

## **Worlds in Collision: Music and the Trauma of War**

Saturday 29 June 2013, The Mansion House

### TRANSCRIPT

#### **How music changed sides – Patrick Bade**

**PATRICK BADE:** If one classical composer could be said to have created the soundtrack of the Second World War, it would have to be Ludwig van Beethoven. His music was played far more than that of any other classical composer everywhere, on both sides. In London, at the wartime Proms, he was by far the most performed composer, followed, oddly enough by Wagner, and with Elgar a long way down the list as the leading British composer. In Paris, the Swiss composer Arthur Honegger bravely wrote an article protesting at the endless Beethoven cycles that were foisted on the French public. On the screen we have the cover of *Les Ondes*, the house magazine of the collaborationist radio station Radio-Paris, and on the right-hand side we see the programme for one of these Beethoven cycles by Mengelberg. Beethoven was performed everywhere, in the darkest places at the darkest times. The indomitable Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who happily is still with us and living in London, wrote movingly in her autobiography *Inherit The Truth*, she writes very movingly about the experience she had as the cellist of the Auschwitz Woman's Orchestra and how on one occasion she played a string arrangement of the Beethoven *Pathétique* and what an uplifting experience this was. Around the same time in the Warsaw Ghetto, Janina Bauman came across some 78rpm records of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. Starving and freezing Bauman and her friends gathered in a ruined house to play these records over and over.

The Nazis were very proud of the Austro-German tradition of classical music. They regarded it as their trump card in the cultural propaganda war. This was their great cultural weapon. And in particular they saw it as a weapon against the barbarous and uncultured Anglo-Saxon nations. England was “Das Land ohne Musik”, the country without music and in November 1939, Hitler made a speech in which he claimed that one German, Beethoven, gave more to the world than all the British in history. So it was desperately irritating to the Germans that Beethoven was appropriated by the BBC as part of their war against the axis powers. Somebody had the brilliant idea that the opening motif of the *Fifth Symphony* is the Morse code for "V". The result was this.

[Music plays.]

This became the regular opening to broadcasts to the French Resistance from London. And to convince the French listeners that this is really coming from London we have another piece of music that was not written by an English composer –the Hornpipe from Handel's *Water Music*. There is a wonderful description of Goebbels' reaction to seeing a propaganda movie produced in this country during the war that I'm sure you will have seen. In it footage from Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, is doctored to make the Nazi hierarchy dance The Lambeth Walk. Apparently when

Goebbels saw this he had a monumental screaming temper tantrum, throwing over chairs and pretty much chewing the carpet. I imagine his reaction to my next little excerpt, in which anti-German propaganda lyrics have been cheekily appended to the opening theme of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, might have been quite similar.

[Music plays.]

The subject of popular music has been brought up a couple of times this morning. And I believe that if you ask anybody who is old enough to have lived through the Second World War, they will tell you it is the popular music of the time that evokes memories of the war most intensely - Vera Lynn in this country and Zarah Leander in Germany. If there is a musician who could be said to have provided the popular soundtrack of the Second World War it is probably Glenn Miller. On the popular music front the Americans had won the war before it started. In the interwar period, American popular culture conquered the world through movies, radio, electric recordings and particularly in the late 30s through the creation of swing. I would claim swing as one of the most powerful emotive propaganda weapons of the Second World War. It was so powerful there was nothing that Goebbels or anybody else could do about it. Most authoritarian rulers, not just the Nazis, but Stalin as well, hated swing, because swing. It was an expression, of youthful rebellion and therefore potentially subversive and very difficult to control. I'm going to play you two short excerpts from Glenn Miller's *In The Mood*. First of all a French recording made in Paris in 1941, as *Dans L'Ambiance*.

[Music plays.]

And now we're going to hear, something very weird, - is a band made up of members of the German Wehrmacht playing, *In der Stimmung* (probably) in a broadcast from Radio Belgrade in 1943.

[Music plays.]

I think the squeezebox accordion there does distract slightly from the sophisticated big-band sound. As I said, a love of jazz and a love of swing was often a way of registering resistance in occupied countries. This is particularly true in France, where they had this youth movement, known as the Zazous, who dressed in a kind of special uniform with long hair and baggy jackets and trousers.

