

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE HOLOCAUST

Timeline • People • Arts • Activities • Resources



Music of the Holocaust

Some of the most recognizable classics in music literature are of German origin. Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *Magnificat*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Brahms's *Lullaby*, Wagner's *Ring* series, Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, Robert Schumann's *Fantasia*, and Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* are but a few.

This rich musical heritage was used by Hitler to promote Aryan superiority. His ideas concerning music and art shaped the cultural atmosphere and political policies for all of Germany. All compositions written by Jews or by those persons suspected of being sympathizers were banned. It became unlawful for artists and musicians to perform in public without being first a member of the state sanctioned *Reichsmusikkammer* (Reich Music Chamber or RMK). Anyone who defied the law was arrested.

Many artists and musicians were government employees, hired in various capacities to create and disseminate Aryan **DEFN** culture. By 1939, the RMK leaders spoke of the elimination of the Jews from the cultural life of the people; exceptions were made for performances by prominent Jews from other countries. Jazz music was banned, as it was considered to be "non-Aryan Negroid." Control and censorship of all radio broadcasts were implemented, with only approved nationalistic music allowed. All other music was prohibited and labeled "entarte" **ED** or degenerate.

- **Music of the Ghettos and Camps.** Although the inhabitants were incarcerated, music was composed and performed giving voice to the indomitable human spirit within the ghettos and camps. Most cruelly, the large camps had orchestras and bands who were forced to play while their families, friends and neighbors were selected for death then sent to the gas chambers or firing squads.
- **Music of the Third Reich.** Hitler was decidedly against any music that did not have the Teutonic overtones of Wagner and Bruckner. State sanctioned music had to sound German.
- **"Degenerate" Music.** Like their counterparts in the Arts, musicians were trying to express through music the world around them. Any music that demonstrated abstract expressionism, jazz, or experimented with "atonality" was prohibited and labeled "entarte" or degenerate.
- **Music in Response to the Holocaust.** Composers and musicians have created a vast

array of music in response to the Holocaust. Written and performed both during and after the Holocaust, the requiems, operas, cantatas and ballads are filled with the stories of the victims, survivors and resistance fighters. Some are poems found in ghettos and camps that have been set to music while others are in remembrance of specific victims like Anne Frank.

- **[Teacher Resources](#)**. Here you will find lesson plans and other resources for the study of the Holocaust through music.

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Produced by the Florida Center for Instructional Technology,
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