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BORIS VON HAKEN, *Der 'Reichsdramaturg': Rainer Schlösser und die Musiktheater-Politik in der NS-Zeit* (Hamburg: von Bockel Verlag, 2007), 234 pp. ISBN 978 3 932696 64 0. €35.00

SVEN OLIVER MÜLLER and JUTTA TOELLE (eds.), *Bühnen der Politik: Die Oper in europäischen Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Die Gesellschaft der Oper, 2 (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2008), 225 pp. ISBN 978 3 486 58570 4. €29.80

Historical investigations of the links between politics and the arts have met with increasing interest over the last two decades or so and exciting new studies are constantly emerging. Crucially, too, scholars have increasingly moved away from relating to the dictatorships of the twentieth century and their control of artistic output and have tackled the arts in wider political contexts. This does not mean, however, that the arts in Nazi Germany, for example, have been exhaustively covered, and there are still many aspects which remain to be addressed. For example, a book-length study of Hanns Johst has only recently been published,¹ and people such as Hans Hinkel and Rainer Schlösser are similarly under-researched.

Boris von Haken's study, which was accepted as a Ph.D. thesis by the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities at the Free University of Berlin in 2007, aims to fill one of these gaps. His book on Rainer Schlösser and official Nazi policies vis-à-vis music is, in fact, the first scholarly attempt to discuss the Reich dramaturge's office (*Reichsdramaturgie*). Schlösser was one of Nazi Germany's pre-eminent cultural functionaries. From 1933 he was Reich dramaturge (*Reichsdramaturg*) and headed the theatre section in the Propaganda Ministry, and in 1935 also became president of the Reich Chamber of Theatre (*Reichstheaterkammer*). In these roles, and in particular as *Reichsdramaturg*, Schlösser was theoretically in a position to control the repertoire at every single German theatre.

Unfortunately, however, Boris von Haken's approach is confusing. He claims that he is primarily interested in structural questions and the workings, influences, and history of the *Reichsdramaturgie* in terms of *Institutionengeschichte* (institutional history). He specifically points out that he does not intend to write a biography of Schlösser (p. 8). His book title, however, suggests otherwise; a study which

¹ Rolf Düsterberg, *Hanns Johst: 'Barde der SS'* (Paderborn, 2004).

clearly embraces Schlösser's personal input, policies, and beliefs. The other major problem with von Haken's study is his sole concentration on *Musiktheater*, that is, opera, operetta, and concerts performed at subsidized theatres. This focus leaves out both musical activity outside theatres (for example, amateur, and especially, choral societies) and theatrical performances. This is all the more unfortunate as contrary to von Haken's claim, music theatre did not represent the *Reichsdramaturgie*'s 'principal remit' ('zentrale Themenstellung', p. 8) – a claim, incidentally, which he does not back up – as Schlösser's major field of operation was, in fact, the theatre. Not all municipal theatres could afford to have their own orchestra and chorus, and opera in particular proved too expensive for many playhouses to perform. Had the author presented some figures here it would immediately have become obvious that the number of theatres without any provision for music, presenting only *Sprechtheater* (spoken drama) was, in fact, substantial. Intriguingly, von Haken adds that a focus on the theatre was not necessary anyway as 'a first study of this topic already exists' ('für diesen Bereich eine erste Studie bereits vorliegt', p. 8). This is an opportunity missed as the study he mentions, while pioneering in many ways, is not particularly strong on the *Reichsdramaturgie* and the topic would have merited another critical reflection of Schlösser's influence on the theatre.²

Unfortunately, von Haken continues to offer misleading interpretations. In the introduction he claims that 'what was performed in concert halls did not appear to have mattered much' ('was in den Konzertsälen gespielt wurde, erschien . . . kaum relevant', p. 9), although works by 'non-Aryan' composers by and large ceased to be put on the stage straight after the Nazi seizure of power. Von Haken fails to mention that leading artists such as the operetta composer Jean Gilbert, the famous tenor Richard Tauber, and conductors such as Fritz Busch were forced to leave Germany in 1933. The names of Kurt Weill and Paul Dessau, who also had to emigrate from Nazi Germany, do not even appear in the index. To be fair, von Haken later deals with repertoire policy and the Nazi ban on 'non-Aryan' works and composers (chs. 3, 4, 5) but the above statement is clumsy if nothing else. Equally problematic is the fact that von Haken's only

² Henning Rischbieter (ed.), *Theater im 'Dritten Reich': Theaterpolitik, Spielplanstruktur, NS-Dramatik* (Seelze, 2000).