The Nazis realized they could not suppress swing, because one of the most fundamental urges of everybody of military age in the Second World War was the desire to dance. In fact, for a short time the Vichy regime, did try to forbid public dancing, but it proved to be absolutely impossible. The Vichy authorities so strongly disapproved of Swing that the Prefect of the Cote d'Azur, actually issued an order forbidding the use of the word "swing" in public. This caused enormous problems with the rhyming of songs with the word "swing" in the title. This is a photograph from a Vichy or a Nazi propaganda magazine of Americans learning to dance. And I think that photograph is being used to try to say that there is something animalistic and barbaric about dancing to this kind of music. So swing, of all types of music in the Second World War, was the one that was most consciously used as a weapon. Glenn Miller broadcast to the Wehrmacht, they had the so called Wehrmacht Hour,

towards the end of the war, and it think this was to try and convince German soldiers that it was best to put down their arms and surrender to the Americans, rather than to wait for the Russians to arrive. Here is a little excerpt of Glenn Miller mangling the German language while trying to talk to the German troops and win them over.

[Music plays.]

The Nazis had a particular problem with jazz and swing on ideological grounds because of its Afro-American and Jewish origins. After emerging from the brothels of New Orleans the jazz idiom was appropriated by white composers who were more often than not of Russian Jewish background. This was the ultimate horrible cocktail as far as the Nazis were concerned. This was a bitter pill for Goebbels to swallow, but he was pragmatic enough to know that he had to do it. The Nazi authorities put together a jazz band "Charlie and his Orchestra" that was probably the best band in Europe during the Second World War. They picked up musicians from all over occupied Europe, from Holland, from Croatia, Italy and so on. Many would have been regarded by the Nazis as racially impure. They were saved from the death camps by their willingness to play in the Nazi cause. Charlie took popular American hits, usually by Jewish composers, and added propaganda words. The one I'm going to play to you is quite harmless. I listened to a number when I was putting this talk together and believe me, listening to three or four of them really does your brain in. There was one that was just so appalling I thought I don't think I can play that, it is too awful. It is an anti-Semitic version of Eddie Cantor's song, *Makin' Whoopee*. This particular propaganda song will probably make you laugh, but only because it is so fantastically unfunny in a clod-hopping Teutonic way.

[Music plays.]

That is the sound of a really sophisticated jazz band, but the Germans weren't going to win the war that way. Now we are going to see how far I get with time, but my intention is to talk about three female musical characters that crossed sides and did good service on both sides in the war. The Merry Widow, Madame Butterfly and Lili Marleen. It is often forgotten how popular operetta was. It was as popular as swing. It was everywhere. It was on Broadway. There were doing endless operetta revivals in London. There were special operetta performances put on to entertain the guards in Auschwitz to keep up their spirits for the hard work they were doing. The Nazis had a problem with operetta, in that they loved it, but most operetta composers were Jewish, or their librettists were. The only major exception to that was Franz Lehár. But even Lehar proved problematic because wife was Jewish, and so were all the main librettists in his career. Here he is with Goebbels. He enjoyed the special protection of Goebbels. On one occasion the SS came to take his wife away. Lehar had Goebbels' personal number and was able to phone him and have him personally give the order to leave Lehar's wife alone.

I think, when it really came down to it, Hitler and Goebbels preferred *The Merry Widow* to *Die Meistersinger*. You just have to think of Hitler in his bunker, humming along to *The Merry Widow* waltz, because that is what he really liked. In fact, he took time off to go to six performances of a single run of *The Merry Widow* with the handsome Dutch tenor Johannes Heesters, who died recently completely unrepentant

of his association with Hitler, at the age of 108. Here he is, at the time, singing from *The Merry Widow*.

[Music plays.]

This is the long-running hugely successful production of *The Merry Widow* With Jan Kiepura and his wife Martha Eggerth that was one of the great successes in New York during the war. In London another married couple the Australians Cyril Ritchard and Madge Elliott were equally successful. They took their production on tour all the way through the Mediterranean war-zone, across North Africa, - here they are in Cairo and finally to Tel Aviv. There must have been many refugees from Austrian Germany amongst the Tel Aviv audiences who shed a nostalgic tear during these performances. And all the time Lehár was still alive, and under the personal protection of Goebbels.

