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-I will be using an audiovisual in my presentation.

Speech: French Identity and Music under Nazi Occupation

This project looked at the Nazi occupation of France during World War II and the collaborationist government formed in Vichy from July 1940 to August 1944. It specifically examined how the musical sense composers had formed of national identity before the war was influenced or changed by the Nazi occupation. Over the course of my research, my thesis became: because French identity was not entirely coherent between the wars, musicians had different reactions to Nazi domination. Some who had formed their musical ideas about French national identity before the war maintained elements of their original style while others, based on their wartime experience, became more pronounced in the development of their musical styles; others still retreated to safer, less controversial music as a way of protecting themselves and their family members. To explicate this thesis I looked at the role of music in everyday life as well as life under the collaboration government and focused on four musicians: Alfred Cortot, Francis Poulenc, Olivier Messiaen and Andre Jolivet, who together represented a spectrum of reactions. Before we can delve into these musical personalities, though, it is important to understand the situation of musicians before the occupation.

The end of WWI in 1918 led to tensions and questions about French National Identity. Politically there was a shift away from conservatism in favor of more leftist socialist and communist tendencies. Musically there was an attempt to resist German influence. Les Six was an example of a group of musicians that resisted German influence and supported the leftist leanings of the Popular Front government. As musicologist Christopher Moore writes, this “Groupe des Six,” “were committed to a tonally-based, neo-classical aesthetic that derived

authority from French musical traditions and the example of Igor Stravinsky” (Moore 473). This group, which rejected the music of Richard Wagner, included Louis Durey, Francis Poulenc, and Arthur Honegger. Further, Jane Fulcher writes, “[this group] like other intellectuals, confronted the phenomena of mass political organizations and parties, and like contemporary writers, realized the roles they could play with regard to the ideologies they either supported or opposed...just like their elders in the twenties, they faced the major issues through stylistic means, most defending French democratic values...against a contestatory fascist romanticism” (Composer as Intellectual 15).

Another group of musicians was Le Jeune France, which formed in 1936 in response to the leftist Popular Front government. This group, made up of Olivier Messiaen and Andre Jolivet, focused on a move towards modernistic music and spirituality. While the group neither outwardly disagreed with nor supported the Popular Front, it tried to find a middle ground between the right and left. These tensions over French identity only became more pronounced and accentuated during the Nazi occupation years.

The Nazis entered France in June of 1940. Marshal Philippe Petain, a venerated war hero from WWI, was called to power to manage the surrender and form a collaborative government with the axis powers known as the Vichy Government. While Vichy had some legal authority in the northern zone of France, it was more open in the southern unoccupied “free zone.” However, the southern zone encountered increased Nazi pressure by 1942. Tensions and different interpretations about French Identity only became more pronounced under a government that was becoming a merger of both German and French ideas.

Of this time, Fulcher explains that while Petain later said the Vichy government protected the French citizens and promoted French nationality, in another sense it actually endangered its

citizens because people were forced into labor service and many Jews were expelled from the country. Fulcher paraphrases Robert Paxton when she writes “The result was an ‘incoherent polity’ lacking unanimity in both its social vision and goals and thus in its own identity: what it meant to promote ‘French values’ during Vichy was far from clear” (“French Identity in Flux” 264).

For example: In the German occupied zone, Nazi’s encouraged cultural development because it made them look better in the eyes of the rest of the world. On the other hand, they enforced the performance of German music. Joseph Goebbels the minister of propaganda pushed German music on the French by reopening France’s leading music college as well as the opera houses and concert halls and forcing the French to perform German music (Riding 143). Wagner’s operas were often performed at the Paris opera house because Hitler regarded Wagner’s music highly.

