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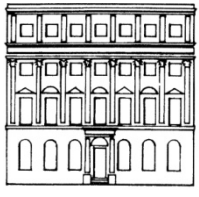

BULLETIN

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Dreams of Germany: Music and (Trans)national Imaginaries in the Modern Era
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CONFERENCE REPORTS

Dreams of Germany: Music and (Trans)national Imaginaries in the Modern Era, conference held at the German Historical Institute London, 5–7 Feb. 2015. Conveners: Neil Gregor (University of Southampton), Thomas Irvine (University of Southampton), and Andreas Gestrich (GHIL).

It is just over a decade since Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter published their seminal edited collection *Music and German National Identity* (2002). By resituating musical works within their broad sociocultural context, the contributors aimed to refine our understanding of how, from the eighteenth century, music came to be imagined as a purveyor of national identity. They sought, in other words, to show how 'writers, thinkers, statesmen, educators, impresarios, demagogues, audiences' (p. 3) and, subsequently, composers co-opted music into an emerging discourse about what it meant to be 'German'. The picture they painted debunked the notion that nationalism was in any sense an essential quality of music, even as it acknowledged the art world's long-standing investment in the idea of 'German music'.

Thirteen years on, 'Dreams of Germany: Music and (Trans)national Imaginaries in the Modern Era' brought together historians and musicologists to showcase the rich panoply of current research on Germany and its music. In so doing, it provided an opportunity to take stock of how broad scholarly developments have impacted these disciplines and, more specifically, have suggested new ways of thinking about the relationship between musical culture, identity, and the national.

One of the academy's most notable turns in recent years has been towards 'affect'—a concept that draws attention to visceral and bodily experiences of the world. In musicology, this turn has given a new impetus to explore music's emotional appeal: to recover from the

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

past, or document in the present, something of the lived experience of particular cultural encounters. If this concern seems eminently pertinent to the study of music, it nevertheless signals a departure from the historical preoccupation with the art form's intellectual value. This old disciplinary bias has also made its mark on research into music and national identity. Despite, or more likely because of, the emotive power of nationalist discourse, scholars have tended to downplay music's complicity in cultivating emotional senses of belonging.

That affect theory's expanded horizons might usefully be applied to (trans)national studies was evident from the conference's opening sessions. The first panel on 'Listening Communities' investigated the very different contexts in which music has helped to foster affective communities. Ryan Minor (Stony Brook) argued that the ensembles in Mozart's da Ponte operas not only staged community, but might also have invited eighteenth-century audiences to share in a moment of national identification. Hansjakob Ziemer (Max Planck, Berlin) showed how, by the early twentieth century, the idea of 'audience as nation' had become central to critics' and intellectuals' aspirations for German society. Bringing the conversation into the twenty-first century, Luis-Manuel Garcia's (Groningen) ethnographic paper presented a vibrant account of Berlin's Electronic Dance Music scene, around which a diverse migrant community has developed since the turn of the millennium. In a second session on 'Genres', Daniel Morat (FU Berlin) looked beyond listeners to performers, examining how in the early twentieth century collective singing, especially of patriotic songs, enacted a variety of 'dreams of Germany'.

Drawing these disparate periods and repertoires together was a shared interest in how participating in a musical event can create a feeling of belonging, even, as Minor and Garcia's case studies showed, in the absence of more formal modes of citizenship. At the same time, juxtaposing such contrasting scenarios raised an important issue: whose nation is captured in these musical moments? Whose national imaginary do they represent? These questions pose a specific challenge when it comes to research into historical audiences or groups of performers whose membership can, at best, be only partially known. While official voices ring on through history, to what extent a given public identified with or internalized this rhetoric is harder to say. What is more, if, as these papers suggested, music's

ephemerality has made it a pliable vehicle for nationalist discourse, this characteristic also leaves something beyond the historian's reach, intangible and remote.

Nevertheless, that such questions are being tackled points to how another turn in recent scholarship is impacting studies of music and nation: a turn, that is, towards the regional and the local. Decentring the official rhetoric that has dominated the public sphere has enabled scholars to bring to light other perspectives on what it has meant to locate a sense of Germanness in music. At this conference, the value of recognizing local particularities was demonstrated in a panel on 'The *Longue Durée* of the Regional (Bavaria)'. Kirsten Paige (Berkeley) described how Wagner used cutting-edge rail and ventilation technologies to realize his utopian vision of Bayreuth as a place in which the German nation might be de-industrialized and re-naturalized. Dana Smith (Queen Mary, Univ. of London) focused on the Jüdischer Kulturbund in Bayern, revealing local variations in how 'Jewish' music was understood, and in the extent to which women were involved as performers. Concluding the panel was Emily Richmond Pollock's (MIT) account of how tensions that pervaded German operatic culture—between past and present, tradition and progress—were mediated at the re-opening of Munich's Bayerische Staatsoper in 1963. By attending to the discourses that surrounded regional institutions at a particular historical moment, these papers highlighted the extent to which national imaginaries are always contingent, shifting, and contested. They also drew attention to the murky relationship between state and civic culture, as they probed how local concerns intersected with national agendas.

The counterpart to this regional turn can be found in the rapidly expanding field of transnational studies. When it comes to music, this development has invited a fresh consideration of how composers, musicians, works, audiences, and discourse have traversed national borders and how this movement has shaped musical meaning, both at home and abroad. Speaking to the impact of transnational musical movement in Germany, Carolin Krahn (Vienna) sought to nuance our understanding of *Italiensehnsucht*, using a close reading of select texts to expose German critics' 'schizophrenic' attitude towards Italian music. In so doing, she showed how certain writers drew on notions of 'the Italian' in their attempts to define 'German' music. Tobias Becker (GHIL) also touched on the reception of foreign

operettas in Berlin, as he explored how scenarios and libretti were modified for different cities and their publics.