I can't be absolutely sure about the figures, but I suspect *Madame Butterfly* might have been the most-performed opera around the world during the Second World War. The only place it was dropped from the repertoire was the Metropolitan in New York, because they didn't want the representation of an American naval officer treating a Japanese girl badly; they thought that was a bit embarrassing. It was also dropped from the Marseille repertoire under very particular circumstances in November 1942 after the American torch landings in North Africa. That event prompted the Germans to invade the South of France; they took over Marseille, and I think they were just scared of what might happen in the audience in reaction to this particular passage of the opera in which Pinkerton and Sharpless proclaim the toast "America for ever!".

[Music plays.]

The fates of these two women – a perpetrator and a victim - were linked by *Madame Butterfly*. On the left is Fania Fénelon who wrote *Playing for Time*. She was in the Auschwitz Orchestra. She was on her way to the gas chambers and her life was saved because she could perform extracts from *Madame Butterfly*. On the right is the notorious Maria Mandel, probably the most evil woman psychopathic criminal in history. She was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people but she had a particular weakness for *Madame Butterfly*. I think there was an announcement; does anybody know *Madame Butterfly*? And Fania Fénelon said yes, and she was able to write out the notes, she was able to perform two pieces from it, One Fine Day and the Flower Duet and in her book she tells an extremely macabre story – looking in this face it's a little bit like Myra Hindley, looking into the face of evil, but this woman identified with the victimized *Madame Butterfly*, and at one point she saved a cute curly headed blond boy from the gas chambers to play with him and to fantasise about being *Madame Butterfly* in the last act with this sweet child. She played with the child for a few days before sending him off to the gas chambers.

This is Maria Cebotari, a beautiful Romanian soprano who must have looked gorgeous as well as sounding good as Butterfly. She was the most popular *Madame Butterfly* in the German-speaking world. The popular Butterfly here who sang it all through the war, was the Australian soprano Joan Hammond. She can never have looked very convincing. In Australia she was a champion golfer and she had the physique and the shoulders of a champion golfer. There is a wonderful story of her singing *Madame Butterfly* in Glasgow and having to catch the last train back to London for a concert the next day, so not having the time to change and startling

people at Glasgow Central Station by sprinting across the station concourse dressed in full gear as *Madame Butterfly*, in her kimono outfit.

My next excerpt is to show you how people used this kind of music, often in very personal ways. This is a story from my family, that's my mother on the right-hand side in her Wrens uniform and she was on a troop ship to Palestine in 1944 and she met a young soldier who fell in love with her, and rather sweetly declared his love by giving her this record, you can see it's - perhaps you can read it, it says "with love from Bill" across the title of this section of the love duet which is "ah, love me a little".

[Music plays.]

Our song of the Second World War in this country is *We'll Meet Again*, Vera Lynn. For a German it would be *Ich weiss es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen* with Zarah Leander, but for everybody it is actually Lili Marleen. And this is a most extraordinary story. The song was written by Norman Schultze. If you can read German, I hugely recommend his autobiography, it's a very entertaining, fascinating book from a man who was an absolute tool of the Nazis, but you can't dislike him, somehow he is so shameless in his book and so honest that you land up liking him. He came across these poems, by Hans Leip, written during the First World War and he wrote this song actually on a commission, and it's the story of a prostitute outside a barracks and waiting for her lover, under the lamp. It was recorded in 1939, just before the outbreak of war, by Lale Andersen, who was a little-known singer. It sold a few hundred copies, it disappeared without trace and would never have re-appeared if it were not for a whole series of accidents.

