“Emperor Quartet,” opus 76, no. 3), a string quartet Haydn composed in 1796. Almost a hymn in its solemn, tuneful construction, Haydn’s melody would provide the perfect partnership with Hoffmann’s text to create the patriotic, stirring atmosphere necessary to convey the concept of Germany under a single flag (initially, the traditional red, yellow, and black; later, the swastika). And, in choosing a melody by Austria’s Haydn, Hoffmann was able to symbolically articulate his vision of a unified Germany *inclusive* of Austria.⁶

⁴ Eyck, *The Voice of Nations*, 169.

⁵ David Kendall’s web site entries on the German national anthem and “Horst Wessel Lied,” accessed August 1, 2009, <http://www.nationalanthems.info>.

⁶ Margarete Feinstein, “Deutschland über alles? The National Anthem Debate in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *Central European History* 33, no. 4 (2000): 507. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156916100746446>

The story of the “Horst Wessel Song” is also intriguing, but for pernicious, not patriotic, reasons. Horst Wessel (1907–1930) was an unlikely candidate for national enshrinement as a Third Reich hero and anthem namesake, but perhaps that is what attracted master propagandist Joseph Goebbels to the story of this young radical. Born in Bielefeld, Germany, in 1907, Wessel was the son of a Lutheran pastor, but chose politics over religion. As a young man, Wessel became involved in a variety of political groups, including liberal, conservative, socialist, and terrorist organizations, before finding his true home within the National Socialist SA (*Sturm Abteilung*, or “Storm Division”). Sensing that his relatively affluent upbringing might stymie a rise within the SA ranks, Wessel even moved into a tenement in a poor section of Berlin and took a job as a taxi driver. Soon he was appointed leader of the Sturm 5, a militant SA branch consisting of 250 soldiers. Wessel was also musically inclined and even established a wind ensemble to provide rousing music for his men.⁷ At the same time, his reputation as a propagandist orator was growing in Berlin, eventually attracting the attention of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda. At Goebbels’ request, Wessel traveled to Vienna in 1928 to monitor the growing strength of the Nazi Party, and upon his return to Berlin, wrote lyrics that would later be used in the song that bears his name:

“Horst Wessel Song”

First Stanza

Flag high, ranks closed,
The S.A. marches with silent
solid steps.
Comrades shot by the Red Front
and Reaction
March in spirit with us in our
ranks.

Second Stanza

The street free for the brown
battalions,
The street free for the Storm
Troopers.
Millions, full of hope, look up
at the swastika;
The day breaks for freedom
and for bread.

Third Stanza

For the last time the call will
now be blown;
For the struggle now we all
stand ready.
Soon will fly Hitler-flags over
every street;
Slavery will last only a short
time longer.

Despite the ominous political atmosphere that enveloped him during this time, *love* is what eventually cost Wessel his life. In 1929 he fell in love with Erna Jaenicke, a Berlin prostitute. Their love affair was widely known, even attracting the attention of Goebbels, who tried to intervene to save the career of his young protégé. Wessel’s landlady was not pleased with the addition of a prostitute to her property and sent thugs from the local Red Front Fighters’ League (a communist organization) to rough him up. The communists already knew Wessel as an instigator who had converted many of their former members to the Nazi Party, so it is not surprising that Wessel was not just roughed up but shot by the Red Front thugs in January of 1930 and then lingered for forty days in a Berlin hospital before passing away. Always a cunning opportunist, Goebbels “orchestrated [Wessel’s] departure from the world to extract as much benefit to the Nazi cause as he could.”⁸ Goebbels issued dramatic daily updates from Wessel’s bedside and chronicled the ordeal in his Berlin tabloid *Der Angriff* (“The Attack”), where he characterized the communist thugs as “a pack of murder-crazed, degenerate Communist bandits.”⁹ Wessel’s funeral was

⁷ Nigel Jones, “A Song for Hitler,” *History Today* 57, no. 10 (2007): 25.

⁸ Jones, “A Song for Hitler,” 27.