In contrast, a panel on 'Others, Near and Far' asked how German music has been imagined beyond the country's national borders. Laura Tunbridge (Oxford) and Annika Forkert (Royal Holloway, Univ. of London) provided two examples of inter-war Britain's 'dreams of Germany', the former focusing on the London Lieder Club, which was founded in 1932 so that elite audiences could experience live (as opposed to recorded) performances of German art song; and the latter on conductor Edward Clark's attempts to promote new German music to British audiences. Meanwhile, Felipe Ledesma-Núñez (Stony Brook) and Brooke McCorkle (Pennsylvania) explored the impact of German imaginaries further afield: the first in an account of how the prominence of musical evolutionism in turn-of-the-century Ecuador inspired composers to draw on German, as well as Ecuadorian, traditions in their efforts to create a national art music; and the second through an exploration of how from the late nineteenth century Wagner's philosophies were appropriated by disaffected Japanese intellectuals, even though his operatic music remained largely unperformed until the 1940s. In another panel, Brooks Kuykendall (Erskine College) took a more traditional stance, analysing Britten's *War Requiem* to suggest ways in which the composer might have drawn inspiration from Bach's Passions. Together, these papers pointed to how the myth of German musical supremacy has been perpetuated across the globe, at once enlivening and disempowering other musical cultures.

In addition to the focus on geographical movement, another prominent conference theme was the transmission of musical ideas across time, a subject that came to the fore in a panel titled 'Fantasies, Reminiscences, Nightmares', which dealt with the issues of cultural memory and loss. Here, Martha Sprigge (Michigan) used Georg Katzer's *Aide Mémoire* to reassess antifascist music's place in postwar East Germany's commemorative culture, as an ambiguous, questioning voice rather than simply a propagandistic one. Moving across the border, Lap Kwan Kam (Taiwan) explored how Austria tried to disentangle itself from a pan-German musical narrative and establish a distinctive Austrian identity. Whereas the transnational perspective focused on external others, these papers revealed an othering from within that was central to the postwar process of rehabilitation.

An altogether different sort of cultural movement was explored in a session on 'High and Low in Interwar Germany'. Over the past decade, a growing body of scholarship has sought to complicate our understanding of the relationship between high and low, but to date relatively little thought has been given to how these ideological categories played into nationalist agendas, a lacuna that Nicholas Attfield's (Brunel) and Martin Rempe's (Constance) papers began to redress. Attfield revisited the early writings of theorist August Halm, which suggest that Halm's educational initiatives ultimately aimed to transform high German culture into a *Volkskunst*. The desire to familiarize the masses with their illustrious musical heritage continued to shape musical culture in the 1930s and 1940s, as Martin Rempe demonstrated in his investigation into the Nazi's aspirations for a 'new popular music'. How the tension between popularity and prestige has been negotiated in relation to the national promises a fruitful avenue for further research.

The final panel focused on postwar popular culture. Julia Sneeringer's (CUNY) paper explored the club scene of Hamburg in the early 1960s as a site of transnational encounter between British musicians, German cultural entrepreneurs, and young music fans, including British and Germans, who descended upon the port city from all over the world. The popular club scene became both a site on which national belonging and identity could be re-thought (or re-felt) and a liminal space in which, in the wake of a recent war, the tensions and problems of national belonging could be momentarily suspended. Similarly, Jeff Hayton (Wichita) explored how in the punk scene, a musical subculture supposedly very distanced from anything 'national', musicians and fans articulated both their critique of aspects of postwar German culture and their alternative visions of what being German might entail. The last paper returned to the contemporary genre foregrounded in the first panel, Electronic Dance Music, and to the reception of the German electronic band *Kraftwerk* in the USA. Focusing on parodic accounts of German EDM music produced in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s, Sean Nye (Univ. of Southern California) explored how such parody served both to familiarize American audiences but also to reinscribe assumptions about German national culture—centred on the trope of the *Autobahn* and its attendant clichés of rationality, efficiency, and boredom—that figure, like the ideas adumbrated in Garcia's opening panel paper,

as a profound fantasy of Germany articulated from beyond its borders.

The themes of the conference were brought together in two keynote presentations. The first, 'Cinematic Dreams of Germany', was given by Berthold Hoeckner (Chicago), who employed psychoanalytic perspectives to compare representations of Germany in films by Jean-Luc Goddard and Alexander Kluge. Meanwhile, in a panoramic survey of German musical cultures over the last three centuries, Celia Applegate (Vanderbilt) both revisited the themes of the original intervention that prompted this conference and asked how, under the headings 'organizations and institutions', 'performance and its technologies', and 'the question of interpretation' that story might now be told differently.

'Dreams of Germany' exemplified how research into music and (trans)national imaginaries has transformed over the past decade. The sheer breadth of the papers was remarkable: in geographical terms, they ranged from Berlin and Munich to Tokyo and Ecuador; in time period from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century; in methodology from close readings of literary, musical, and filmic texts to ethnography; and in sources from musical scores to photographs, architectural plans, and sound recordings. While canonical composers and works remained well represented, they by no means dominated. Taken together, this scholarship seemed to foreground the complex plurality of national discourse and musical culture. Yet by putting such diverse contexts side-by-side, the conference also raised the thorny question of how macro socialities and micro-level experiences might relate. To what extent did these multifarious German musical fantasies intersect? How much of the past is carried into the present, in spoken or unspoken ways? It is evident that discourse about the nation continues to shape musical encounters, just as music continues to be used to voice national imaginaries; but the points at which these narratives overlap often remain elusive. One thing that this conference made certain is that there are many different Germanys, and many different German musics.

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