The Germans arrived in Belgrade, they took over the radio station and they wanted to use it to broadcast to the whole Mediterranean war theatre. But when they looked in the archives, they found that most of the music was either by Slav or Jewish composers, so that all got chucked out and there was almost nothing left, so they sent somebody to Vienna, and Vienna radio people were a bit sniffy and said, "You can have our cast offs, we don't want to play this particular record because it starts with a bugle call which is the Prussian rather than the Austrian bugle call", , and there was a big hostility between north Germans and south Germans and so on, so they didn't want to play it. So that was sent in amongst a small group of records, played over the radio, and the German troops loved it. This is a still from a propaganda film, made by the British, about this song, during the war, here it is being broadcast in Belgrade, here are troops in the North African desert listening to it, and there are stories about how there would be a short ceasefire, when it was played every night at 10.00 to end the broadcast, people would stop killing each other. Alberto, that's something to think about. For five minutes, everybody put down their guns and they listened to this song. And it was picked up by the British, and there is - let me recommend to you a wonderful publication by the German publishers the Bear family, on 10 CDs, 277 different versions of Lili Marleen in Estonian, Lithuanian, it just became this incredible phenomenon and now I really have to stop. Can I just play you a little bit of the original record?

[Music plays.]

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** I am glad we got that in at the end there! A lovely one to think about. These extraordinary many faceted roles of music that we're hearing about during the course of this weekend, it really is as many faceted as the experience of being human, isn't it? And like human beings, bewildering and contradictory and glorious all at the same time. But it's time for you maybe to ask our two speakers some questions.

**FLOOR:** A question to Alberto, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the role of music in promoting conflict during the dirty war in Argentina.

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** To begin with, we had the national anthem on all the time - you are talking about the last one? The Falklands war? Is that the war?

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** Can we have some dates please, this would help.

**FLOOR:** Late 1970s. The dictatorship in Argentina.

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** But that wasn't a war.

**FLOOR:** But it's called the dirty war.

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** The control of the country by the military who took over after we had a terrible president that was - we had two terrible presidents, Perón and then he as a joke, as a last joke, to finish destroying the country, appointed his wife, who was a cabaret dancer in Panama and who had no experience of politics, he appointed her vice-president of the country, and the constitution says that at the death of the president, the vice-president automatically becomes president, so we had this woman in the presidency and, of course, it was terrible and - all controlled by Washington, of course, because the whole of Latin America, they decide what they want to do with us, and CIA worked very well to organise the military takeover, and then, you know, most of the military people in charge were all former students at what I call the school of the assassins but the official name at the time was School of the Americas, a military school the United States had in Panama until the 2000s, and where all these military trained including also all the people who worked in the Pinochet government in Chile.

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** I think the main question though here is how music was involved in this.

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** Music was only involved in, like Lili Marleen here, to entertain people, and to keep them kind of distracted from what government was doing. It wasn't really a government, it was just a bunch of criminals running the country, all making a lot of money. One of them was later arrested: Videla, and he died only about a month ago in prison and there wasn't much music going on specifically because there was nothing to promote, all they wanted was to control the country, and become rich while they were in power, that is all.

**FLOOR:** What changed, and when, to make women composers more obvious, or come into being, why were there no women composers and then all of a sudden there are?

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** Yes, it's the beginning of the 20th century that you start to find women classical composers. You start to get figures like Lili Boulanger who tragically died aged 25 and who had already produced works of genius by then, God knows what the story would have been if she had lived another 10 years. This is a huge question, but I just remember recently reading a Jane Austen novel the other day and discovering the remark "music should not be amongst the accomplishments of a gentleman" so curiously enough in this country for a long time there was a prejudice in favour of the idea of music being more of a women's thing, which I think still prevails to some extent in this country, and yet oddly enough, we still find male composers coming through, which, you can't say that this was a kind of stereotypical ideal, this was what men should be doing, because if you look at a lot of these men's ought biographies, you find that their fathers thought it was the last thing they should be doing, Handel's father tried to beat it out of him. That's another huge issue.

**PATRICK BADE:** Can I say something about popular music? You will find that actually, some of the most popular songs of the Second World War were written by women. For my mother, who was on the screen just now, her big song that makes her cry from the Second World War is *Bésame Mucho*, I can't remember the name of the composer, but it is a Mexican woman composer. Another very important person in France who wrote a lot of songs, she was actually probably the most popular song composer in France during the Second World War was Marguerite Monnot who wrote the songs for Piaf.