⁹ Jones, “A Song for Hitler,” 28.

filled with Nazi pageantry not befitting his status within the party: 30,000 Storm Troopers marching behind the casket, the attendance of Goebbels and Göring, and eventually monuments and buildings erected or renamed in Wessel's honor. Goebbels took full advantage of his new martyr during the reign of the Third Reich, commissioning 250 literary works about Wessel as well as an embellished film on Wessel's life.¹⁰

However, Goebbels' most strategic propagandist ploy took place long after Wessel died, when he discovered Wessel's lyrics and converted a rousing marching song into the "Horst Wessel Lied." The lyrics denounced both the communist and conservative movements, and soon Goebbels was promoting the establishment of both the "Horst Wessel Lied" and the traditional "Deutschlandlied" as national anthems of Germany. Hitler and the Third Reich leadership enacted a law in May of 1933 that established both the "Deutschlandlied" and the "Horst Wessel Lied" as twin national songs of Germany. This effort, in keeping with the totality of Third Reich governance, was derived from the Nazi concept of *Gleichschaltung*, or enforced political conformity.¹¹ During this time, a unique set of political and cultural variables contributed to the institutionalization of both songs.

In the "Deutschlandlied," Goebbels and his propagandists commandeered a widely known emblem of Germany (one of only a few enduring national points of pride from the start of the Weimar era to the 1930s), and thus brought a degree of nationalistic credibility to their campaign. It is astonishing to consider that, given the eventual outcomes, the somewhat benign text of the "Deutschlandlied" had initially come to represent the acceptance of diverse political beliefs through the late Weimar years. The song was a fixture in the repertoire of German school choirs and singing societies since the late nineteenth century. Haydn was a hero to many and an outright musical celebrity who epitomized the ideals of duty and service before self that were central to the Nazi message. Even though Haydn was not a "true" German, the Nazi leadership had no problem twisting his persona into some sort of Germanic hero to suit their propagandistic needs. His music certainly fit the mold of Nazi purity. And with the Nazi *Anschluss* already in development, the "ideal" German boundaries Hoffmann included in the first stanza of his "Deutschlandlied" text suddenly assumed a new imperialistic meaning. For example, the Adige River was considered Austrian territory during Hoffmann's lifetime; it became part of Italy in 1918.

To the horrible delight of many a Nazi propagandist, the "Deutschlandlied" had also been gradually militarized since World War I, conveying a brand of nationalistic fervor via military might to certain German ears. This process of militarization began in November of 1914, when a widely published German war bulletin recounted the story of the deaths of two thousand German soldiers, all of whom were purportedly singing the "Deutschlandlied" in unison while fighting in the battle of Langemarck.¹² This tale of youthful heroics and sacrifice for the Fatherland cemented the "Deutschlandlied" as a call to military glory for some Germans. Hitler further romanticized the story in the portion of *Mein Kampf* that chronicles his military duty on the front lines of World War I:

With a burning love of the homeland in their hearts and a song on their lips, our young regiment went into action as if going to a dance. The dearest blood was given freely here in the belief that it was shed to protect the freedom and independence of the Fatherland.¹³

¹⁰ Jones, "A Song for Hitler," 29.

¹¹ Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 15.

¹² Feinstein, "Deutschland über alles?," 508.

¹³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. James Murphy (Boring: CPA Publishing, 1939), 174.

Similar stories helped feed the impression of the “Deutschlandlied” as a symbol of German strength in the face of adversity and unfair political treatment after World War I. Defeated German troops reportedly sang it while marching home in November 1918, and the national assembly offered a somber version in May 1919 after hearing of the harsh punishment imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. The imperialistic tone of Hoffmann’s first stanza was now cast as a defiant harbinger of things to come in light of the fact that the Treaty of Versailles had ceded the Meuse, Memel, Adige, and Belt regions to Denmark, Belgium, Lithuania, and Italy, respectively.

In contrast to the somewhat veiled militarism and optimistic call for German brotherhood found in the “Deutschlandlied,” the “Horst Wessel Lied” was a perfect counterbalance, providing vivid Nazi imagery and denouncing competing communist and conservative political parties to narrow the patriotic focus. Based on a rousing march, the “Horst Wessel Lied” fit into the Nazis’ new concept of folk music. Britta Sweers observes, “By redefining folk music as a music for the masses and positing a strong nationalist component, the original conception was expanded to include ‘composed music’—propaganda and marching songs.”¹⁴ Dubbed *Volkslied*, this new emphasis on communal singing of German folk music was seen by the Third Reich as both a way to exalt the “pure” native culture of the Fatherland while also serving as a tool to control and manipulate the populace. John Street explains, “Before the war, . . . the Horst Wessel Song was made compulsory in school, and Nazi Youth training manuals specified the use of [the song] at key points in the daily rituals.”¹⁵ Again, Hitler helped to shape the view of the anthem, calling the “Horst Wessel Lied” the song “that seems the holiest to us Germans.”¹⁶ Once in place as an official Nazi anthem, it was even deemed necessary to publish it separately from all other SA songs “because it deserves special honors,”¹⁷ and indeed, it was published and performed more frequently than any other song during Hitler’s reign. “Above all,” Michael Meyer explains, “the Horst Wessel song was featured as the greatest and most clearly identified representation of the musical SA.”¹⁸