One of the few contemporary accounts of this time was written by Mina Lederman her article, “France’s Turncoat Artists,” was published in *The National* in 1940. She demonstrates the danger of French culture being taken over by the Nazis. She wrote “Even in Paris today, among men of arts and letters, there must be many not yet completely indifferent to their prestige beyond the German sphere of Europe, and not without some concern for their ‘historical position.’ To reach the mind of France is an effort worth making for more than immediate reasons. The obliteration of Paris as a focal center of culture and humane civilization would be an irreparable loss not only to France but to the whole post-war world” (Lederman 171). Lederman’s worries about the fate of French culture, as well as the tension over French Identity, shows the struggles composers were facing, no matter where in France they lived. The five musicians mentioned early illustrate this tension. Alfred Corot is used as an example of a very

German influenced musician, Francis Poulenc as a representative of the more traditional French music, Andre Jolivet-as a mix between traditional and modernistic, and Olivier Messiaen, throughout the war, only became more modernistic in his approach.

The arranger Alfred Cortot was a Franco-Swiss pianist and conductor whose love for German music was clear before the occupation. In 1903 he had conducted excerpts of Parsifal, even though doing so was illegal outside Bayreuth; he took this step because he loved Wagner's music so much (Spotts 192). While he was barred by Cosima Wagner from again going to the festival, Cortot said "On Leaving Bayreuth I had the feeling of taking with me something very precious"(Spotts 193). The Germans picked up on Cortot's love and he became the star performer during the Vichy years (Riding 144). He was given a seat on the national council and Vichy authorities placed him in the ministry of education and youth. In 1941, he was given broad control of French musical life and was the first French artist to hold a government position (Spotts 193). As Cortot himself said, "Collaboration...in the sphere of music between Germany and France is something I have been engaged in for more than forty years, despite events in other spheres which oppose it" (Spotts 195). Cortot used the occupation and his love of German music to his advantage. Although he was not a composer, he is an example of how musicians who supported German ideals and values were safer and had more prominence and financial support during the Vichy years. I looked at Cortot because he is a good example of how French national identity became more compromised under Vichy.

Francis Poulenc, as I mentioned before, was a member of Les Six. During the occupation years he was also a member of the Front National des Musiciens, a group of composers who opposed the Nazis. While they weren't successful politically, it is clear that Poulenc rejected Nazi ideals and that his work should be interpreted in this light. Poulenc's views on French

traditionalism continued during the occupation years. His ballet *Les Animeaux Modeles* was a throwback to ancient French history. He based the ballet on the stories of La Fontaine, which were considered deeply French. Poulenc wrote of this piece, “during the darkest days of the Summer 1940, I wanted to find, no matter what the cost, a reason to hope for the future of my country” (Simeone 30). Here is a clip from part of this ballet: you can hear the joyfulness and happiness expressed in the piece. In the ballet, Poulenc also used a fast waltz to illustrate the scene between the Lion and Elmire. This waltz was in fact a popular French dance piece of the 1930’s, and his use of it could be seen as a way of reminding the French of their past and the greatness they once had enjoyed. Further, when describing the ballet Poulenc also wrote “From the fables, I chose those which did not require too much dressing up as animals, or those which could be represented symbolically, such as *Le Lion Amoureux*” (Simeone 30). This desire to represent the animals symbolically, Nigel Simeone, professor of historical musicology at the University of Sheffield maintains, suggests that Poulenc wanted the entire work to be seen symbolically as a celebration of France’s past. This reminder to the French of the greatness of their past is consistent with Poulenc’s role as a member of Les Six. However during the war where it became increasingly difficult to determine clear French values, it is evident that Francis Poulenc became more solidified in his desire to express French traditionalism and that he continued through his music to reject fascism