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** It is fascinating that whatever, even composers, set out to achieve in terms of political allegiance in their work, or their songs or whatever, it can take on a life of its own and people will adopt it absolutely, to even quite contradictory, it would seem, points of view, isn't it? Lili Marleen is a fabulous example of that.

**PATRICK BADE:** But there are many other examples. It's so interesting how songs and pieces of music change their meaning because of political developments.

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** There are many cases in 20th century history, wars, some of them I named before, in Vietnam, in Korea, in also the Second World War, where women were brought specially when they noticed that soldiers were more affected by songs sung by attractive women than by men, and Doris Day is one of the famous ones, of course Marlene Dietrich, who made Lili Marleen also so famous.

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** Nigel has a question, by all means.

**NIGEL OSBORNE:** It is just an observational question, first of all I want to thank you very much for mentioning Lady Forsdyke, I was her assistant at Horton Hospital, an unsung heroine of music therapy, but to go on to another woman musician and creative artist who was my mentor at a distance, in the origins of art therapy in the use of it, for helping children, victims of conflict, my hero was Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in Theresienstadt and what I would like to hear your thoughts about is I'm trying very hard to get to the roots of Freidl's method, I have been working closely with the few remaining people who knew her. One thing we discovered was that it was intensely musical, we work with art therapy now, as music therapists, Friedl was using from the

voice, activated the body and then relaxed and motivated the body in her children, actually through the voice and music. I wondered if you had any thoughts as an artist about that relationship in your life? You pointed the effectiveness of art therapy but have you seen it in relation to music therapy? Do you see it as a relationship? This is for Alberto.

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** Definitely music can be therapeutic but that is very different from what I aim which is music for peace, you know, you have Daniel Barenboim with his fantastic work with the two orchestras, mixing Muslims and Jews, playing together, but that would never stop the fighting between - with Tony Blair organising wars in the Middle East, as a war envoy, but politically called peace envoy, to the Middle East –

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** Yes, that is one of the strangest job descriptions!

**ALBERTO PORTUGHEIS:** And becoming richer and richer by the day, with the more people die, the richer he becomes. You know, no matter how much music we play, that will never, never affect war and you can have in Iraq a quartet made by two Iraqi performers and two American soldiers, that they can play together, but it will never bring peace. Religion is also unfortunately very important here, because you have these people in the orchestra of Daniel Barenboim playing together, wonderful music, but when the Muslim young men falls in love with the Jewish musician and vice versa and they want to get married, their parents say no, "you can play Beethoven symphonies together but you cannot love each other, because our religion doesn't allow it". So that is the end of peace.

**FLOOR:** Can I ask Patrick if you would regard music as the most effective morale booster and propaganda tool of the war, however it was used, as opposed to words or speeches or any other form of culture? As opposed to theatre or anything else?

**PATRICK BADE:** I would just like to quote Woody Allen and say, "Every time I hear Wagner I want to invade Poland", that music affects you in a kind of very visceral way. It bypasses the intellect. So for me, yes, I would say absolutely, that is the case.

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** It is also worth remembering that by 1937 there was a tacit agreement between Bayreuth and the Hitler authorities that they would not perform Parsifal because its message of compassion and forgiveness was deemed too subversive and effeminate.

**PATRICK BADE:** I think they misunderstood Parsifal, I don't think that's its real message at all.

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** We can argue about that, but it goes to show how much more complicated these pieces of music are than the propagandists would like to make them. Music has a habit of doing things which we maybe don't intend. I would like end that by saying something I remember very strongly about music in this context, I was reading Kafka's *Metamorphosis* again recently, and there is a sentence that leapt out at me that I had never noticed before, towards the end, Gregor, having gone through this horrible transformation, hears a violin playing, and there is a

sentence that almost reduced me to tears when I read it: “how could he be an insect if music could do this to him?” And in my own experience of serious clinical depression, I have had that experience with music too, and maybe in war, for whatever purpose, to whatever political ends, people need that message, whether they are aggressors or victims or whatever, we need to be reminded that we are more than just animals, tearing each other - ignorant armies clashing by night, as Arnold Bennett put it. That's just my thought.