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## Review of *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich*, by Michael Kater.

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*The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich.* By Michael Kater. Oxford University Press. 1997. Pp. xv + 327. \$35.00. ISBN 0-19-509620-7.

This is a serious book about "serious" music. Michael Kater's *Twisted Muse* is the author's second major contribution in five years to the study of music under National Socialism. In his previous volume, *Different Drummers* (Oxford, 1992), Kater provided a detailed and nuanced examination of jazz under the Nazis. In his new book, Kater turns his attention to the world of serious (*ernste*) music, a category encompassing not only classical compositions and performances, but also a good deal of the contemporary music of the 1930s and 1940s. This book bears many of the hallmarks of Kater's earlier work on jazz: resourceful research, copious documentation, straightforward writing, and a good working knowledge of music. Perhaps of even greater importance is that this book, like the one on jazz, succeeds brilliantly in conveying a sense of the ambiguities and contradictions of musical life in Nazi Germany.

This last strength emerges most clearly from Kater's analysis of the careers of several prominent musicians during the Nazi period, among them Richard Strauss, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan, Carl Orff, and Hans Pfitzner. Avoiding simplistic notions of "collaboration" and "resistance," Kater describes intricate patterns of behavior that were determined by personality, ideology, aesthetic sensibility, and self-interest. Although present in different proportions in different cases, these were almost always the key ingredients.

In the case of Furtwängler, Kater takes exception to the widely held belief that the conductor exploited his prominence in order to oppose Nazi rule from within (an interpretation most recently promoted in Fred K. Prieberg's huge biography of Furtwängler, *Kraftprobe*). Furtwängler has often been given credit for his protection of several Jewish members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Kater places such gestures in context by pointing out that Furtwängler also went to bat for quite a few musicians who were "anti-Semites, Nazis, and musicians sympathetic to the Nazi cause" (p. 196). The reason for this, argues Kater, was that "Furtwängler was not an altruist but a man obsessed with personal connections, who always had to be at the center of things" (p. 196). In attempting to understand why Furtwängler, for whom finding work abroad would not have been difficult, remained in Germany almost through the entirety of the Nazi period (he disappeared into Switzerland in early 1945), Kater reminds us that Furtwängler was a "mandarin," an "archconservative upper-bourgeois professional" (p. 197) who had become convinced that "upright Germans had to enter into perhaps distasteful alliances" with the likes

of the Nazis, whose antipathy for “degenerate music” he shared (p. 198). Although the self-centered conductor might have periodically issued minor gestures of dissent or defiance, his musical activity served the requirements of the regime at home and abroad. His performances often took place in “highly propagandistic frameworks,” such as when he directed *Die Meistersinger* at the 1935 Nuremberg party rally, which produced the Nuremberg racial laws (p. 200), and when he conducted at a performance honoring Hitler’s birthday in 1942 (p. 202). The regime paid the piper for his efforts. Hitler and especially Goebbels made certain that Furtwängler’s salary and other sources of income remained healthy (p.201). Kater concludes that Furtwängler was “an elitist, beholden to authority, and with a strongly conservative bent, a man who decided to ride out a dangerous political storm, assuaging his ego with occasional humanitarian commitments which for him, the powerful culture broker, entailed very few risks” (p. 203).

Whereas in Furtwängler’s case Kater seeks to revise existing scholarship, in other instances Kater offers unprecedented political analysis of important figures. A good case in point is that of Carl Orff. Until Kater, we have known very little about the Nazi-era career of this composer, whose choral work *Carmina Burana* is the only work of serious music composed in the Third Reich that has become part of the standard repertory. (The sections on Orff in *Twisted Muse* are drawn from a lengthier article by Kater in the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* in 1995.) Orff epitomized the apolitical artist who, for the sake of his music, adjusted to political realities. Although Orff managed successfully to conceal the fact of his partial Jewish ancestry, he understandably perceived himself to be especially vulnerable. Kater argues that these circumstances led Orff to “accommodate himself to a regime that at heart he detested.” The nature of Orff’s compositions complicated his predicament. *Carmina Burana*, like most of Orff’s compositions from the Nazi years, as certainly a far cry from the atonal modern compositions that the Nazis had ridiculed and banned, but as nevertheless “sufficiently idiosyncratic to be suspect” in some Nazi circles. Orff, his publishers, and his producers shrewdly worked the system, sounding out officials in the Reich Music Chamber and the Propaganda Ministry in advance of performances (p. 190). In Kater’s estimation, this was the record of neither a “hero” nor a “Nazi villain” (p. 190). Nor, it should be added, was it the record of a Nazi victim, as Orff preferred to portray himself after 1945.

The example of Orff points up a particular strength of the book, namely its ability to relate the fascinating details of individual careers to the unfolding of official policy and to institutional factors. For a musician, much could ride on an ability to negotiate one’s way through the political-bureaucratic labyrinth. Those who succeeded in doing so should not automatically be categorized as Nazis. Yet, Kater’s determination to illustrate the complexities and ambiguities of the era does not deter him from rendering harsh judgments where they are appropriate. Kater has little sympathy for German musicians, some of them household names, who collaborated with and prospered under National Socialism, only to lie about their record after the war. In a particularly compelling section (pp. 61–63) Kater demolishes the postwar self-exculpatory asser-

tions of soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Kater also provides the most careful treatment to date of the Nazi-era career of Herbert von Karajan (pp. 55–61). As for musicians who were purged for artistic or “racial” reasons, never before has the readiness of large numbers of German musicians, both major and minor, to acquiesce or cooperate actively in the purge of their colleagues, been as thoroughly and persuasively documented.

Kater devotes many pages to German musicians who attempted to buck Nazi trends, and to those who left the country. His chapter on “Persecuted and Exiled Jewish and Anti-Nazi Musicians” offers fascinating portraits of several of the century’s most important musical figures, such as Bruno Walter, Arnold Schönberg, Otto Klemperer, and Kurt Weill. Kater has performed a valuable service by bringing their stories together in one place, integrating them into a study whose main focus is on what took place inside Germany’s borders. These exiled German musicians were, after all, representatives of *German* musical traditions, a fact that should not be obscured by their physical separation from Germany, or by the willingness of the majority of their colleagues to make music under the auspices of National Socialism.

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