Oliver Messiaen, a member of Le Jeune France, went through a terrible experience towards the beginning of the occupation. Captured and made a prisoner of war in early 1940, he composed his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* for the four instruments he had available in the prison: a piano, violin, cello, and clarinet. Before the occupation, Messiaen had already been heavily influenced by modernism and spirituality in music. But his *Quator pour la fin du temps*

shows how during the war he became even more spiritual. Of the piece Messiaen later said "it was an era of dreadful despair...I found myself in Silesia, a prisoner of war...I was persuaded that I had forgotten everything about music...I paused upon the image of Saint John, the angel crowned with a rainbow. I found in it a glimmer of hope" (Rischin 51). In his preface to the first published score in 1942, Messiaen wrote, "conceived and written during my captivity...It was directly inspired by this quotation from the revelation." Leslie Sprout writes that Messiaen's ambivalence has been a "stumbling block for commentators who seek to relate the Quartet to the circumstances of the camp" (Sprout 261). In a 1958 radio interview conducted by Antoine Golea, Messiaen still resisted the idea that what had happened in the camp had an effect on the music he composed there (Sprout 261). Rebecca Rischin, in her study of Messiaen's Quartet, wrote that "at a time in which a real life Apocalypse must have seemed imminent to many, these four men sang of resurrection, leading their audience in a musical prayer" (Rischin 66). While this piece had its first premiere in the prison, it later premiered in France to mixed reviews—partly because of its modernistic approach and partly because people were not clear on Messiaen's meaning. Sprout writes that people in France were accepting of modernistic music if it portrayed the hardships of the war, but Messiaen was adamant that his piece was completely religious in intent. Regardless, his Quartet demonstrates that Messiaen continued to hold and emphasize the ideals he had held before the occupation. It seems as though the *Quartet for the End of Time* could have been written in rebellion against the Nazis. Even its title seems to suggest that he saw the Nazis are responsible for the end of the world. Yet, Messiaen always insisted that he remained focused on what was important to him (i.e., the spiritual realm) and did not see himself as actively part of any anti-Nazi effort.

Andre Jolivet, during his war experience, moved away from the modernistic tendencies he had as a member of Le Jeune France. His daughter said of him "He later wrote that the second World War gave him the opportunity to use other types of musical expression [but] to me it appears now a way of protecting not only himself but his family [After 1945] he came back to what he had been in the 1930s" (Rae 9). As a soldier, Jolivet had seen the effects of war and he turned this into a musical narrative. Leslie Sprout comments that his piece *Three Laments of a Soldier* marked a move away from his earlier pieces such as *Mana* and *Cinq incantations* (Sprout 280). These earlier pieces had given Jolivet a reputation of being merely a modernist who valued technical novelty over artistic expression. I think Jolivet's move away from expressionism and modernism during the occupation can be seen as a form of self-protection, because the Nazis did not support heavily modernistic music. At the same time, they allowed the French to have their "laments" because they wanted to seem culturally accepting and to allow French cultural despondency over what had happened. In 1943, Jolivet composed *The Pastorals de Noel*, which was a trio for flute, bassoon, and harp. The piece is gentle and evocative. The four movements are entitled "The Star," "The Mages," "Virgin and Child," and "Arrival and Dance of the Shepherds." I think Jolivet focused on this type of music because it was safer and it would not draw attention to him or his family, as his wife was Jewish.

In conclusion, I think it is clear that tensions over national identity before the outbreak of WWII forced composers to challenge how they presented their French identity in music. There was no one really solid response of composers, a variety which, I think, occurred because there was no one unified idea of what it meant to be French. Both the primary and secondary sources I studied demonstrated that the music of the four men I focused on was influenced by their conceptions of national identity. I focused on these four because I wanted to show a spectrum of

responses and then illustrate how each of their conceptions of national identity played an important role. I used Alfred Cortot because I thought he represented the strong German influence; Francis Poulenc, as a member of Les Six, already favored traditionalist music but this feeling became more solidified under the occupation. Both Olivier Messiaen and Andre Jolivet had experimented with modernistic approaches before the war but as a result of their individual circumstances, each represented French identity differently during wartime. These diverse approaches and musical ways of representing French identity illustrate how the lack of a unified idea of what it meant to be French made it harder for the French to rally effectively, including through classical music. Understanding the situation of French musicians helps to provide context for how music and identity are intertwined and how both can be affected by and do affect political climates. Such an increased comprehension of culture can help us see how humans adapt in dangerous times.

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