With the synergy of the “Deutschlandlied” and the “Horst Wessel Song” finally codified in 1933, the propagandizing began. Far beyond Leni Riefenstahl’s use of both anthems in *The Triumph of the Will*, the manipulation of these songs in the name of the Nazi brand of populism was rampant and remains unprecedented in the history of national songs and anthems. First, the Third Reich leadership modified the “Deutschlandlied” text to eliminate the use of the second and third stanzas. Hoffmann’s playful caricature of German “loyalty, women, wine, and song” in the second stanza would not have been appropriate in a Nazi administration where virtuous womanhood was upheld and alcohol was said to cause everything from infertility to immorality. Likewise, the call for “unity and justice and freedom for the German Fatherland!” in Hoffmann’s third stanza was not exactly the message the Nazis were looking to convey, at least not until they had eradicated the Jewish population.¹⁹ The dual anthems played a crucial role in many of the congresses and pageants arranged by Goebbels and Hitler. Published bulletins instructing the *Reichsmusikkammer* on proper performance practices specified in great detail how various propaganda songs, including the anthems, were to be performed. In February of 1939 a decree issued by

¹⁴ “The Power to Influence Minds: German Folk Music during the Nazi Era and After,” in *Music, Power, and Politics*, ed. Annie Randall (New York: Routledge, 2005), 72.

¹⁵ “Fight the Power: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics,” *Government and Opposition* 38, no. 1 (2003): 115.

¹⁶ Jost Hermand, “On the History of the ‘Deutschlandlied,’” in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 260.

¹⁷ Michael Meyer, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), 72.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1977.00568.x>

¹⁸ “The SA Song Literature: A Singing Ideological Posture,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 3 (1977): 576.

¹⁹ Feinstein, “Deutschland über alles?,” 508.

Hitler himself specified “that the German national anthem was to be played in a solemn manner, giving specific instruction as to tempo, while the Horst-Wessel Song was to have a faster beat in the manner of a revolutionary fighting song.”²⁰ This cunning arrangement demonstrates Hitler’s taste for drama, crafting the sequence of songs and the tone each one sets in the manner of a somber Bach chorale and its exciting fugal sequel. Drama on a larger scale was in full display during the huge Nazi rallies that Hitler and Goebbels organized:

The stadium filled with tens of thousands of enthusiastic party supporters, all dressed in uniform. To heighten the atmosphere Hitler always arrived late, to intensify the crowd’s thrill of anticipation to a fever pitch. Music, blaring out of hundreds of loudspeakers, thundered around the arena and the Nazis would join in the singing of the Nazi hymn, the Horst Wessel, or the German National Anthem.²¹

Soon, strains of either anthem, but especially the “Horst Wessel Lied,” took on an ominous quality to those persecuted by the Nazis as the soundtrack to the intimidation and bullying that took place. After the *Anschluss*, as Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg scrambled to calm the fears of the Austrian people, he decided to give a radio address (his last speech to his citizens): “Schuschnigg spoke over the radio system which also carried Austrian music. The program came to an abrupt halt after which the Horst-Wessel Song was heard. Schuschnigg was arrested, and the transfer of sovereignty was confirmed ...”²² The film *Prisoner of Paradise* (PBS Home Video 2002) mentions the singing of the “Horst Wessel Lied” by SA troops as a terrifying accompaniment to the ambush of Kurt Gerron’s movie set, effectively ending his career as a free man in Germany. Storm Troopers also administered severe beatings to prisoners who refused to sing the “Horst Wessel Lied” as they marched to concentration camps.²³ Eventually, the stature of the dual anthems rose to such a level that Hitler restricted their performance to only those events that he attended, and banned their playing for entertainment purposes:

Hitler aspired to supremacy even in the arts. The symbolic association of politics with music through official tunes—reserved strictly for the leader in the case of the Badenweiler Marsch, the National Anthem, and the Horst-Wessel song, which was not allowed to be performed at public coffee houses and other places of entertainment—was concentrated on this one person who commissioned not only the politicians of the realm but also the musicians.²⁴

It should be noted that some Jewish musicians utilized the “Deutschlandlied” in compositions as a form of protest against Nazi atrocities. Viktor Ullmann’s opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (1943), which he composed while imprisoned at Theresienstadt, features a distorted performance of the “Deutschlandlied,” and includes the character “Emperor Overall,” a satirical personification of Adolf Hitler that needles the “Deutschland über alles” phrase in the “Deutschlandlied.” The opera was never performed at Theresienstadt—after rehearsals were halted, Ullmann and the entire cast were killed at Auschwitz. Carlo Taube, another composer at Theresienstadt whose life ended at Auschwitz, also used the

²⁰ Meyer, *The Politics of Music*, 105.

²¹ Marshall Cavendish Corporation, *History of World War Two: Origins and Outbreak* (London: Marshall Cavendish, 2004), 83.

²² Meyer, *The Politics of Music*, 168.

²³ John Eckhard, “Music and Concentration Camps: An Approximation,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 20, no. 4 (2001): 275.

²⁴ Meyer, *The Politics of Music*, 285.

“Deutschlandlied” in his *Theresienstadt Symphony*. In the *Finale* of the work, a protest is sounded. As Arnost Weiss recounted:

the first four measures of “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” were repeated over and over and surged with ever-increasing ferocity until a last shriek “Deutschland, Deutschland” broke off before reaching “über alles” and died away in a horrible dissonance. Everyone understood.²⁵

The “Horst Wessel Lied” was also lampooned in underground cabarets and revues after the ascension of the Third Reich. Here, the lyrics address the Nazi leadership:

The prices high, the shops tightly closed,
poverty marches and we march with it.
Frick, Joseph Goebbels, Schirach, Himmler and comrades
they go hungry as well, but only in spirit.²⁶

With the fall of the Third Reich in May 1945, the Allied Control Council banned both German anthems. Four years later, the issue was resurrected with the establishment of a new Federal Republic of Germany. Fresh from his election victory, chancellor Konrad Adenauer wished to reintroduce the “Deutschlandlied,” while others hoped to erase the misdeeds of the past, at least symbolically, by establishing a new anthem (one popular option that never came to fruition was the Beethoven/Schiller “Ode to Joy”). Adenauer’s stance was initially unpopular, especially given the tone of military expansionism that had become associated with Hoffmann’s first stanza. Texts by Bertolt Brecht and other authors were suggested as replacements that would work with the same Haydn melody. A long-forgotten alternate “Deutschlandlied” stanza inspired hope for the creation of a more politically correct anthem; it was written in 1921 by Albert Matthai to reflect the German national psyche after World War I but was never used:

Germany, Germany above everything,
And in times of misfortune more than ever,
Only through misfortune can love
Show whether it’s strong and true;
And so shall the song continue
From generation to generation
Germany, Germany above everything,
And in times of misfortune more than ever.

German president Theodor Heuss, the other top leader in post-Nazi Germany, even commissioned a new anthem in 1950 by secretly asking poet Rudolf Alexander Schröder and composer Hermann Reuter to craft a new song.²⁷ The resulting “Hymne an Deutschland” failed to catch on and was eventually scrapped. Another option suggested by German athletes was to replace the singing of an anthem at public events with a minute of silence, but most proponents of this protest measure eventually conceded the need for an

²⁵ Quoted in Eckhard, “Music and Concentration Camps,” 292.

²⁶ George Broderick, “Das Horst Wessel Lied: A Reappraisal,” *International Folklore Review* 10 (1995): 100–27. Also available at http://www.george-broderick.de/ns_docs/ns-horst_wessel_lied.doc.