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source for this claim is Werner Stephan's 1949 biography of Goebbels. Judging from this statement alone it appears that he has failed to consult either the lists of 'unwanted' composers, musicians, librettists, and so on,³ or such seminal studies as Joseph Wulf's documentation of music in the Third Reich.⁴ Fortunately, von Haken later admits that the content of musical programmes was, indeed, scrutinized after 1933 (for example, on pp. 48–9).

However, von Haken has also done some convincing work. His discussion of the peculiarities of the way files were composed, passed on, and kept in the *Reichsdramaturgie* (pp. 10–12), for example, is illuminating. He clearly and rightly points out that Schlösser, unlike functionaries working in more established offices and ministries, was not bound to a particular legal framework. His job, then, does not seem to have consisted of classic administrative duties, but largely of *Menschenführung* (translated literally as 'leading people', pp. 15–17). The particular strength of von Haken's study is the discussion of the *Reichsdramaturgie* as an office within the framework of the Propaganda Ministry. After humble beginnings without any actual remit or executive powers, Schlösser managed to gain influence via the Reich Theatre Chamber, part of Goebbels's Reich Culture Chamber (*Reichskulturkammer*) founded in November 1933. Eventually the *Reichsdramaturgie* was put on a firm legal footing with the 1934 Reich Theatre Law, which also established the Propaganda Ministry's leading role in Nazi cultural policy. Von Haken identifies the chaos in the administration in the first few years after the Nazi seizure of power, presents the different power players and their various concepts of the arts in detail (Göring, Rosenberg, Goebbels, Ley), and discusses Schlösser's day-to-day work in detailed and often fascinating case studies. He also makes clear that especially during the early years of his office, Schlösser's power seems to have been limited and that many theatres did not follow his directives. Crucially, too, the general policy of the *Reichsdramaturgie* was destructive and reactive rather than constructive and proactive. This finding stands

³ e.g. Adolf Schmid (ed.), *Judentum und Musik: Liste der jüdischen Komponisten als Unterlage für die Säuberungsaktionen auf dem Gebiete der Musik* (Straßburg, Abteilung Volksaufklärung und Propaganda beim Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsaß, 1941).

⁴ Joseph Wulf, *Musik im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt, 1964).

in clear contrast to the extravagant claims of the regime's representatives that they were establishing a genuine Nazi art. In fact, this materialized neither in theatre, nor in music, poetry, or the visual arts.

After consolidating his power, Schlösser tried hard to appear not as a crude censor but, as von Haken persuasively demonstrates, as someone who closely cooperated with the theatres on questions of repertoire. When proposing a play for production he avoided appearing forceful, although theatre managers clearly knew what was expected of them. Equally, when approached by composers who were looking for an official endorsement of their work, or who wanted particular theatres to be instructed to produce their piece, Schlösser was anxious not to commit himself. He would state only that there was no 'objection' to a production if, indeed, it corresponded in some way to official ideology (see, for example, the case of Ortner's opera *Tobias Wunderlich*, which von Haken discusses on pp. 39–41). Schlösser manoeuvred carefully and stayed flexible. He did not take sides with particular factions within the Nazi movement, and von Haken presents plenty of evidence of tactical ad hoc decisions which could have gone either way. The author convincingly elaborates on this in the case of three operettas which were regarded as 'degenerate' (as written/composed by Jewish artists), but still received official permission to be performed in Nuremberg in 1935 because theatre manager Maurach had the backing of the mighty Julius Streicher (pp. 97–102). In particular, Schlösser was prepared to grant exemptions if there were financial considerations, for example, with box office hits such as Georges Bizet's operas (although it was credibly insinuated that Bizet was not of 'Aryan' decent). Even with ideological questions central to the Nazis' concerns, decisions were not made immediately. The Propaganda Ministry did not enforce *Berufsverbote* (bans) against Jewish artists until 1935. Here, however, von Haken concentrates too much on the perpetrators' side rather than the victims' perspective, which would have benefited his study. Most Jewish artists had been forced to leave their jobs long before Goebbels had formulated an official policy in response to pressure from local politicians and SA groups.

Overall, the book leaves the reader with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it is well written and well researched, and von Haken is able to contextualize most of his interesting case studies. He has worked in a considerable number of archives, has consulted the rele-

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vant sources, and manages his material well. On the other hand, the introduction is at times confusing, as is the title of the book. It is also unfortunate that von Haken does not discuss the research situation and fails to relate his study to other approaches. However, as an attempt to discuss the office of the *Reichsdramaturgie* from an institutional perspective, von Haken largely succeeds.

Much broader in approach is *Bühnen der Politik*, a collection of essays on opera in European societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries edited by Sven Oliver Müller and Jutta Toelle. The publication is part of a larger research project funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, which investigates opera not only as a musical art form, but also as linked to social practices and as part of modern cultural history. Broadly speaking, the editors aim to investigate links between politics and opera. In their introduction they make it clear that although audiences often 'only' seek entertainment and amusement when visiting the opera, there are no apolitical performances, that opera, and art in general, is always political (p. 10). This is particularly obvious in the productions of *Historien-* or *Nationalopern* towards the end of the nineteenth century, which put powerful national myths onto the stage. Audiences were invited to make connections between their cultural heritage and the present political situation. Less sublime methods of influencing audiences were similarly used, mostly to stabilize the political status quo, for example, gala performances, architecture, conventions, or specific costumes, scenery, and so on (pp. 13, 15). In fact, 'Sinn stiften' (literally, making sense of, or giving meaning to, something) was important, and reducing often complex political issues to one glamorous performance made them 'digestible' (pp. 14, 17). The other side of the coin is that opera performances did not necessarily have to be acclamatory. They, or press reviews of their performances, could be highly critical, raise sensitive issues, cause arguments, or even riots.

Methodologically Müller and Toelle locate their approach within New Political History, which sees politics as a communicative and competitive process (p. 9). They claim that attendance at opera performances not only mirrored the principles of social order, but also created them. Particularly interesting is the contextual approach of the book (and the whole research project, see below). So far opera research has largely concentrated on the operas themselves and has neglected the social and political contexts in which these operas

were produced, including audience reception and contemporary reviews.

The volume is structured by three overarching themes: performance, affirmation, and conflict. In the first essay in the 'Performance' section, Michael Walter argues that the popularity of the *grand opéra* can be explained by the *liberté* of its structure, which he interprets as a manifestation of nineteenth-century liberalism, without the operas themselves becoming a manifestation of a particular discourse. In that sense, Walter concludes intriguingly, the composer's *liberté* illustrated the movement of liberalism perfectly and even welcomed comments such as 'je n'y comprends rien' (p. 38).

Markian Prokopovych then turns to Hungary and discusses the 1887 Budapest production of the ballet *Excelsior*, a hit show all over the Continent at the time, as a vehicle for the political legitimization of the elite. He convincingly argues that a comment on the aesthetics of the production invariably turned political: a positive comment was read as support for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the present Hungarian administration, whereas a negative review was understood to be a call for political change (p. 40). The ballet also acted as a political tool for the new artistic director Keglevich, who wanted to target a particular audience (exclusive, rich, male) to support his new venture – an attempt which ultimately failed.

Attempts to find suitable *sujets* to illustrate and foster German nation-building increased in Germany during the early nineteenth century, not least to rival successful Italian and French model operas. Commentators called for a grand opera which could appeal to a sense of nationalism and educate its audience at the same time, and the medieval sagas (such as the *Nibelungenlied*) were believed to provide perfect material. In relation to this premise, Barbara Eichner concentrates in her essay on three different productions of the *Kudrun/Gudrun* epic, which was widely regarded as perfect material for a 'national' opera celebrating Germanic values. Eichner convincingly argues that it was not the literary quality of the text that attracted composers to the story but its 'national' character (pp. 74–5).

In the last essay in this section, Irina Kotkina turns to the twentieth century and the Bolshoi and La Scala theatres of the 1920s and 1930s, claiming that each represented 'perfect imperial opera concepts' (p. 76). Interestingly, she finds a number of parallels between fascist Italy and the Soviet Union under Stalin. In both countries,

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opera was seen as an important vehicle for propaganda. Commentators, artists, and politicians increasingly turned to neo-classical forms in their aesthetic, and both regimes were eager to find operatic works which would glorify their own past and could rival Wagner's dominance. The Bolshoi's production of Glinka's *Ivan Susanin* had the added advantage of featuring, in its new production of 1939, a true Soviet hero ready to fight against foreign aggression.

In the second part of the collection, entitled 'Affirmation', Peter Stachel looks at post-1945 Austria to discuss the re-opening of the Vienna State Opera in 1955 amidst political claims of Austria's newly found international influence and a public discourse which was trying to eradicate Austria's Nazi past. Instead, commentators created an image of Austria as the first victim of Hitler's aggression and of Vienna as the international 'city of music', a paradigm which, according to Stachel, also compensated for lost political influence and was used time and again during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 91). More disturbingly, the 'new Austria' happily took artists who had openly supported the Nazi regime and had accepted official posts back into leading positions.