²⁷ Feinstein, “Deutschland über alles?,” 515.

anthem.²⁸ Bertolt Brecht wrote “Kinderhymne” in 1950 as a reaction to the state of affairs in Germany, using the first “Deutschlandlied” stanza for target practice:

And not above and not below
 Other nations do we want to stand,
 From the ocean to the Alps
 And from the Oder to the Rhine.
 And because we are making this land better,
 We love and protect it.
 May it appear to us to be the best
 Just as others consider theirs to be.²⁹

Heuss initially opposed restoring the “Deutschlandlied,” but later agreed to support Adenauer based on “the strong traditionalism of many Germans,” adding that he hoped to see to it that “the true meaning of [the] third stanza [of the “Deutschlandlied” is] fully understood and supported.”³⁰

Given the imperialistic tone of Hoffmann’s first stanza and the trivial nature of the second stanza, the lone third stanza of the “Deutschlandlied” was officially declared the national anthem of Germany’s modern era on May 2, 1952. Performances and recordings of the “Horst Wessel Lied” continue to be outlawed in Germany today, except for educational and scholarly uses. Once Germany was divided and the Berlin Wall erected, the anthem issue resurfaced again. German citizens were reminded of a painful past when, in 1956, a collection of former SS leaders offered yet another additional “Deutschlandlied” stanza in keeping with the militant anticommunist ideals they had first cultivated in the early 1930s. This new text was intended as a protest against communist rule in East Germany but did little more than open old wounds:

Over nations, borders, and zones
 echoes a call, the simple will.
 Everywhere where Germans live,
 the oath resounds to the heavens:
 Never will we bend,
 Never take force as justice,
 Germany, Germany above all
 And the Reich will rise again!³¹

The new communist government in East Germany chose “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” to distinguish itself from West Germany; the song fell out of favor by the early 1970s. Amazingly, the spirit of Hoffmann’s poetry yet again filled the hearts and minds of Germans hoping to heal their nation, and on October 3, 1990, “unity and justice and freedom for the German Fatherland” was finally realized when nearly one million Germans sang the “Deutschlandlied” as Germany was reunified.

Scholars and critics continue to debate the difficult history of German national songs even as the “Deutschlandlied” is performed today at German civic events. Some contend that it is a democratic song,

²⁸ Feinstein, “Deutschland über alles?,” 515.

²⁹ Hermand, “On the History of the ‘Deutschlandlied,’” 262.

³⁰ Eyck, *The Voice of Nations*, 175.

³¹ Hermand, “On the History of the ‘Deutschlandlied,’” 265.

while others assert, “it is the expression of an unbroken history of an aggressive German nationalism.”³² In 2012 this debate resurfaced in the consciousness of the German populace when the German national soccer team refused to sing the “Deutschlandlied” before the UEFA Euro semifinal match against Italy. Whether it was an act of defiance or simply a symbol of increasing ethnic diversity within the ranks of the German national team, the decision not to sing drew the ire of German citizens, politicians, and even soccer legend Franz Beckenbauer, who commented that obligatory anthem singing was “how we became World Champions in 1990.”³³ The setting of this controversy over the singing of the “Deutschlandlied” was not lost on many observers—the soccer match was being contested in Warsaw, Poland.

Perhaps the only way to reconcile opposing viewpoints surrounding the German anthem is to revisit the story of August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben. He was a patriot and ardent nationalist, yet he championed the democratic principles that were so quickly discarded in the name of German pride during the dark years of the country’s history. The installation of the “Horst Wessel Lied” effectively destroyed the message behind his poetry, infecting it with the worst kind of Nazi ideology shrouded in flag-waving patriotism. National anthems and iconography such as flags and emblems often inhabit an “untouchable” space above the fray of party politics, but they also wield the power to include *and* exclude. In Germany, the idealistic and populist writing of Fallersleben and the folksy infectiousness of Haydn’s melodic sensibilities were distorted and weaponized by Joseph Goebbels and other provocateurs within the administration of Hitler’s Third Reich. Stanzas written to inspire German unification ultimately helped tear the country apart. The “Deutschlandlied,” as beautiful and innocent as its origins might be, will to some be forever condemned to evoke the horrible lack of “unity and justice and freedom” in certain dark periods of German history.

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³² Eyck, *The Voice of Nations*, 176.

³³ Only two months prior to this anthem controversy, soccer player Adem Ljajic was cut from the Serbian national team for refusing to sing the Serbian anthem before a match with Spain. A Slav Muslim from the diverse southern region of Serbia known as Sandzak, Ljajic reportedly refused to sing for personal and religious reasons.

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