Sarah Zalfen continues the theme of affirmation but discusses examples of more problematic relationships between state and opera, illustrated by the debates around the leading opera houses in London and Paris during the 1980s and 1990s. During this time notions of excellence and access placed particular demands on opera houses which were required to shed their elitist image and open up to the masses. In both countries the public debate centred on the issue of taxpayers' money being spent on institutions which seemed anachronistic and undemocratic. Ultimately, as Zalfen argues, attempts to democratize the opera houses not only largely failed but, in fact, stressed the continuing elitist image of opera (p. 124).

In the next essay Vjera Katalinic discusses calls for a Croatian national opera, which formed an important part of the nationalist discourse in nineteenth-century Croatia. Katalinic identifies some overarching issues in a number of early Croatian operas. Simple friend-foe dichotomies were used to foster Croatian nationalism, as were traditional folk melodies, the Croatian language, and historical references.

In the last essay in this section, Stephanie Kleiner looks at the political aesthetic of the Frankfurt opera house in Germany during

the Wilhelmine monarchy and the Weimar Republic. Since its opening in 1880, the opera house had become an important centre of Frankfurt's urban festive culture, and Kleiner presents two case studies in particular. The 1922 Goethe festival, which aimed to rally support for the new political order of the Weimar Republic, attempted to establish a new democratic political culture, whereas the 1896 jubilee of the Peace Treaty of Frankfurt (1871), with a gala performance in the opera house, brought to light contrasting views of state, nation, and society. In celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of hostilities rather than the 1870–1 Franco-Prussian war itself, the city seemed to be making a political choice which did not go down well with conservative circles.

In the last section of the collection, entitled 'Conflict', Sven Oliver Müller discusses audience violence in London opera houses during the nineteenth century, presenting two case studies. As musical performances could be seen as either supporting or endangering the political order, audiences never just silently witnessed shows, but always played an active part. For example, during the Tamburini scandal of 1840, aristocratic members of the audience used a seemingly mundane issue to mark out their territory and to make it clear to everyone that they, the wealthy patrons of Her Majesty's Theatre, and not the theatre's management, actually called the shots. Subsequently this attitude was successfully challenged by middle-class audiences in a debate which clearly related to wider socio-political issues of participation.

Bruno Spaepen continues by discussing Milan's La Scala as a tool for power politics during the Risorgimento in northern Italy. During the Austrian occupation the authorities saw La Scala as a potentially dangerous place because of its size and popularity, and its importance to the city's cultural life and elites. Despite attempts to pacify audiences by stupendous performances and increased funding, patrons became more aware of their political power and started to stay away from an opera house that they saw as a propaganda tool of the Austrian oppressors.

Ostap Sereda follows with a similar example of cultural propaganda by a foreign power. He looks at the Russian opera house in Kiev and shows that during the late 1860s the Russian government increasingly tried to curtail Polish and Ukrainian influence in the region. Theatre and opera played an important part in their consid-

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erations and were tightly controlled by the Russian authorities whose cultural imperialism, Sereda argues, eventually succeeded (p. 203). Finally, Jutta Toelle sheds some light on another Italian opera house under similar circumstances to La Scala, discussed by Spaepen. In contrast to Milan, however, in Venice cultural politics were implemented not by the Austrian authorities generously funding the city's most glorious opera house, but by its private owners, who kept it shut for seven years in an obvious act of defiance.

In all, the essays assembled in this collection make intriguing reading. They gain additional currency by being assembled in this volume on opera and politics in an international context. In their introduction Müller and Toelle frame the different contributions well, placing them into a convincing structure based on their three overarching themes of performance, affirmation, and conflict. The various contributions largely successfully illustrate the validity of the claims made in the introduction. They substantiate, for example, how far opera in particular has been used for purposes which are not purely aesthetic. Conveying national myths, supporting or openly criticising political regimes, and questioning the social order are recurring themes in the history of opera. So far, they have tended to be neglected in approaches which have concentrated solely on specific aspects in isolation, such as libretti, musical scores, theatrical architecture, or costume design. The attempt to pull these different threads together and contextualize opera is perhaps the most important achievement of this volume. If there is one criticism of this most useful volume, it would probably concern the lack of a conclusion, which could have pulled the different threads together and mapped out the scope for further investigation.

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